

ONE NATION, DIVISIBLE

by Shlomo Katz

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Vayeishev

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Today's Learning:

Bava Batra 4:3-4

Orach Chaim 551:5-7

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 16

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kilayim 28

This week's parashah describes the conflict between Yosef and his brothers, and Yosef's kidnaping and sale as a slave. The midrash makes an astounding statement, quoting the verses in Tehilim (66:5-6), "Go and see the works of G-d; He is awesome in deed toward mankind. He changed the sea into dry land." Says the midrash: "Why did Yosef's brothers hate him? So that the sea would be split into pasim / rows." [The midrash is referring to the fact that the Red Sea split into twelve parallel channels, one for each tribe. The midrash calls these channels "pasim," making a play on Yosef's "ketonet pasim" / "striped coat."]

R' Simcha Zissel Broide z"l (Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000) explains: This midrash sees a beneficial side to the conflict between Yosef and his brothers. The Jewish people are referred to by the prophet (Shmuel II 7:23) as, "one nation." Nevertheless, there is room - indeed, a need - for different ways of serving Hashem, and thus a need for twelve tribes to

develop in parallel to each other. It was the sale of Yosef that made this possible.

We read in next week's parashah (42:3): "So Yosef's brothers -- ten of them -- went down to buy grain from Egypt." Rashi writes: "What is the mention of this number intended to tell us? Is it not written [in the next verse], 'But Binyamin, Yosef's brother he did not send'? [Thus, we know there were ten!] It means to suggest that as far as their feeling of brotherhood towards Yosef was concerned, they were divided into ten, because the love and hatred that all of them bore him were not alike, whereas in regard to buying grain they were at one and united." It was these varying levels of love and hatred towards Yosef that first distinguished Yaakov's sons from each other and allowed them to develop into distinctive tribes, explains R' Broide.

And this is no small matter, as the midrash testifies. King David himself (the author of Tehilim) recognized the significance of this event and exclaimed about it (in the verse quoted above): "Go and see the works of G-d; He is awesome in deed toward mankind." (Sahm Derech, II p.96)

"Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan." (37:1)

Rashi comments: "After [the Torah] has described to you [in last week's parashah] the settlements of Esav and his descendants in a brief manner, since they were not distinguished and important enough that [this information] should be related in detail . . . [the Torah] explains clearly and at length the settlements made by Jacob and his descendants, and all the events which brought these about, because these are regarded by the Omnipresent as of sufficient importance to speak of them at length. Thus, too, [Rashi continues,] you will find that in the case of the ten generations from Adam to Noach it states 'So and so begat so and so,' but when it reaches Noach it deals with him at length. Similarly, of the ten generations from Noach to Avraham it gives but a brief account, but when it comes to Avraham it speaks of him more fully.

"This may be compared to the case of a jewel that falls into the sand. A man searches in the sand and sifts it in a sieve until he finds the jewel. When he has found it he throws away the pebbles and keeps the jewel."

R' Shmuel Shinover z"l (Polish rabbi; died 1870) observes that the end of Rashi's comment is reminiscent of a teaching in chapter 5 of the midrash, Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah. There we read:

Fortunate are Yisrael, wherever they live! Although they are tossed about to the four directions of the wind - from north to south and from south to north, from east to west and from west to east - nevertheless, they remain in the center. [In other words, explains R' Shinover, they are protected by G-d, just as an object in the center of an area is safer than an object near the outside. The midrash continues:] Thus it is written (Amos 9:9), "For behold, I decree that I will shake out the House of Israel among all the nations, as [sand] is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble falls to the ground." If [says the author of the midrash] the verse had said, "and a pebble falls to the ground," I would have been

crestfallen; however, since it says, "and not a pebble falls to the ground," [I understand that] just as a pebble in a sieve remains [safely] in the sieve no matter how much the sieve is shaken, so Yisrael, wherever they live, even if they are tossed to the four directions of the wind, are safe.

A sieve is a very appropriate metaphor for our wanderings throughout our exiles, writes R' Shinover. A sieve is used to separate two substances that are mixed together, typically, a desired substance and an impurity that has mixed with the desired substance. Our exiles likewise are meant to be a purifying process; as we are tossed about from one exile to another, our suffering causes those impurities to be shed from us. But do not worry that we, ourselves, will be crushed in the process - the author of the midrash, the prophet Eliyahu, promises that we will be safe in the center of the sieve. (Ramatayim Tzofim)

R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (Hungary and Yerushalayim; one of the founders of Petach Tikva; 1835-1922) offers a different interpretation of the above midrash: "Fortunate are Yisrael, wherever they live! Although they are tossed about to the four directions of the wind - from north to south and from south to north, from east to west and from west to east - nevertheless, they remain in the center." The "center of the world" is Zion. No matter where in the diaspora the Jewish people find themselves, that place can attain some of the sanctity of the "center" (i.e., Zion and Eretz Yisrael) if Torah is studied there and mitzvot are performed there. Thus the prophet says (Malachi 11:1), "Everywhere is brought up in smoke [as an offering] and brought for My Name's sake."

Nevertheless, the "pebble," the remnant of Israel, will never fall to the ground, it will never be lost. Eventually, we are promised, we will return to the real "center" - Zion, the source of all holiness. (Tosfot Ben Yechiel)

"Behold! -- we were binding sheaves in the middle of the field, when, behold! -- my sheaf arose and it remained standing; then behold! -- your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf."

"His brothers said to him, 'Would you then reign over us?'" (37:7-8)

Commentaries explain that Yosef erred in thinking that he would rule over his brothers forever, as he said, "My sheaf arose and it remained standing." Thus the brothers retorted: "Would you then reign over us? Our tradition is that Yehuda (ancestor of King David), not you, will be the progenitor of royalty."

R' Shimshon David Pinkus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2000) asks: Was Yosef's dream wrong? Surely, as a prophecy, it had to be true! He explains:

When ten tribes split from the Kingdom of Yehuda after King Shlomo died, their first king was Yerovam, a descendant of Yosef. The prophet told Yerovam (Melachim I 11:38), "It shall be if you obey all that I will command you and walk in My ways, and you do that which is upright in My eyes . . . I shall build an enduring dynasty for you, just as I built for David, and I shall give Israel to you." These

verses seem to state clearly that a descendant of Yosef would have an enduring rule. How can this be? Commentaries explain that Yerovam was meant to found a dynasty of prime ministers, not kings. These prime ministers would be subservient to a king, who would be from the tribe of Yehuda, but they would rule their other brethren. Had Yerovam remained righteous, Yosef's dream ("it remained standing") would have been fulfilled through him.

In the end, though, Yosef's dream did not come true. Why? Because man has free will. Yosef was shown what was meant to be, but he could not be shown how the story would end, for that would have negated Yerovam's ability to exercise his free will. (Tifferet Torah)

R' Dr. Dov (Bernard) Revel z"l

Part II

[Several weeks ago, we presented the life of R' Dr. Dov Revel from his birth until 1915, when he was appointed President and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan in New York. We now conclude his biography.]

In his new position, for which he refused a salary, R' Revel headed both the religious and secular departments of the Yeshiva. He taught the highest Talmud class and also lectured on Yoreh Deah and Choshen Mishpat (i.e., the sections of Shulchan Aruch covered in a semichah / ordination program). As R' Revel himself explained, his goal at the Yeshiva was to create a bridge over which the Torah could be brought from Europe to America and, without compromise, be made meaningful to contemporary American life. (Indicative of the challenge he faced was the congregation that chose a Jewish Theological Seminary graduate over a Yeshiva- graduate merely because the latter was so "unpolished" as to wear his hat indoors when women were present.)

R' Revel's first project after becoming familiar with the Yeshiva was to organize a state-accredited high school. The Talmudical Academy, as it was called, opened for the 1916-17 school year, and was accredited by the Board of Regents of New York State in 1919. Its program of advanced religious studies in the morning and a complete secular curriculum in the afternoon is now familiar as the model for Jewish days schools, but at the time it was revolutionary. (Of the high school's first six graduates, two became rabbis, two entered business, one became a lawyer, and one a physician.)

At the Yeshiva level, R' Revel attempted to prepare the students for the challenges of the American rabbinate by introducing to the curriculum subjects that were not studied in typical European yeshivot. These included Tanach / Bible, Hebrew language, pedagogy, and Jewish history. Later, R' Revel acceded to the demands of the student body and added a course in homiletics (i.e., preparing sermons). This latter course was taught by Reverend Dr. Henry Pereira Mendes, the spiritual leader of New York's Sephardic community.

On 21 Adar II 5679 / March 23, 1919, the Yeshiva ordained the first five graduates whose entire

education had been under the new program, including the Yeshiva's first American-born graduate. (Previously, the Yeshiva's graduates had obtained most of their education in European yeshivot.) The ordination ceremony was held in the week of Parashat Shemini, in which two of the sons of Aharon die, and referring to that parashah, R' Revel said to the five new rabbis:

May I remind you of what we read in the portion of this week, of the children of Aharon, the high priest, who, soon after their consecration to priesthood, were consumed by a heavenly fire for bringing "near before the Lord a strange fire that the Lord has not commanded them." My friends, who are entering now the priesthood of Israel, beware of "strange fires" which the Lord has not commanded. Remember that our holy Torah is perfect and complete. It needs neither additions nor embellishments, from other cults and cultures. The "strange fires" are very alluring at times, but they are indeed destructive.

R' Revel also aided in the dissemination of Torah knowledge in the United States by encouraging and guiding the publication of the bimonthly Torah journal, Yagdil Torah. R' Revel contributed many articles to the journal and encouraged other Yeshiva faculty members to do the same. Most of R' Revel's articles dealt with the esoteric areas of Taharot / ritual purity and Kodshim / the sacrificial service. (R' Revel left behind other writings as well, including halachic responsa.)

From 1920 to 1923, R' Revel left the Yeshiva for long periods to return to Tulsa, Oklahoma and his in-laws' troubled oil business. At first, he attempted to run the Yeshiva from a distance, but eventually he resigned. However, in May 1923, he returned to the Yeshiva.

For years, R' Revel was troubled by the fact that graduates of the Talmudical Academy had to choose between continuing their yeshiva studies or attending college. Accordingly, in December 1923, he announced a five-million dollar campaign to start Yeshiva College, a four-year liberal arts college. That college, which later changed its name to Yeshiva University, opened on September 25, 1928.

Among R' Revel's proudest accomplishments was bringing distinguished European scholars to America to join the faculty. These included: R' Shlomo Polachek, R' Moshe Soloveitchik, and R' Chaim Heller. In 1929, R' Shimon Shkop came to America to raise funds for his own yeshiva in Grodno, and accepted R' Revel's invitation to serve as rosh yeshiva. (At the request of the Chafetz Chaim, R' Shkop returned to Europe after six months.) Most of the distinguished European and Palestinian rabbis and roshei yeshiva who visited the United States in the 1920's and 30's also delivered guest lectures at the Yeshiva.

R' Revel died on December 2, 1940 / 2 Kislev 5700, at age 55. His last words to his wife were: "It was my privilege to serve G-d, the Torah, and the children of the Torah." (Source: Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy by R' Aharon Rakeffet)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
