



## THOUGHT OF NACHMANIDES: VAYESHEV: HOW CHILDISH! Gavriel Z. Bellino – December 2, 2015

### Nachmanides on Genesis 37:2

AND THE LAD WAS WITH THE SONS OF BILHAH. His actions were those of youth: he would touch up his eyes and dress his hair. With the sons of Bilhah, that is to say, he associated with the sons of Bilhah because his brothers slighted them as being the sons of handmaids, and he therefore befriended them. Their evil report he told his father about every wrong which he discerned in his brothers, the sons of Leah. This is the language of Rashi.

But if this be so, why did the children of the handmaids not save him later on, inasmuch as he loved and befriended them, and told his father about his brothers' slighting them. And if we say that they feared their brothers, they were four, and Reuben was with them, and, with Joseph himself, [they made a total of six]. Surely they would have prevailed against them especially when considering that the remaining five sons of Leah would not wage war against them. Moreover, it appears from Scripture that all of the brothers concurred in the sale of Joseph. However, according to our Rabbis in Bereshith Rabbah, he uttered slander against all of them.

In my opinion the correct interpretation is that this verse returns to explain that which it mentioned above, and its purport [is as if the phrases in the verse were transposed as follows]: Joseph being a lad of seventeen years, was feeding the flock together with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives.

[Skipping]

### פרוש הרמב"ן על ספר בראשית לז:ב

וְהוּא נֶעַר אֶת בְּנֵי בִלְהָה. שְׁהִיָּה עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה נְעוּרוֹת, מִמְשָׁמֵשׁ בְּעֵינָיו וּמְתַקֵּן בְּשָׁעֲרוֹ. אֶת בְּנֵי בִלְהָה, כְּלוּמַר וְרָגִיל אֶת בְּנֵי בִלְהָה לְפִי שְׁהִיָּה אֶחָיו מְבִזִּין אוֹתָן וְהוּא מְקַרְבֵּן. אֶת דְּבָתָם רָעָה, כֹּל רָעָה שְׁהִיָּה רוֹאֶה בְּאֶחָיו בְּנֵי לֵאָה הָיָה מְגִיד לְאָבִיו, לְשׁוֹן רִשׁוּי.

וְאִם בֶּן לָמָּה לֹא הִצִּילוּהוּ בְּנֵי הַשְּׁפָחוֹת, וְהוּא אוֹהֵב אוֹתָם וּמְקַרְבֵּן וּמְגִיד לְאָבִיו עַל הָאֲחִים בְּבִזְיוֹנָם. וְאִם נֹאמַר שְׁיִירָאוּ מִן הָאֲחִים, וְהִנֵּה הֵם ד', וְרֹאוּבֵן עִמָּהֶם, וְיוֹסֵף עִצְמוֹ, וְתִגְבֵּר יָדָם עֲלֵיהֶם, וְאִם כִּי לֹא יָבִאוּ עִמָּהֶם בְּמַלְחָמָה. וְעוֹד, כִּי נִרְאָה בְּכַתוּב כִּי כָּלֶם הִסְכִּימוּ בְּמִכְרֹתוֹ. אֲבָל לְדַעַת רַבּוֹתֵינוּ בְּבִרְאשִׁית רַבָּה (פ"ד ז') עַל כָּלֶם הָיָה מוֹצִיא הַדְּבָרָה:

וְהַנֶּכּוֹן בְּעֵינָי כִּי זֶה הַכָּתוּב. שָׁב לְבָאָר מֵהַשְּׁעוּר, וְשַׁעוּרוֹ, יוֹסֵף, וְהוּא נֶעַר בֶּן שְׁבַע עָשָׂר שָׁנָה הָיָה רוֹעֶה בְּצֹאן אֶת אֶחָיו, אֶת בְּנֵי בִלְהָה וְאֶת בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו,

It may be that the word vhu (and he was) require another similar word, as if it were written: "and he was a lad, and he was with the sons of Bilhah and with the sons of Zilpah, who were his father's wives." The verse thus states that because he was a lad he was constantly with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, never being separated from them on account of his youth, for their father had commanded them to watch over him and serve him, not the sons of the mistresses, and he brought an evil report concerning them to their father. It was for this reason that these four brothers hated Joseph.

Following that, the verse says that his father loved him. Now when the other brothers saw that their father loved him more than all, they became jealous of him and they hated him. Thus Joseph is found to be hated by all: the sons of the mistresses were jealous of him because Jacob loved him more than them although they were also sons of a mistress as he was, and the sons of the handmaids, who would otherwise not have been jealous of his superior position over them, hated him because he brought their evil report to their father. The purpose of the redundant expression, dibatham raah (their evil report), is to magnify, for dibah itself connotes evil. Now according to the opinion of Rashi it is possible for dibah to be a good report. Thus when Scripture uses the expression, "he brings dibah", it means that he tells what he sees, but when it uses the term, he bringeth forth dibah,' it refers to the fool who speaks falsehood.

In line with the literal meaning of Scripture, the fact that it calls one a naar (lad) when he was seventeen years of age presents no difficulty for since he was the youngest among them, it calls him by that name, indicating that he was not as sturdy as his brothers and therefore needed to be with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah on account of his youth. Now of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, it is written, And Rehoboam was young and faint hearted and could not withstand them, yet he was forty one years old when he began to reign. Similarly the verse: Is it well with the lad Absalom? And Benjamin, upon going down to Egypt, was older than Joseph was now, and yet Scripture frequently refers to him as naar.

או שיהיה והוא מושך אחר עמו, ומשפטו והוא נער והוא את בני בלהה ואת בני זלפה נשי אביו, לאמר כי הוא נער, והוא עם בני בלהה ועם בני זלפה נשי אביו תמיד, לא יפרד מהם בעבור נערוthו, כי להם צוה אביהם שישמרוהו וישתוהו, לא לבני הגבירות, והוא מביא מהם דבה רעה אל אביהם, ולכן ישנאוהו אלה הארבעה האחים:

ואחר כן אמר כי אביו אהבו, ויראו אחיו האחרים כי אותו אהב אביהם יותר מכלם ויקנאו בו וישנאוהו, נמצא שנוא מכלם, בני הגבירות יקנאו בו למה יאהב אותו מהם והם בני גבירה כמוהו, ובני השפחות אשר לא יקנאו בזה למעלתו עליהם, ישנאו בו בעבור היותו מביא דבתם אל אביהם. וטעם דבתם רעה, להפליג, כי כל דבה רעה היא. ועל דעת רש"י (במדבר י"ד ל"ו) תכן שתהיה דבה טובה. ו"מביא דבה" הוא אשר יראה נגיד, אבל "מוציא דבה" הוא כסיל האומר שקר:

ועל דרך הפשט איננו קשה שיקראנו נער והוא בן שבע עשרה שנה, כי בעבור היותו קטן מכלם יקראנו בן, לומר כי לא היה מתחזק באחיו ויצטרך להיותו עם בני בלהה וזלפה מפני נערוthו. וכתוב ברחבעם בן שלמה (דהיי"ב י"ג ז') ורחבעם היה נער ורוך לבב ולא התחזק לפניהם, והוא בן ארבעים ואחת שנה במלכו, וכן השלום לנער לאבשלום (ש"ב י"ח ל"ב). ובנימין ברוthו למצרים גדול ממנו ויקראנו נער פעמים רבים:

Now Onkelos translated vhu naar as "he grew up with the sons of Bilhah." Thus the verse states that from the time he was a lad he was in their company. They raised him as a father would, and they served him. This interpretation is also correct according to the literal interpretation of Scripture, which I offered as an explanation, namely that Scripture relates that he brought evil report concerning [the sons of the handmaids, who, according to Onkelos, raised him. This is why they hated him, whereas] the sons of the mistresses hated him because of their jealousy, as explained above.

וְאֵנְקֵלוֹס תְּרַגְּם וְהוּא נֶעַר וְהוּא מְרַבֵּי  
עִם בְּנֵי בִלְהָה. יֹאמֶר, כִּי מִיּוֹם  
הָיְתָהוּ נֶעַר הוּא עִמָּהֶם, הֵם גָּדְלוּהוּ כְּאָב  
וְהֵם יִשְׂרָתוּהוּ. גַּם נִכּוֹן הוּא, וְעַל הַדֶּרֶךְ  
שֶׁפָּרְשֵׁתִי, כִּי הַכָּתוּב יְסַפֵּר כִּי מֵאֵלֶּה יָבִיא  
הַדְּבָרָה וְלִבְנֵי הַגְּבִירוֹת בְּקִנְיָתָם: