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Who Are You?

By Mordechai Plotsker | December 28, 2023

Our forefather Jacob was a real person who experienced hate, heartache, and depression. Beginning with his estranged twin brother Esav, who hated and desired murder over peace, to a deceitful father-in-law Laban, whom, among other miscreant behavior, successfully plotted to undermine his daughter's marriage, and made Jacob's life a living perdition, and finally, the depression that set-in following the tragic and unexplained loss of his cherished son Joseph who went missing while checking on his brothers in Shechem.

Dovetailing these series of tragic events, the Vilna Gaon explains that when Rebecca in Parshat Toldot stated, "*Ahlai Kilalascha Bini – On me is your curse,*" (Genesis 27:13) she intimated the future state and acronym *Ahlai* (*Ayin, Lamed and Yud*) – Esav, Laban and Joseph, hinting, that she will take at least half of the pain so that Jacob would be able to manage the remainder. The word, *Ahlai*, resurfaces in Parshat Mikeitz when Jacob, feeling intense anxiety concerning the prospect of sending Benjamin down to Egypt, recalls his mother's premonition and sadly states, "*Ahlai hayu kulana – All these troubles have come upon me.*" (Ibid: 42:36)

The pain and anguish appeared to immediately disappear once Jacob was reunited with his long-lost son, Joseph. One could only imagine the happiness and enjoyment that Jacob experienced, sitting and basking in the golden years of life, learning Torah with his beloved grandchildren, Menashe and Ephraim. Suddenly, the sweet music of that tender moment violently stopped. Jacob took a hard look at Menashe and Ephraim and said, "Who are you?"

Joseph quickly replied, "They are my sons, whom God gave me with *this*." Jacob then said, "Bring them near to me so that I may bless them" (Ibid: 48:8-9). How could Jacob suddenly not remember his grandchildren? What happened?

Rashi provides a fascinating answer that seems to literally bounce off the page. The innocuous word in the verse, *bahzeh*, translated as "*this*", means that "Joseph showed Jacob the marriage document and Ketubah. Joseph then prayed for mercy (concerning the "matter"), and the Ruach Hakodesh returned and rested upon Jacob" (Kallah Rabbathi 3:19). Why is Joseph revealing a marriage document and Ketubah – Is this what Jacob requested?

Pirkey D'Rav Eliezer (Ibid: 37) explains that when Dina returned home (from the abduction by Shechem), she gave birth to a girl shortly thereafter. Feeling ashamed she proclaimed, "Now the world will say that the house of Jacob is defiled." This prompted Jacob to take a piece of gold and write the name of God together with the following sentence, "Anyone who touches this (amulet), know that I am from the house of Jacob." Jacob placed the amulet onto a necklace, and miraculously, the angel Michael, without revealing to Jacob, transferred this little girl down to Egypt where she was found the following morning in a *sneh* (bush) by means of a *nais* (miracle). Fusing the two words reveals the name, Osnas. Potifera heard the cries of this infant and took mercy and adopted Osnas.

This reconciles the incessant attraction Potifera had towards Joseph: She saw in her astrological sign that she was destined to have children through Joseph. However, she was unaware that the children would be born by her adopted daughter, Osnas.

Da'at Zikainim and Yonatan ben Uziel explain that when Joseph became second-in-command to Pharaoh, the Egyptian girls would try their best to gain his attention (Ibid: 41:45). Osnas, an *isha tzanuah* – a modest woman, removed the necklace, threw her treasured amulet toward Joseph, who, upon reading the content, married her on the spot since he knew, with total conviction, that this girl was destined to be his wife.

Interestingly, the town of Shechem (Nablus) was given to Joseph as his eternal resting place since that was his inheritance from his father-in-law (Shechem). Jacob conferred this land to Joseph, “And I have given you the city of Shechem” (Ibid: 48:22, Rashi).

Therefore, when Jacob asked, ‘Who are you?’ he was asking, who is your mother that successfully raised you in Egypt to be shomer Torah u'mitzvot, to learn with energy and excitement? Joseph then presented the document that Jacob had feverishly written many years ago for his granddaughter, who as Osnas, later became the proud mother of Menashe and Ephraim, the latter from whom Moshiach ben Yosef will readily emerge. Upon recognizing his own handwriting and realizing the miracle, Jacob was overwhelmed with happiness. With his Ruach Hakodesh fully restored, in the very same verse, Jacob then said to Joseph, “Bring them (Menashe and Ephraim) please to me, so that I may bless them”.

Mordechai Plotsker runs a popular 10-minute nightly shiur on the parsha with a keen interest on the invigorating teachings of the Berdichever Rav, the Kedushas Levi. Plotsker resides in Elizabeth with his wife and children, and can be reached by email at marc.plotsker@gmail.com.