



הרב הראשי הרב מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, ת"ת דרך המלך,
שיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Parashat Vayesheiv

One Should Never Differentiate Between His Children or Students

Our *parasha* states, (37:3) "And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his children because he was a child to him in his old age. And he made him a *ketonet passim*, a multicolored coat. And [Yosef's] brothers saw that their father loved him more than all the other brothers, and they resented him and could not talk to him in peace."

The Gemara and the Halacha

It is clearly written in the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 10b), "Rav said: One should never differentiate between his children; for we see that because of the two *sel'a'im* (coins) that Yaakov gave Yosef [- i.e., the worth of the multicolored coat], *Bnei Yisrael* had to descend to Egypt." The *Rif*, *Rosh*, and the *Rambam* (*Hilchot Nachalot* 6:13) quote this *Gemara* as *halacha*. The *Shulchan Aruch* codifies it as well in *Choshen Mishpat* 282:1, stating, "Whoever gives his estate to others and passes over the rightful heirs, even if the heirs are not conducting themselves properly, the Sages are unhappy with him; nevertheless, the non-heirs legally own whatever was given to them. The way of the pious is not to distinguish between different heirs in their wills, not even between a child who is not conducting himself properly and a child who is wise and acting properly."

Question

Tosafot asks: Is it really true that the coat that Yaakov gave Yosef was the cause of their descent to Egypt? Was it not decreed from the days of Avraham *Avinu*, "For four hundred years your descendants will sojourn in a land that does belong to them?"

The Coat Caused Terrible Suffering and Affliction

Tosafot answers that although there was already a Divine decree that Avraham's descendants would live in a foreign land, this decree could have been fulfilled without Yaakov and his children having to descend to Egypt and being severely afflicted and persecuted there. However, because Yaakov differentiated between his children and gave Yosef a special coat, he and his offspring had to descend to Egypt and be subject to terrible suffering.

Why it is Forbidden to Differentiate Between Children

This requires explanation: How could Yaakov's gift of a coat to Yosef warrant such a terrible decree - 210 year of suffering in Egypt? This is especially perplexing since Yaakov motives were purely *le'sheim Shamayim*; he was trying to encourage his children to be like Yosef and to learn with great diligence, as Yosef's learning and wisdom were the root of the favor that he found in his father's eyes. This is clear from the *Targum* who translates, "*ben zekunim*," the *pasuk's* description of Yosef, as "the wise one." How could something like this bring about such a terrible decree?



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The Way of the World: To Favor the Talented and Successful

It is common for people to treat their children, students, and workers different from one another. When a parent notices that a certain child is brighter, quicker, or a harder-working than his brothers, he will favor him over his siblings. This may be expressed by offering him greater assistance, giving him more time, or even by bequeathing to him the majority of the estate. The same is true regarding a teacher and his students; he will favor the exceptional students by giving them more praise and prizes than his peers. An employer will act in a similar manner to his excellent workers. Perhaps this son, student, or worker really deserves favorable treatment for their superior behavior, and the extras they receive can be justified. However, our holy Torah teaches us that this approach is invalid and can lead to tragic results; we are obligated to be careful to show equal respect to all our children, students, and workers and not offend any of them by openly favoring one over another. In private, the parent, teacher, or employer should praise and uplift those who have pleased him, in a manner which will not offend others. This approach will achieve both goals - it will encourage those who are successful, while still taking care to avoid offending those who are not.

Differentiating Between Children Causes Hatred and Strife

Now we can start to explain what happened between Yaakov, Yosef, and the brothers. After telling us that Yaakov gave Yosef a special coat, the Torah continues and relates that Yaakov's gift had immediate consequences: "The brothers saw that their father loved him [-Yosef] ... and they resented him." When the brothers saw Yaakov's blatant partiality for Yosef, they began to resent and distance themselves from him. The commentators already explain that the *Shevatim* were not simply jealous over a fancy coat; rather, they feared that they would be rejected and Yosef alone would perpetuate and build the Jewish Nation as was the case with Yitzchak and Yishmael, and Yaakov and Esav. It seemed to them that Yaakov was starting the same process now - Yosef would receive Yaakov's blessings, while they would be rejected. Yaakov erred, as the *Rosh* and the *Seforno* explain, by expressing his love in an open manner that was obvious to all. This led to something as insignificant as a coat, to cause the brothers to think the worst, distance themselves from Yosef, and breed ill-will. This would eventually even lead them to throw Yosef into a pit, ignoring his cries and pleas for mercy, expecting him to meet his end. Their actions resulted in a Divine decree that they and their descendants would be subject to an Egyptian exile full of pain and suffering, as well as the decree against the *Asara Ha'rugei Malchut* (the Ten Martyrs). What set off this tragic chain of events? Yaakov's openly favoring Yosef by giving him a beautiful coat. We should reflect on just how much damage Yaakov's favoring Yosef caused - it caused the brothers to err in selling Yosef, based on imagined, self-created fears and brought about the Egyptian exile and the death of the Ten Martyrs.

Why the Prohibition to Show Favoritism is Not Exclusive to the *Shevatim*

There still seems to be a difficulty with our approach; if, as we explained, the *Shevatim* were motivated by fear of rejection like Esav and Yishmael, how can our Sages learn from Yaakov that every parent in every generation must be careful not to favor one child over another, even to a small degree? Perhaps this was only true for Yaakov and his children, because favoring one child over another could cause the other children



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to think that they were being rejected, as we explained? We must say that our Sages are teaching us a fundamental principle that is true for all generations: Yaakov openly favoring Yosef caused the *Shevatim* to err and imagine that this was the start of a process to remove them from the Jewish People. It led to friction, hatred, the bitter Egyptian exile, the Ten Martyrs, etc. So too, whenever any father differentiates between his children, he can never know what the consequences will be. He should be concerned that his preferential treatment could lead to hatred, strife, and destruction. Therefore, it is the obligation of every father to reflect on his actions and think about the feelings and sensitivities of his children. He must consider what their reaction will be and make sure that he doesn't offend anyone. Negligence in this area can lead to hatred, strife, and exile.

How could Yosef Err in an Area Where He Suffered First Hand

According to what we have said, Yosef's later actions are difficult to understand: The Torah writes (*Bereishit* 45:22), "[Yosef] gave to every one [of his brothers] a set of clothing and to Binyamin he gave 300 pieces of silver and five sets of clothes." The *Gemara* (*Megilah* 16a) asks, how could Yosef, who suffered so much from his father's show of favoritism, make the same mistake as his father and show favor to Binyamin? The *Gemara* answers, "Says Rabbi Benyamin Bar Yafet: Yosef was hinting to Binyamin that in the future he would have a descendant who would go out in front of the king, wearing five royal garments, as it says about Mordechai, "And Mordechai went out wearing royal garments ..."

The Question of the Vilna Gaon and His Explanation: The Five Sets Were Worth the Same as One Set

The Vilna Gaon (*Kol Eliyahu*, *Bereishit* 45:22) asks how the *Gemara* answered its question. Yosef's actions would still lead to jealousy amongst the brothers. The Vilna Gaon answers that really one can take a step back and ask a question on the *Gemara*'s initial question: Perhaps the five sets of clothing that Binyamin received were of inferior quality to the clothing that the other brothers received, and the one suit that the brothers received had the same monetary value as the five sets that Binyamin received. He says that this cannot be the case, because if it was the case, then why did Yosef give Binyamin five sets of clothes and not just give him the one set of high quality clothing like everyone else. Therefore, we have no choice but to conclude that the clothes that Binyamin received must have been of the same quality as the clothes that the brothers received, and Yosef was showing him greater favor; therefore, the *Gemara*'s question is valid. The *Gemara* answers that, in truth, there is no reason to assume that Binyamin's clothes were the same as that of his brothers, and the reason that Yosef preferred giving him five sets of inferior clothing instead of one set of high quality clothing was to hint to him that he would have a distinguished descendant who would go out in front of the king in five royal garments. It seems to me that we can add and strengthen the words of the Vilna Gaon. When the Torah mentions the garments of the brothers, it spells them *malei* (complete), with a *vav*. However, when it mentions the garments of Binyamin, it spells them *chaser* (incomplete) without a *vav*. This is to indicate that the garments of the brothers were complete, superior garments while Binyamin's garments were lacking and inferior, so that there should be no jealousy amongst the brothers, exactly as the Vilna Gaon explained.

Our Obligation to Take Great Care and Not Differentiate and Offend Our Students

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It seems obvious that our Sage's warning to avoid openly favoring one child over another was not intended exclusively for a father and his children, but was meant to include a teacher and his students as well. Sometimes one word can break a student and bring destruction to that student and all the generations that come after him. To our great misfortune, we see many students who have fallen into the depths of despair and given up all hopes of success.

Story with Rav Shach

Once Rav Shach *zt"l*, tested a group of students, and as in any group, there were those who did better and those that did worse. At the end of the examination Rav Shach took ten *shekel* out of his pocket and gave it to the teacher to divide amongst the students. Rav Shach didn't want to single out the successful students in public, so as not to bring about jealousy and hatred. This is in keeping with what it says in this week's *parsha*.

Story about our Master, Harav Ha'goan Rav Ovadiah Yosef, *zt"l*

I will relate a story on the importance of a teacher focusing on every one of his students, to show them warmth and love. Once, when we wanted to commemorate the dedication of a *sefer Torah* to the Yeshiva, we went to many *Gedolei Yisrael*, offering them to write a letter in the Torah. We went in the company of the Rosh HaYeshiva and the Mashgiach and several other members of the staff. When we entered the house of the Rav, I presented the Yeshiva's staff and asked that he bless them. Afterwards, the Rav called over the Mashgiach and told him that he must know that his job involves life and death, and he must shower his students with warmth and love, so that they do not give into temptation and head for "the street." He must understand that he is not dealing simply with one student, but with generations, and when he works with the students, he should be patient and forbearing. It was incredible to see the great importance that *Maran* attached to this. He himself introduced the subject, told us about the importance of being involved with each and every student, and taught us the proper way to deal with them.

Words of Mussar

We have learned how each and every one of us is obligated to pay attention that every word we say and everything we do should not cause pain to another person, and certainly not to a *talmid chacham* or a parent. We should be even more careful with our words and actions where there is a chance that they will cause resentment and strife between brothers, for who knows what this can bring! The Jewish Nation suffered terribly in Egypt because Yaakov did not take greater care to avoid offending his children; this brought about the Ten Martyrs, the death of Yehudah's children, and other calamities. A person should learn from this and realize that he must be very careful in this area. This is especially true today, when the Jewish People are in great distress and each day brings more evil decrees. We must increase love and fraternity amongst us, as this is the cure against evil decrees. Everyone must take care while raising their children not to differentiate between them as not to cause them to resent and hate each other, *chas ve'shalom*. A teacher also must be wary not to err in this, because, *chas ve'shalom*, this can break students and lead to jealousy and hatred; sometimes, this even results in the student casting off the burden of Torah and mitzvot. There is no doubt that this is one of the reasons responsible for the situation today, where, to our great



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sorrow, many precious students fall and end up wasting their time on a street corner. Many who our asked about the cause of their decline, respond that they did not receive enough encouragement and support, and moreover, were insulted and embarrassed. Even though competition can increase Torah wisdom, this should not be done loudly and publicly, but with care and thought as to encourage the weak students as well. May it be His Will that we not cause anyone to sin and stumble.

Shabbat Shalom

Rav Mordechai Malka