

History is made through simple actions.

**אֱלֹהִים תַּלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בָּרוּשֶׁב עַד עֲשָׂרָה שָׁנָה כִּי רֹעֶה אָתָּה אָחִיו בָּצָאָן וְהַוָּא נָעֵר
אֲתָּה בָּנִי בְּלִהְה וְאֲתָּה בָּנִי זִלְפָה גַּשְׁי אָבִיו וְיִבְאָה יוֹסֵף אֲתָּה דְּבָתָם רֹעֶה אֶלְאָבִיהֶם:**

“These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef, who at seventeen years of age was a shepherd to his brother’s, in sheep, and he was attendant to the sons of Bilha and the sons of Zilpa—the wives of his father—and Yosef brought their slander of evil to their father.” (Bereishis 37:2).

The pasuk adds the extra letter ב in front of “sheep” indicating “in sheep” instead of just “sheep.” It also adds the נָ in front of “sons of Bilha” and “sons of Zilpa.” And it says “their slander” and adds “evil.” Why these nuanced wordings?

The word toldos indicates the primary lineage of the person. Yaakov’s was Yosef. But it was not just Yosef. It was what happened to Yosef when he was seventeen years old. The pasuk also says he was a shepherd to his brothers but an attendant to the sons of Bilha and Zilpa. This indicates he did not shepherd their sheep, but helped attend to his older brothers’ business. The shepherding was done with or to his four eldest brothers—Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehuda.

The Torah also indicates that the evil reports were not his own. דְּבָתָם means their slander. The word דָבָת is found when the Scouts slandered Eretz Canaan. (Bamidbar 13:32). The scouts died for that slander. (Ibid 14:37). The way the word works is that it is an adjective followed by a noun. In the case of the Scouts, it was the “slander on the land.” What is “slander about evil?” Also, what slander would the sons of Bilha and Zilpa have? And why did Yosef feel compelled to share these reports with their father?

This pasuk is a capsule of time. Not all of it occurred exactly in the chronological order that the Torah writes it. Some of it—that Yosef was seventeen—commenced here, and other parts—the relaying the slander of evil—occurred later. The brothers had no dislike for Yosef based on these reports. The pesukim that follow state clearly their only adversarial relationship with Yosef was over his dreams of kingship. (Bereishis 37:4). When the Torah says that a father loved a son—especially in the cases of Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov—it means the father wants to bestow the full inheritance fights to the Brochos on that child. Yaakov loved Yosef, apart from his brothers. Yosef was the rightful heir to Yaakov’s brochos, and the brothers knew it.

Indeed, Yosef received those brochos. (Ibid 48:15-16). The brothers then were even more adversarial toward Yosef after he relayed his dreams to them. (Ibid 37:5). When they saw him come from afar to check on them, they said, “Here comes the dreamer.”

(Ibid 37:19). They conspired against him, and said, “We shall see what becomes of his dreams.” (Ibid 37:20). Perhaps if he was gone, another could be given the Brochos.

Why would the sons of Bilha and Zilpa – Dan, Naftali, Gad, Asher – be adversarial to Yosef or want to hurt him because of his dreams? Dan and Gad were older, and they were eldest of their mothers, but Yosef was also an eldest. Lest one opine that perhaps they were second-class because they were only the children of Bilha and Zilpa, the Torah says clearly, “the wives of their father.” They had equal status. However, not more equal than Yosef. Therefore, “the brothers” that said here comes the dreamer is the same “brothers” in our pasuk – Revuen, Shimon, Levi, and Yehuda.

The brothers were shepherding by Shechem. (Ibid 37:13). This follows their conquering Shechem because of the incident with Dina. (Ibid 34:25). Shimon and Levi struck the town and then returned Dina to their father. (Ibid 34:26). The other sons plundered the town. (Ibid 34:27). Yaakov sent Yosef to Shechem to check on the brothers. (Ibid 37:13). He could not find them because the brothers were no longer in Shechem. (Ibid 37:14). The man directed Yosef to Dosan, because the brothers left Shechem after their victory. (Ibid 37:17). Meanwhile, Shimon and Levi return with Dina and Yaakov scolded them. (Ibid 34:30). While they were being scolded, Yosef finds his other eight brothers near Dosan. Inspired by their victory they plan to dispose of Yosef. Why should he be king over them when they are more than capable of their own victories? Then the brothers celebrated their victory over a bread meal. (37:25).

If Shimon and Levi were with their father, and the four brothers from Bilha and Zilpa were not adversarial to Yosef, it was only Reuven and Yehuda. Reuven, though, did not want to kill him. (Ibid 37:22). It could be that the sons of Zilpa sided with Reuven to be king, and the sons of Bilha felt they were older than Yosef. More likely, it was Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehuda who had issue with Yosef, though Reuven did not want to kill Yosef. The sons of Bilha and Zilpa were swept up in the conspiracy. Even without Shimon and Levi present, they talked about getting rid of Yosef.

When did Yosef shepherd sheep? It was the brothers that shepherded sheep. (Ibid 37:13). After Yosef became king, he convinces Pharaoh to give them the choice land in Goshen for their flock. (Ibid 46:34). That is how he shepherded his brother, in *their* sheep. He was able to find favorable pasture for them. He attended to the sons of Bilha and Zilpa – including their children, thus the “es” – by providing them with food and shelter. (Ibid 47:12). The slander of evil that he brought to his father was their conspiracy to get rid of him. Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher got swept up in their older brothers’ conspiracy. That is why the slander was evil. It was not even their own slander. Also, the tunic dipped in blood and the missing Yosef was a report brought to their father, in regards to Yosef.

Years later, Scouts from the tribes fell into the same mistake. They slandered the Land and cited a riot against Moshe and Hashem. It was the Scouts of Yehuda and Ephraim who defended the Land, which is why those tribes begot kings. In the end, Yosef did become king and protected his family. He received the Brochos, and Yehoshua and great kings came out of him. Little events in the present can have great rippling affects in the future.