

Vayeshev - Rabbi Lerner - December 11, 2011

Yaacov's Attempt to Settle in Peace in Eretz Yisrael

There is a very difficult section that opens this parsha, detailing what appears to be very strange and difficult behavior of both Yaacov and Yosef.

37:1: *Yaacov settled in the land of his father's sojournings - Eretz Megurei Aviv - in the land of Canaan.* **Rashi**: there is a well-known Midrash that says Yaacov desired to finally live in peace and tranquillity, he wished to settle down after the horrible years of tension with Esav, the terrible years with the duplicitous Lavan, the epic wrestling match with the angel of Esav, and then confronting Esav, to be followed by the rape of Dinah and his children's sacking of the city of Shechem. He is finally home in the land of Israel and he hoped to settle down, with these to be the golden years of retirement with peace and quiet. But it doesn't work out that way. Now a new crisis - possibly the worst of all - arises. His family will be torn apart with a civil war because of the jealousy between Yosef and his brothers. **Rashi** adds that tzadikim might wish to have peace in this world, but isn't it enough that they have peace in the world to come? They shouldn't ask for it here in this world as well. But, the Gemorrah tells us that, in fact, many tzadikim "eat from both tables" - they have peace in both worlds. So why couldn't Yaacov finally have some quiet years after all he had been through?

Kli Yakar: Yaacov specifically is being deprived of this type of peace. The clock was ticking to fulfill the prophecy of the Bris Bain Hebesarim, predicting that the descendants of Avraham are to be enslaved for 400 years and then leave with great wealth. The actual number of years was only 210. One explanation for that lesser amount is that Hashem had to take us out early because of the downward spiral of the Jews who became completely assimilated - it would have ended up with no Jewish nation - this is why we had to go into galus again at other times because we still "owed" Hakadosh Baruch Hu years of enslavement. A second explanation is that the 400 years were fulfilled - they were strangers for 400 years, although not enslaved all those years. During the years from the birth of Yitzchak Jews were strangers in the land and those years counted towards the 400. The Canaanites could not be chased out before their full years of sin warranted their expulsion. The **Kli Yakar** adds that it is not that a tzaddik can't have peace in both worlds. But if Yaacov wanted to have tranquillity in this world, it would have made the clock stop ticking. If we can settle down now in serene peace, this would not have counted towards the 400 years of being a stranger in a land that was not theirs. That is why the troubles of Yosef now began. Had Hashem not intervened and stopped Yaacov from having peaceful years, then it would have delayed the termination of the 400 years - these years wouldn't have counted and the Geulah from Mitzrayim would have been delayed. Hashem did not want this to happen. So, He brought about divine forces to interrupt Yaacov's years of peace. But while Yaacov could not have this peace, other tzadikim can in fact have peaceful existences in both worlds. After the 400 years, it was possible for Jews to have a good life in this world as well as the next one.

Why is it that the pasuk says *Megurai Aviv* when referring to Yitzchak and not *Yeshuvai Aviv* - the settled years? *Megurai* means he felt like a ger, a stranger. Yitzchak felt the land was not his - he saw himself as a ger, as did his father Avraham. Yaacov thought that he was capable of settling with firm roots in a peaceful way; but this is what the **Kli Yakar** says would have interrupted the count of the 400 years. His own desire for peace and serenity would spell disaster for the nation, which would have had to suffer longer.

37:2: *These are the generations of Yaacov; Yosef was 17 years old...* This is a very strange pasuk - if we are recounting the generations of Yaacov, it should list all of the brothers, not just Yosef? **Rabbeinu Bachya** brings down a medrash that says there is an equation being drawn between Yaacov and Yosef in this pasuk - there are amazing similarities between their lives and qualities - there are at least 12:

- 1) Yaacov was pursued by his brother, Yosef was persecuted by his brothers.
- 2) Yaacov was born of a mother who was an akarah, sterile or barren; Yosef was born to Rachel who had the same issue.
- 3) Yaacov was born circumcised - he was described as an *Ish Tam*, an unblemished, pure man; Yosef was also born circumcised.
- 4) Yaacov had a mother who went through tremendous difficulty with her pregnancy, with the two boys fighting within her; Yosef was born of a mother who went through a difficult pregnancy (her second was worse as she died as a result of it).
- 5) Yaacov was a shepherd; Yosef was a shepherd.
- 6) Yaacov married a woman outside the land of Israel; Yosef likewise married a woman outside of the land - Osnas Bas Potiphera - unlike all of the other brothers.
- 7) Yaacov was escorted by angels, Yosef was escorted by the angels.
- 8) Yaacov was able to see awesome things through his dreams - particularly the ladder to heaven; Yosef was able to see magnificent things in the dreams he had or was told; they both were not just dreamers but had tremendous abilities in interpreting dreams.
- 9) Yaacov goes down to Egypt; Yosef goes down to Egypt.
- 10) Yaacov was able to stop the famine when he went to Egypt and thus help people live; Yosef was able to keep the people alive during the famine.
- 11) Yaacov died in Egypt, Yosef dies in Egypt.
- 12) Yaacov and Yosef both were embalmed in Egypt.
- 13) Yaacov's bones and remains were taken back to Eretz Yisrael, Yosef's bones were returned to the land.

Abarbanel: Chazal are missing another important connection, that of Yaacov's relationship to his father, and that of Yosef's connection to his father. He quotes the **Ramban:** the words *Megurei Aviv* mean that they chose to live in this special chosen land even though they did not have the deed to the land, so they felt like strangers. This was unlike Esav who packed his bags and left the land - he did not want to live as a stranger; he went to the land of Seir and set up a kingdom there, with many kings; he had tremendous power and control, as opposed to Yaacov who signed onto to being part of this legacy of Avraham and Yitzchak, to remain a stranger for generations to come because of this decree of being Gerim in a land that is not theirs for 400 years. All of this is captured in the words *Megurei Aviv* - his father and grandfather were gerim - they chose this rather than going to another land as did Esav; Yaacov is signing onto it as well. **Abarbanel:** disagrees with the Ramban - if he was correct, it should have said *Vayagar* rather than *Vayeshev*. So what is the meaning of these words? There is a pasuk: "*Lo Soguru Mipnei Ish*" - it is talking about a judge who should not be intimidated by any of the supplicants who come before him. A judge has to be bold and courageous - he should not be afraid of a wealthy person or a Mafioso; he must be strong, independent; he must speak his mind and render a correct decision. *Soguru* is the language of fear. So *Eretz Megurei Aviv* means the land of the fear of his father. In the same way that Yitzchak lived in dread of the tension between his two sons, Yaacov has this tremendous concern as well. They were very concerned about the tremendous conflict between their children. Yaacov is afraid of this. There is enormous amount

of similarity between Yitzchak and Yaacov: Yaacov is making the same mistakes his father made; Yitzchak openly favored Esav over Yaacov, and now Yaacov is making the same mistake, showing favor of Yosef over his other sons. Yitzchak suffered for 22 years with the absence of Yaacov; Yaacov suffered for 22 years with the absence of Yosef. There are many other similarities and shared experiences as well. The other reason that Yaacov has this special proclivity towards Yosef was that Yaacov had undergone a tremendous transformation from his early years until now, from the time when he was outside of Eretz Yisrael to this point where he is now much older with a full family. Yaacov in the house of Lavan was very dedicated to his work; he was into wealth; he wanted to accrue tremendous wealth, which he did. He was so successful that he might have stayed on had not Hashem appeared to him and told him it was enough, that he had to return and fulfill his neder of building an altar to Hashem. That was a wake-up call for Yaacov. When Yaacov goes home and fulfills this vow, he transforms himself into a different human being. What is this change? Before he was all into gashmius and materialism; now all ruchnias and spirituality. How do we know this? Because Yaacov's wealth is all in his flocks. If he was still into gashmius, where would he have lived? In an area that has ideal pastures for the sheep to graze, to be able to feed all of the animals. Instead he settles in Chevron which is hilly, mountainous and full of rocks - this is the worst place for a shepherd. That is why when the brothers are out shepherding after Yaacov has retired, they must take the sheep all the way to Shechem. Why did Yaacov choose Chevron which was such a poor place for his sheep and wealth? Because he was now into Ruchnios, into connecting with his Avos. Avraham and later Yitzchak were buried here; it contains tremendous spirituality. Yerushalayim is not even on the map yet. Chevron is the spiritual center where one goes to connect to Hashem. **Rabbeinu Bachya** adds that the word Chevron is from chibur, connection; it is the place to connect to heaven. The **Abarbanel** goes on to say that Yaacov is now like in kollel, he is sitting and learning, becoming more and more like his father Yitzchak. Now we see why Yaacov has this tremendous connection to one son, his son who stands head and shoulders above all of the others in both wisdom and motivation, Yosef. Toldos means building the future, not just children and genealogy; it is creating the bridge, the legacy to the future. He is transmitting all of his wealth of learning to Yosef; that is why he has this tremendous connection. Yosef is the *Ben Zekunim*, or as **Targum Unkelos** translates, the *Bar Chakim* - the one with the capacity and desire to learn. And Yaacov, who is no longer the same person, no longer interested in gashmius, wants to teach everything to his special son. This is one of the main reason that Yosef is chosen. But also, Yosef himself has tremendous skills in terms of the world - he is not just sitting in the kollel with Yaacov; the Torah also tells us that "*..Hayah Ro'eh Es Echav Batzohn*" - he was *the shepherd of his brothers with sheep*. His brothers were not the shepherds - they were very wealthy with enormous flocks and they were overseeing the fortune, directing the shepherds. Yosef was the one who was teaching his brothers the craft of shepherding, how to feed and protect them, and how to direct others. Yosef had tremendous love of learning but was also the economic wizard, the genius who can explain to all the others how to properly do things.

This explains why his father made a kesones pasim. **Sforno**: it was a sign that he would be the ruler over them in the house and field. **Kli Yakar**: after Reuven messed up in his role of first born, Yaacov knows that Reuven has forfeited the bechorah; this coat is a symbol that Yosef is on the top in terms of wisdom, learning ability, and business acumen; he can do it all, like his father; the appointment of Yosef as the head brother was a deliberate act - Yaacov has identified which son is the pre-eminent one in the family. This will hopefully avoid the problems that Yaacov had when he was growing up, when this was not established by his father. Yitzchak had

made a mistake and Yaacov is trying to pre-empt that. **Rav Hirsch**: Yaacov was forced to deceive his father; the brothers are born identically, but they grow differently; Chazal does not hide the mistakes of the Avos; they point out the contrast in these boys that was not because of a difference in temperament, but the problem was how they were brought up. When they were little there was no difference made in their education; instead of each child being brought up in their own way, Yitzchak raised them equally - a big mistake. The twins had different temperament and needed to be approached and educated differently, developing each of their strengths appropriately. What Yitzchak did by not following this precept helped turn this into disaster. Much later, when Yaacov was on his death bed, we learn how he saw the differences between his sons, he blessed them all differently, highlighting the special qualities of each; the brachos were all different, individualized for each son. But he already was doing this long before; Yaacov did not want to leave it all to chance. He recognized early on that Yosef had it all together and Yaacov already started to treat him differently from a very early age. He identified him as the bechor, and Yosef gets the double portion later on; he doesn't wait until later on. So why do the brothers go wild? **Abarbanel**: the brothers could have lived with this had Yaacov explained the situation to them clearly; what they thought was happening was that just like Avraham chose Yitzchak and expelled his half-brother Yishmael. Yitzchak had two twin boys with one ultimately expelled from the chosen people. When the brothers saw that Yosef was given this special status, one that represented the garment of the Kohen Gadol, they thought that Yosef would end up being the only Jew and what would happen to them would be like what happened to Esav and Yishmael - they would be cast out of the fold. It is not just that Yosef would be the most important in the family; they feared they would be completely out, with the same selection process that had gone on in the previous two generations; history is repeating itself; that is why they reacted so violently because they feared they were losing everything, all of their Yiddishkeit.

The **Rosh** (Rabbeinu Asher): Yosef gets himself into trouble because he has these special powers, and other nations and his other brothers will bow down to him; If Yosef is so brilliant, why does he feel compelled to share these dreams of domination with his brothers if it will invoke such feelings of jealousy? It looks like a mistake. The reason was that Yosef felt he had no choice. He knew these were not dreams, but prophecy. There is a halachah that when a navi is given a prophecy, he must deliver the message to the people. Who were the Jewish people at that time who could hear this nevu'ah? It was only his family. It is a capital crime to withhold a prophecy, like Yonah. Yosef knew that if he told them he would be in danger, but if he didn't he would also be in danger, chayav misah, liable to death. Which danger is greater - by humans or God? He correctly chose the right decision; he has no choice but to deliver the message that will cause anger and danger to him, but that is the lot of the prophet. Yeshayahu was killed for his prophecy; Yirmiyahu was imprisoned for his prophecy. Yosef comes close to being killed because of his prophecy - he was compelled to give over the prophecy; he wasn't lording it over his brothers. Likewise, Yosef did not report evil his brothers were committing - it wasn't a dibah Ra'ah - they were being negligent, it was his job to teach them correctly; he was obligated to report to his father the mistakes of his brothers; it was his job.