

# ALSHICH

## INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת וישב

SERIES 1: ISSUE 9

## THE TORAH ABSOLVES YAAKOV, YOSEF AND THE BROTHERS

### Chapter 37

2) These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef was seventeen years old. He would shepherd the sheep with his brothers. He was a youth together with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Yosef brought a bad report about them to their father.

3) Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his other sons because he was born to him in his old age, and he made him a tunic of fine wool.

4) His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers and they hated him; they could not speak with him in a peaceful way.

ב) אלה תלדות יעקב יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה היה רעה את אחיו בצאן והוא נער את בני בלהה ואת בני זלפה נשי אביו ויבא יוסף את דבתם רעה אל אביהם.

ג) וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי-בן זקנים הוא לו ועשה לו כתנת פסים.

ד) ויראו אחיו כי-אתו אהב אביהם מכל אחיו וישנאו אתו ולא יכלו דברו לשלם.

### Consider the following questions:

1. How is Yosef's bringing a *bad report* connected to the first part of verse 1?
2. Why does the Torah use the name "Yisrael" in verse 3 when it used the name "Yaakov" in the previous verses?
3. Why is the fact that the brothers saw that Yaakov loved Yosef the most (verse 4), the reason why *they hated him*? Was it Yosef's fault that Yaakov loved him the most?

It is necessary to correct a mistaken impression that might be formed when considering the actions of the brothers and their holy father, Yaakov, which begin with this passage. Many of the things described here seem, God forbid, to present them in a very bad light. How could Yosef HaTzaddik tell his father *lashon hara* about his brothers? How could Yaakov, the holy servant of God, accept the *lashon hara* without protest? How could the righteous brothers hate Yosef and be jealous of him to the point that they wanted to kill him and throw him into a pit of snakes and scorpions? Are these the actions of *tzaddikim*? A person without proper understanding might wrongly suspect that the brothers were not true servants of God, and conclude that they had turned out like the wicked offspring of Esav.

To correct this false impression, the Torah states, *These* – Yosef and his brothers – *are the generations of Yaakov*, i.e., they are all righteous. The Torah was careful to write אלה תלדות יעקב (*These are the generations of Yaakov*), not ואלה (*And these, etc.*), in order to make clear that Yaakov's offspring are **not** linked to Esav's offspring enumerated in the immediately preceding passage at the end of the previous *parashah*, which is what a *vav* in the beginning of the word would signify.

A close look at our passage shows how the Torah is careful to limit the blame of each person involved. For example, the Torah tells us that Yosef was **a youth together with** the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah,

his father's wives. This means that he was happy to serve them and did not hold himself to be superior. Thus, it was not haughtiness that led him to bring a bad report to their father. He brought it **only** to "their father," with the intention that Yaakov should examine their actions and guide them on the right path, as a father does for his sons. Yosef did not go about gossiping to strangers, in the manner of one who wishes to belittle a person and ruin his reputation. The Torah has thus provided some justification for Yosef's actions.

**[This answers Question 1.]**

The next verse turns its attention to Yaakov: *Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his other sons*. One might think that this was because he accepted Yosef's bad report, and now thought that only Yosef was righteous. To refute this interpretation, the Torah refers to Yaakov by his name "Yisrael," from the root י-ש-ר, meaning righteous and just; "Yisrael, i.e., Yaakov, with justice, loved Yosef more than all his other sons." That is, his love was justified; it was not because he accepted any *lashon hara* but because **בְּן זִקְנִים הוּא לוֹ**. The word **זִקְנִים** comes from the root ז-ק-ן meaning old, and it is written in the plural to hint at a double meaning: (1) that Yosef was the son of Yaakov's old age; and (2) that Yosef was wise in Torah. **[This answers Question 2.]**

But now that we have justified the actions of Yosef and Yaakov, the actions of the brothers seem even more blameworthy. If the brothers were so righteous, why did they become full of hatred when they saw their father's special love of Yosef? Why was their jealousy and enmity aroused by the gift of a simple tunic, especially since the tunic is worn underneath all the outer garments and is almost entirely invisible to others.

If we look carefully, we will see that the brothers' enmity did **not** stem from their father's preferential treatment of Yosef (i.e., from jealousy). For the Torah does not say here that the brothers envied Yosef. Rather, it states: *His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers and they hated him*. The brothers believed that Yosef had turned their father against them through his *lashon hara*, and had presented only himself in a good light. This must be the reason their father loved Yosef the most – and this was why the brothers hated him.

If you want to argue that the brothers should have judged their father more favorably, assuming that he loved Yosef so much because he was *the child of his old age* (as stated in verse 3), the Torah forestalls this argument by emphasizing that they saw that their father loved him **more than all his brothers**, i.e., even more than Binyamin, who was more "the son of his old age" than Yosef was. Thus, as mentioned above, they concluded that there must be a different reason for Yaakov's special love for Yosef – the *lashon hara* that had turned their father against them. **[This answers Question 3.]**

### THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKadosh" (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

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