

TRANSITION AND LEADERSHIP

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Transition and Leadership

The focus of this week's Parsha is the transition of leadership from the Avos to the Shevatim, from the Fathers to the Sons.

Yakov was 108 years old and his twelve sons ranged in age from Reuven, who was 24, to Binyamin, who was 11. As the Parsha states, "And Yakov settled in the Land where his Father dwelled..." Rashi references the Medreesh, "Yakov desired to dwell in peace..."

The Medresh seems to imply that Yakov was looking forward to his golden years. He had battled and bested the likes of Lavan and Eisav. He had worked hard and done well. He was returning to the place of Yitzchak and to presumed safety. He had raised a family under challenging conditions and could proudly bask in his success as a father and leader. Now it was time to enjoy the good life. A life filled with the undisturbed study of G-d and the rich bounty of his children and grandchildren.

However, it was not to be so. First, Yakov was confronted by the trauma and politics of Dina's abduction. Then Yoseph's disappearance imposed itself on his tranquility. Yakov was seemingly beaten. What Lavan and Eisav could not do time and circumstance managed to accomplish. Overwhelmed by his loss and tragedy, Yakov could not be consoled. He was a broken man.

What happened to Yakov's resilience and unfaltering energy? Where was the father who had tirelessly stood guard over his family for twenty years while living with Lavan? Neither heat nor cold could deter Yakov's vigilance and determination in protecting his children from Lavan's influence. "The guardian of Israel neither slept nor slumbered!"

Yet, something changed. Yakov remained silent when negotiating with Shechem and Chamor in the aftermath of Dina's abduction. Why was Yakov silent? Why did he allow the brothers to dominate the conversation? Why was Yakov relatively uncritical at what the brothers had done to the inhabitants of Shechem? He seemed to accept the judiciousness of their actions and was only concerned about how the incident would affect the family's safety and political standing. Where was the righteous outrage that Yakov had displayed in the final showdown with Lavan?

In this week's Parsha, Yakov was certainly aware of the brothers' animosity toward Yoseph. Rashi

(37:7) explains that Yakov scolded Yoseph for his "foolish dreams" because even though he knew that the dreams were prophetic he did not want the others to be jealous. Why was Yakov silent about the possibility of jealousy? Where was Yakov the teacher and father? Why didn't he take direct issue with the eroding relationship between the brothers and Yoseph? Why was he silent?

To make matters worse, Yakov singled out Yoseph for special attention. Yoseph appeared to be his favorite. Yoseph was loved more than his brothers because he was the "son of his old age." Yakov made Yoseph "a jacket of fine wool" (multi-colored). Had Yakov gotten so old and feeble that he no longer cared about petty jealousies? As father and mentor of his twelve sons, why was Yakov silent?

What single criteria, if any, set the Avos (forefathers) apart from the Shevatim (tribes - sons of Yakov); and how was Yoseph different from the rest of his brothers?

Early in Shemos (6:3), the Medresh stated that G-d "missed the Avos" because they never questioned His judgment. Starting with Avraham, the Avos displayed a singular capacity to subjugate themselves to the will of G-d. Their faith extended way beyond "listening to the word of G-d". The Avos did not even question G-d's commands. They did not even allow themselves the luxury of wondering about His instructions. The Avos simply did as they were told.

The incident with the Akeidah (binding) is the most extreme example of this capacity. Avraham listened to G-d's command, and Yitzchak fully accepted Avraham's word that his "sacrifice" was divinely mandated. Both men were incredible intellects who had spent every waking moment engaged in the exploration of G-d's will. They wanted to know and to understand, yet, even though the Akeidah went against everything they both knew to be G-d's will, they unquestioningly suspended their own judgment and followed the stated will of G-d.

In many ways, Yitzchak was even more unique than Avraham. Avraham had the benefit of hearing the command directly from G-d, Yitzchak had not. Yet, Yitzchak willingly and unquestioningly accepted his father's word regarding the decree as the will of G-d! (Rashi 29:9). Avraham had cause to do the illogical and the contradictory. He truly believed that G-d had spoken to him. Yitzchak however, had to trust his father without the benefit of hearing it from G-d Himself.

This same capacity was evident in Yakov as well. Whether from his father or his mother, Yakov accepted their instructions as divine and as fact. For sixty-three years he sat at his father's feet - learning from Yitzchak as if he was learning from G-d Himself. Yakov was raised to trust the teachings of his father and mother. Additionally, after leaving their home he studied another fourteen years at the feet of the great Ever, the great-grandson of Shem son of Noach. At the end of his 77 years of continuous study, Yakov's subjugation to G-d's will was so absolute that he alone earned the title of "The chosen among the Avos."

The Avos were unique because they willingly subjugated themselves to the will of G-d, without question or reservation. This was not necessarily so with the brothers, especially when they were still young.

(Note: We do not know that much about the Avos in their early years. Avraham was first introduced to us at 75. Yitzchak takes center stage at 40. Yakov became central - besides the purchase of the firstborn rights - at the time of the blessings when he was 63.)

It is true that Yakov's sons were G-d fearing and righteous. It is true that they are called, "The Tribes of G-d" because of the pride G-d felt for them; however, they were not Avos. In their youth they did not display the singular unquestioning devotion and subjugation of their father, grandfather and great-grandfather. They did not earn the title of Av - father.

The only exception to the difference between the Avos and the Shevatim - tribes was Yoseph. It was Yoseph who earned the partial title of Av. He was the only one of the brothers to become more than a tribe. There is no one tribe of Yoseph. He, like Yakov before him, gave rise to two Shevatim - tribes, Menashe and Ephraim. He too exhibited a degree of subjugation, in his youth worthy of this singular designation.

(Note: The Torah's expectation that all the sons could have been like Yoseph may be predicated on the fact that the 12 sons had three generations of Avos to look back upon as role models of subjugation to the will of G-d. Possibly, that was a lesson, similar to our own millennium of Jewish history, that demanded earlier compliance than the Avos themselves.)

Starting with last week's Parsha, the brothers exhibited an independence that had not been displayed by the Avos. In negotiating and then punishing Shechem, they did not first confer with Yakov. Even after Yakov chastised them for having compromised the family through their impetuosity, they continued to disagree. "Is our sister to be treated as a prostitute?"

In this week's Parsha, their decision to do away with Yoseph revealed a degree of independence that altered the history of the entire world. Rather than bringing their concerns to Yakov for analysis and resolution, they judged and sealed the fate of Yoseph and the Jewish People.

Yoseph, on the other hand, was different. He was no less independent than the rest of his brothers. In fact, it might be argued that he was more independent. The difference was that he willingly subjugated himself to his father's teaching. As the most unique among the brothers, Yoseph devoted himself to imbibing as much truth from Yakov as possible. He became his father's favorite. Yakov recognized Yoseph's qualities of "fathership" and nurtured his young, and at times, insufferable righteousness.

The brothers, on the other hand, needed the freedom to make the teachings of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov their own. They needed to feel the responsibility, make the decisions, and live with the consequences.

Yakov's silence was not a lack of concern or vigilance. Yakov's silence was letting go of the era of the Avos and ushering in the development of his nation - giving the next generation, his sons, the right to make decisions and assume true leadership.

Identifying Yoseph's uniqueness was also part of their overall training. Greatness must be identified if it is to be respected, therefore Yakov gave him the multi-colored robe. Yoseph needed to learn how to wear royalty with humility, and the brothers needed to learn that Yoseph was different than them. He was an Av! Therefore, the issues of special designations and possible jealousies between the sons would have to be given the time to take their natural course as they struggled with each other's uniqueness.

When Moshe asked G-d to appoint his successor, he asked that the individual be able to deal with the inherent differences and complexities of Bnai Yisroel. "Just as the face of each person differs from all others, so do the ideas and attitudes of each one differ from all others." Moshe's successor would have to be a leader that could deal with each and all of them.

It is interesting to note that the Medresh says that Yitzchak looked exactly like Avraham and Yoseph looked exactly like Yakov. Yitzchak, who looked like Avraham subjugated himself entirely to his father. Yoseph, who looked exactly like Yakov, subjugated himself entirely to his father. However, the rest of the brothers, "Just as their faces were different, so too were their thinking and attitudes." They were the ones who struggled with the issues of their own independence and the subjugation that is the necessary foundation for the accurate transmission of G-d's Torah.

Quick review of the laws of Chanukah

Chanukah is from Friday night Nov. 29 through Dec. 7. Hallel is said every morning and Al Hanisim is added to the Amidah and the Birkat Hamazon.

1. The Menorah should be lit a ½ hour after sunset and remain lit for at least 1/2 hr. On Friday the Menorah must be lit before the Shabbos candles and remain lit for at least 90 minutes.
2. Candles should be placed in the Menorah from right to left and lit from left to right.
3. Olive oil or wax candles are acceptable; however, olive oil is preferred. Electric or gas lights are unacceptable.
4. Each family member (a wife often lights with her husband) should light their own Menorah. A wife may light her own (there are differing opinions about whether she should or should not) and if agreed upon exempt her husband if he won't be home.
5. The Menorah should be placed in a location where both family and public can see it. The best height is at 35" to 40", however safety must be a priority.
6. Brochos should be recited before lighting the Menorah. Talking is prohibited between the Brochos and the lighting.

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