

פרשת וישב

Sometimes our attempts to understand Torah requires us to be attuned to subtleties and nuances. We have to be ever alert to a seemingly minor change in a word or an unusual syntax or a term that is unexpected.

When we come across such instances, whether we discover them ourselves or learn from others, we have a 'Eureka' moment. The sudden insight awakens me and allows me to fathom ideas that never occurred to me before. Additionally, the sudden insight provides me with the means of connecting other ideas and thoughts and allows me to weave a fabric of Torah understanding.

Sometimes, though, that pursuit of subtlety or nuance may lead me to ignore aspects of Torah interpretation that are very clear and apparent – as long as we think about them.

One case in point is our Parshas Vayeshev in which the Torah features two individuals most prominently: the brothers Yehuda and Yosef.

A preliminary examination of two sections of our Parsha will make it quite obvious that the Torah wishes to compare Yehuda and Yosef, in a particular aspect at least, and then our task, after identifying the parallelism will be to understand what it has to teach us.

After all, if the Torah will make it evident that we should look at some of the events of the Shevatim in tandem, it wants us to learn from them.

Let us go in order.

A brief review of the background for our investigation will be appropriated.

The Torah tells us (B'reishis Perek 37/P'sukim 1-2):

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְוִרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: אֵלֶּה תִּלְדֹּת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה
הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת אֶחָיו בְּצֹאן וְהוּא נֶעַר אֶת בְּנֵי בְלָהָה וְאֶת בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף
אֶת דְּבָתָם רֹעֵה אֶל אָבִיהֶם:

Yaakov dwelled in the land of the sojournings of his father, in the Land of Canaan. These are the generations of Yaakov – Yosef was seventeen years old; he shepherded the sheep with his brothers; he was a lad with the

children of Bilhoh and the children of Zilpoh, the wives of his father; Yosef brought negative reports about them to their father.

The Torah continues (P'sukim 4-8):

וַיֵּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי אֶתּוֹ אָהַב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל אָחָיו וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֵם: וַיִּחְלֹם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגִּד לְאָחָיו וַיֹּסְפוּ עוֹד שֹׁנְאֵי אֹתוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שְׁמְעוּ נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חֲלַמְתִּי: וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי וְהִנֵּה מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלַמְתִּי וְגַם נִצְבָה וְהִנֵּה תִסְבֵּינָה אֲלַמְתֵּיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶינּוּ לְאֲלַמְתִּי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אָחָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשַׁל בָּנוּ וַיֹּסְפוּ עוֹד שֹׁנְאֵי אֹתוֹ עַל חֲלַמְתּוֹ וְעַל דְּבָרָיו:

His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved more than all of his brothers and they hated him and they could not speak peaceably with him. Yosef dreamt a dream and he told it to his brothers and they hated him more.

He told them, 'Please hear the dream that I dreamt. Behold we were bundling sheaves in the midst of the field and behold, my sheave arose and even stood erect and behold your sheaves encircled and bowed to my sheaf.'

His brothers said to him, 'Will you fully rule over us; will you fully have reign over us?' They continued to hate him for his dreams and his words.

Not so long after the above event we read of the tragedy of the selling of Yosef (P'sukim 24-27):

וַיִּקְחֵהוּ וַיִּשְׁלְכוּ אֹתוֹ הַבְּרָה וְהַבּוֹר רֶק אֵין בּוֹ מַיִם: וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכֹל לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיֵּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אַרְחַת יִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִים בָּאָה מִגְּלָעָד וְגַמְלִיָּהֶם נֹשְׂאִים נִכְאֹת וְצָרִי וְלֹט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרַיִמָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל אָחָיו מֶה בָּצַע כִּי נִהַרְגְתֶּם אֶת אָחֵינוּ וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת דַּמּוֹ: לָכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ לְיִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִים וַיְדַנּוּ אֶל תְּהִי בּוֹ כִּי אָחֵינוּ בְּשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אָחָיו:

They took Yosef and they cast him into the pit; the pit was empty; it had no water. The brothers sat down to eat bread and they raised up their eyes and they saw and behold an Arabian Caravan was coming from *Gilead* and their camels were carrying various spices that they were taking down to Egypt.

Yehuda said to his brothers, 'What value is there that we kill our brother and we cover his blood. Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and let our hand not be against him because he is our brother and our flesh; the brothers listened to Yehuda.

Certainly, we do not have *nachas* from either of these episodes. We will not relate here to the important thoughts regarding the rationale that Yosef and Yehuda had, respectively, to choose the actions that they chose. The fact is, and the ramifications of the events support the facts, that that which they did was appalling.

The immediate ramifications are told to us clearly.

After learning the travail in the house of Yaakov and that Yosef was taken to Egypt, we read a segment relating to the personal history of Yehuda. Following that segment, we return to Yosef.

The Torah writes (P'sukim 34-36):

וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹלְתָיו וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁק בְּמַתְּנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים: וַיִּקְמוּ כָּל בְּנָיו וְכָל בָּנֹתָיו לְנַחֲמוֹ וַיִּמְאַן לְהִתְנַחֵם וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֵרֵד אֶל בְּנֵי אָבִי לְשָׂאֵלָה וַיִּבֶךְ אֹתוֹ אָבִיו: וְהַמְדָּנִים מָכְרוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל מִצְרַיִם לְפוֹטִיפָר סָרִיס פְּרֹעֶה שֶׁר הַטַּבָּחִים:

Yaakov tore his garments and he placed sackcloth on his loins and he mourned his son many days. All of his sons and all of his daughters arose to comfort him and he refused to be comforted; he said, 'I will go down to my grave mourning my son; his father cried for him. The *Medonim* sold him to Egypt, to Potifar the officer of Par'o, who was the officer of the kitchens.

We will note already that the phrase that Yaakov Ovinu spoke was:

אֵרֵד אֶל בְּנֵי אָבִי לְשָׂאֵלָה

I will go down to my grave mourning my son.

Yaakov Ovinu, the third and final Patriarch, one who reached the lofty accomplishments that he achieved, now pictures himself as being in descent.

And the very next section continues that descent. We read:

וַיְהִי בְּעֵת הַהוּא וַיֵּרֵד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחָיו וַיֵּט עַד אִישׁ עַדְלָמִי וַשְּׁמוֹ חִירָה:

It was at that time, Yehuda descended from his brothers and he turned to an *Adulamite* man whose name was *Chirah*.

It is clear that that this verse requires us to add interpretation. Not only do we read that Yehuda descended, because the Torah could have written that 'he went', but also it was 'from his brothers'. What is the interpretation?

Rashi writes:

ויהי בעת ההוא - למה נסמכה פרשה זו לכאן, והפסיק בפרשתו של יוסף, ללמד שהורידוהו אחיו מגדולתו כשראו בצרת אביהם, אמרו אתה אמרת למכרו, אלו אמרת להשיבו היינו שומעים לך:

It was at that time – Why is this section of Yehuda placed here, interrupting the flow of events regarding Yosef? This teaches that his brothers lowered him from his position of greatness when they saw the distress of their father. They said, 'You said to sell him. If you had said to return him, we would have listened to you.'

The Torah has told us, as we read above,

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אָחָיו

The brothers listened to Yehuda.

We are limited in our ability to conjecture. Now they said, 'We would have listened to you if you said to return Yosef to our father.' Would they have if they heard such a drastic change from their original plans?

After all, the first plan was clear. We read (Perek 37/P'sukim 19-20):

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחָיו הִנֵּה בֹעַל הַחֲלֻמוֹת הַלְזָה בָּא: עֲתָה לְכוּ וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנִשְׁלַכֵהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת וְאָמַרְנוּ חֲמֵה רָעָה אֲכַלְתֵּהוּ וְנִרְאָה מֶה יְהִי חֲלֻמֹתָיו:

One man said to his brother, 'Behold this dreamer is coming. Now, go and let us kill him and we will cast him into one of the pits and we will say, "a wild animal devoured him"; we will see what his dreams will be¹.

The brothers acceded to Reuven's suggestion, as we read (P'sukim 21-22):

¹ Rashi says that this final phrase was not part of the brothers' dialogue. Rather it was a prophetic statement from the Ribbono Shel Olom:

נראה דבר מי יקום או שלכם או שלי:

We will see whose word will stand – yours or Mine!

וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיִּצְלֵהוּ מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִכְנֹו נַפְשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם רְאוּבֵן אֵל תִּשְׁפְּכוּ דָם הַשְּׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבָּר וַיֵּד אֵל תִּשְׁלְחוּ בוֹ לְמַעַן הִצִּיל אֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם לְהָשִׁיבוֹ אֶל אָבִיו:

Reuven heard and he saved Yosef from their hand; he said, 'Let us not kill him.' He said, 'Do not spill blood; cast him into this pit in the wilderness and no one should sent out his hand against him;' he did so in order to save Yosef from their hand in order to return him to his father.

The implication is that had Reuven suggested to return Yosef to his father, the brothers would not have listened.

We do not know had Yehuda made the same suggestion if the brothers would have listened because of the prestige that was assigned to Yehuda or if their words, after the fact, were merely an excuse.

In any case, Yehuda was ostracized.

We note that the Torah writes:

וַיֵּרֵד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחָיו

Yehuda went down from his brothers.

They did not physically force him to go. He went down on his own volition; he went down because his actions brought him to this situation of ostracism.

And thus we come to the third descent, that of Yosef. There we read (Perek 39/Posuk 1):

וַיֹּסֶף הוֹרֵד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקְנֵהוּ פוֹטִיפָר סָרִיס פְּרַעֲהַ שֶׁר הַטַּבָּחִים אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מִיַּד הַיִּשְׁמַעֲאֵלִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרְדוּהוּ שָׁמָּה:

Yosef was taken down to Egypt; Potifar, the officer of Par'o, the officer of kitchens, an Egyptian man, bought him from the Ishmaelite people who took him down to there.

Although we could attribute the brothers' intense dislike of Yosef to Yosef's actions and words, the Torah does not allow that to be an excuse for the brother's actions. Thus, the Torah writes here, as was the objective fact, that Yosef was a victim, in the most complete sense.

One might ask at this point, 'wasn't Yaakov Ovinu a victim? Wasn't his sense that he would go down to the grave in fact the result of the brothers' dishonesty?'

The answer is that of course Yaakov Ovinu was a victim. But he didn't know that and therefore he didn't say, 'You are bringing me down to the grave.' He presumably thought that the tragedy that befell him was his own fault.

We know that Yaakov Ovinu was a victim; he did not know.

Let us now skip the intervening events that occurred to Yehuda and Yosef and let us look at parallel conclusions, whether final or not yet final.

We will try to learn from the events and, at the same time be most cautious so as not to compare one to the other with the purpose of saying, 'he is better than him'. Rather, we will attempt to learn from each event and see what understandings the Torah wishes us to extract from those events.

The Torah goes into great detail regarding Yehuda and his missteps with his Adulamite host. We are told of the evil of his sons and his insincere promise to Tamar that she would marry Yehuda's third son.

At this juncture we come to the meeting of Yehuda and Tamar under far less than ideal circumstances.

Tamar is pregnant and unbeknownst to Yehuda, he is the father. When Tamar is condemned to death because of her promiscuity, she exhibits extraordinary heroism by refusing to shame Yehuda in public.

She spoke in a general sense that could not have been understood by anyone else than Yehuda.

We read (Perek 38/P'sukim24-26):

וַיְהִי כַּמִּשְׁלֵשׁ חֳדָשִׁים וַיֵּגֵד לַיהוּדָה לֵאמֹר זָנַתָּה תָמָר כַּלְתֶּךָ וְגַם הֵינָה הָרָה לְזַנוּנִים
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה הוֹצִיאֶנָּה וְתִשְׂרָף: הוּא מוֹצֵאת וְהִיא שְׂלָחָה אֶל חַמִּיהָ לֵאמֹר לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
אֵלֶּה לּוֹ אָנֹכִי הָרָה וְתֹאמַר הֶכֶר נָא לְמִי הַחֲתָמָת וְהַפְתִּילִים וְהַמָּטָה הָאֵלֶּה: וַיִּכַר יְהוּדָה
וַיֹּאמֶר צְדָקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי עַל כֵּן לֹא נָתַתִּיהָ לְשִׁלָּה בְנִי וְלֹא יִסֹּף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ:

It was at about three months and it was told to Yehuda saying, 'Your daughter-in-law acted promiscuously and she is promiscuously pregnant'; Yehuda said, 'Take her out and she should be burned².'

She was taken out and she sent to her father-in-law saying, 'the person whose these are is the one from whom I became pregnant;' she said, 'please recognize whose signet ring and whose fringes and whose staff these are.' Yehuda recognized and said, 'she is correct; the pregnancy is from me³; because I did not give her to my son *Shelah* and he did not continue⁴ to know her.

Yosef had his challenge and his successful withstanding of it gave him the unique title of *Yosef HaTzaddik*.

How did he deserve such a unique title? We read (Perek 39/P'sukim 7-9):

וְיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּשָּׂא אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶתְּ אֲדֹנָיו אֶת עֵינֶיהָ אֶל יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁכַבָּה עִמִּי:
וַיִּמָּאן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָיו הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא יַדַּע אֶתִּי מִה בְּבַיִת וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לּוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי:
אֵינְנִי גָדוֹל בְּבַיִת הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא חֹשֶׁךְ מִמֶּנִּי מֵאוֹמֶה כִּי אִם אוֹתָךְ בְּאֲשֶׁר אֶתְּ אִשְׁתּוֹ
וְאִיךָ אַעֲשֶׂה הָרָעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לֹא... לְקִיָּם:

It was after these things that the wife of his master raised her eyes to Yosef and said, 'Lay with me.' Yosef refused and he said to the wife of his master, 'Behold my master does check upon me what I do in the house; he has given me control over all that he has. No one in this house is greater than me [in authority] and he has not withheld anything from me, except you since you are his wife; how could I do this great evil and sin against G-d.'

The word וַיִּמָּאן – he refused has the *שְׁלִשְׁלֹת*, a rarely used singing note that gives great emphasis to his refusal. He was adamant in the 'no' that he said to his master's wife.

Yet that adamant declaration weakened over time. Thus we read (P'sukim 11- 12):

² See the various commentators as to why this was the capital punishment that she was to receive.

³ Later on we will see an additional explanation for the word *ממני*.

⁴ An alternative interpretation is 'cease' instead of 'continue'.

וַיְהִי כִּהְיוֹם הַזֶּה וַיָּבֹא הַבַּיִתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכְתּוֹ וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם בְּבַיִת:
וַתִּתְפָּשֶׂהוּ בְּבִגְדוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁכַבְהָ עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה:

It was on that certain day, Yosef came to the house to do his work and there was no one from the people of the house in the house. She grabbed him by his clothing saying, 'lay with me' and Yosef left his clothing in her hand and he fled and he went outside.

In one of this explanations, Rashi writes:

לעשות מלאכתו - רב ושמואל, חד...אמר לעשות צרכיו עמה

To do his work – Rav and Sh'muel had a dispute. One of them said, 'to take care of his needs with her'.

That is, despite his obviously sincere refusal, at a certain point the resolve of Yosef faltered and he decided to sin.

At this point the question before Yosef was would he sin or not and since the Posuk tells us that Yosef was secluded with the wife of Potifar nothing could prevent him from fulfilling his intention.

And yet, he did not sin. What caused him to change his mind at the very last second?

Rashi (ibid.) brings what Chazal teach us in Masseches Sotah (36 b):

אלא שנראית לו דמות דיוקנו של אביו וכו', כדאיתא במסכת סוטה.

As he was about to sin, the picture of his father appeared before him.

The vision of his father was such a powerful reminder of the values for which he stood, that Yosef was able to remove himself despite the triumph of his *yetzer ha'ra'* that brought him to her on that day.

The Gemara writes:

באותה שעה באתה דיוקנו של אביו ונראתה לו בחלון, אמר לו: יוסף, עתידין אחריך שיכתבו על אבני אפוד ואתה ביניהם, רצונך שימחה שמך מביניהם ותקרא רועה זונות? דכתיב: (משלי כט/ג⁵) ורועה זונות יאבד הון.

At that moment the picture of his father⁶ appeared before him in the window. Yaakov said to Yosef, 'Yosef, in the future the names of your

⁵ The entire verse reads:

אִישׁ אֲהַב חֲכָמָה יִשְׂמַח אָבִיו וְרָעָה זֹנוֹת יֶאֱבֵד הוֹן:

The man who loves wisdom will bring happiness to his father; he whose companions are harlots will lose a fortune.

The first of Malbim's explanations of this verse will give us insight into Yaakov's choice to use it as a warning to Yosef.

He writes:

איש אוהב חכמה ישמח אביו, מדת האהבה הנטועה בנפש, אם ישתמש בה כראוי תהיה לאהבת החכמה והטוב והצדק, ואיש המשתמש במדת האהבה לאהוב חכמה הוא ישמח אביו, כמו שכתוב (משלי יא/טו) בן חכם ישמח אב, כי אחר כן תבא החכמה בלבו ויהיה בן חכם, אבל המשתמש במדת האהבה לאהוב זונות, הוא יאבד הון של אביו.

The man who loves wisdom will bring happiness to his father – the attribute of love that is implanted in a person's soul, if used well, will bring him to love wisdom, goodness and righteousness. One who uses the attribute of love to love wisdom will bring happiness to his father, as it is written, 'a wise son brings happiness to his father' because then the wisdom will enter his heart and the father will have a wise son.

But, if one uses the attribute of love to love harlots, he will lose the fortune of his father.

It was the fortune of Yaakov that enabled the names of the *shevatim* to be engraved on the stones that were on the eiphod. If Yosef would behave wrongly he would lose that fortune.

Of course the 'father' refers to HaKodosh Boruch Hu as well.

⁶ Tosfos there (d.h. 'b'o'soh sho'oh) brings the explanation of *Rabi Moshe HaDarshan* who tells us how Chazal interpreted the verse to imply that Yaakov was there.

He writes:

כתב רבינו משה הדרשן ואין איש מאנשי הבית [שם בבית דמשמע דוקא מאנשי הבית] לא היה שם מכלל דאיש אחר שלא מאנשי הבית כלומר חלוק ומופלג מתורת אנשי הבית היה שם וזהו דמות דיוקנו של אביו ותימה קצת מנלן דנראית לו בחלון ושמה מדכתיב בבית דמשמע בבית לא.

brothers will be inscribed on the stones that will be upon the *eiphod* that the Kohen Godol will wear and your name will be with theirs. Do you want your name to be erased from among them and they will call you 'the one whose companions are harlots', as the verse says, "He whose companions are harlots will lose a fortune."⁷

Of course, we are moved by the thought of this intervention of the *neshama* of Yaakov to save his son and the spiritual level of Yosef who was able to have such a holy vision at the moment he was about to sin grievously.

Devek Tov, the supra-commentary on Rashi writes:

ואין זאת לחובותו של יוסף כי זאת מעלה גדולה לצדיק שנתאוה לעבירה ושלט ביצרו
וניצל מעבירה:

This event does not come to teach that Yosef was guilty. Rather this shows the high level of a *Tzaddik* who desired to sin and who ruled over his *yetzer ha'ra'* and was saved from sin.

Even without these words of *Devek Tov* we are certainly moved by the heroism of Yosef – Yosef HaTzaddik.

Rabi Moshe HaDarshan wrote: 'no one from the men of the house were there in the house'. This implies that the emphasis was on the 'men of the house' were not there, but someone not from the classification of 'the men of the house'. That is, someone who was distinct and very different from the 'men of the house' was there. And that is the picture of Yosef's father, Yaakov.

But it is difficult to know how Chazal interpreted that the picture of Yosef was seen from the window. Perhaps the answer is that it is written 'in the house'. That implies that the picture wasn't in the house [but out of it, seen through the window.]

It is interesting to note that Rashi does not mention 'the window' in his explanation and I did not find alternative texts of Rashi that mentioned it. Perhaps, Rashi agreed with the Tosfos' question but not with the answer and thus felt that 'the window' was part of *פשוטו של מקרא* and thus he did not bring that part of the Gemara.

⁷ The Gemara continues with powerful descriptions of the *gevurah* of Yosef who, at the last moment, withstood extraordinary temptation.

And it certainly appears that the juxtaposition of this even with the misbehavior of Yehuda implies a place for comparison with the righteousness and heroism of Yosef being made even more impressive by virtue of the implied comparison.

We have no reason to doubt this conclusion.

However, and at the same time, we can see these two events that the Torah chose to place side by side from another perspective.

We read in Masseches Shabbos (53 b):

תנו רבנן: מעשה באחד שמתה אשתו והניחה בן לינק, ולא היה לו שכר מניקה ליתן, ונעשה לו נס ונפתחו לו דדין כשני דדי אשה והניק את בנו. אמר רב יוסף: בא וראה כמה גדול אדם זה, שנעשה לו נס כזה! אמר לו אביי: אדרבה, כמה גרוע אדם זה שנשתנו לו סדרי בראשית!

The *Braisa* taught: It occurred that a man's wife died and she left him with a nursing baby and he had no funds to hire a nursemaid. A miracle occurred to him and his chest became like that of a woman and he nursed his son.

Rav Yosef said, 'Come and see how great was this person that had such a miracle occur to him.'

Abaye said, 'It is the opposite. How bad is this person that nature had to be changed for him.'

We translated the word גרוע as 'bad', because of the context. However, the word גרוע means 'lacking' and since we cannot say that this man was wicked – after all he had such a miracle occurring to him, certainly this refers to the fact that in order to save his child, he lost many or all of his merits.

That is similar to what we read in the beginning of Parshas Vayishlach (Perek 32/Posuk 11). In his prayer to Hashem prior to meeting Eisav, Yaakov Ovinu said:

קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְּמִקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת:

I am too small for all of the kindnesses and for all of the truth that You have done for Your servant; because I crossed the Jordan River having only my walking-stick and now I have two [large] camps.

Rashi writes:

קטנתי מכל החסדים - נתמעטו זכיותי על ידי החסדים והאמת שעשית עמי, לכך אני ירא, שמא משהבטחתי נתלכלכתי בחטא ויגרום לי להמסר ביד עשו:

I am too small for all of your kindnesses – My merits have been lessened from all of the kindnesses and truth that You did for me; that is why I am afraid. Perhaps, from the time that You promised me I have dirtied myself with sin and that will cause me to be delivered into the hand of Eisav.

That is the , גרוע, the lack or lessening of this man that the Gemara discusses.

Don't we know that ⁸הרבה שלוחים למקום? Hashem has infinite ways to bring about the results that He wishes. Changing nature so drastically has a cost. The cost is the merit of the individual who had such an extraordinary event occur to him.

How are we to envision the appearance of his father's face before Yosef? Was it a G-d-sent miracle to save him from egregious sin? If so, perhaps that takes away from the event and the greatness of Yosef.

Yehuda, on the other hand, sinned. He was wrong and there is nothing that we can say that changes the matter.

However, the result of his sin was the formation of the Davidic dynasty that began thousands of years ago and will be renewed when the *Geula Shleima* will arrive.

The Torah writes regarding Tamar (B'reishis Perek 38/P'sukim 27-30):

וְיָהִי בַעַת לִדְתָהּ וְהָיָה תְאוּמִים בְּבִטְנָהּ: וַיְהִי בְלִדְתָהּ וַיִּתֵּן יָד וַתִּקַּח הַמִּילָדָת וַתִּקְשֹׁר
עַל יָדוֹ שְׁנֵי לְאֹמֶר זֶה יֵצֵא רִאשׁוֹנָה: וַיְהִי כַמִּשְׁיב יָדוֹ וְהָיָה יֵצֵא אַחִיו וַתֹּאמֶר מֶה פָּרָצְתָּ
עָלַי פָּרָץ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פְּרִיץ: וְאַחַר יֵצֵא אַחִיו אֲשֶׁר עַל יָדוֹ הַשְּׁנִי וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ זֵרַח:

It was the time when she was giving birth, behold there were twins in the stomach. When she gave birth, one child extended his hand and the midwife took and tied a scarlet ribbon on his hand saying 'this one emerged first'. When he returned his hand, behold his brother came out and she said, 'What is this that your broke [*poratzto*] out a break out' and he called his name *Peretz*. Then his brother came out, the one with the scarlet ribbon on his hand, and he called his name *Zerach*.

⁸ This is well-used phrase throughout our *sefarim*. One example is Seforno to B'reishis Perek 44/Posuk 16.

Megillas Rus concludes (Perek 4/P'sukim 18-22):

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פֶּרֶץ פְּרָץ הוֹלִיד אֶת חֶצְרוֹן: וְחֶצְרוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת רֹם וְרֹם הוֹלִיד אֶת עֲמִינָדָב:
וְעֲמִינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת נַחֲשׁוֹן וְנַחֲשׁוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת שַׁלְמָה: וְשַׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת בְּעֵז וּבְעֵז הוֹלִיד
אֶת עוֹבֵד: וְעוֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת יִשָּׁי וְיִשָּׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת דָּוִד:

These are the generations of Peretz: Peretz gave birth to Chetzron. Chetzron gave birth to Rom and Rom gave birth to Aminodov. Aminodov gave birth to Nachshon and Nachson gave birth to Salmah. Salmon gave birth to Boaz and Boaz gave birth to Oved. Oved gave birth to Yishai and Yishai gave birth to Dovid.

It certainly seems odd that through the misbehavior of Yehuda, that *Malchus Beis Dovid* should be established. Thus, we read an alternative explanation to the words:

צדקה ממני

She is righteous from me

that were uttered at the time of Yehuda's admission.

Rashi writes there (Posuk 26):

ממני -...ורבותינו ז"ל דרשו שיצאה בת קול ואמרה ממני ומאתי יצאו הדברים...

From Me – our Rabbis of blessed memory interpreted that a heavenly voice emerged and said, 'From Me'. These events came out from Me...

Yehuda acted through history, not supernaturally. Yehuda had found the inner-strength to return, *teshuva*, from his sin.

And even if we view the appearance of Yaakov as stemming from the inner spiritual strength of Yosef, we can still contemplate the meaning of the juxtaposition between the events of Yosef and Yehuda.

My Rebbe Rav Aharon Soloveichik ZT" L saw this correlation in his article to Parshas Vayigash in "The Warmth and the Light"⁹.

⁹ The article is far more expansive, explanative and sophisticated than that which will be brought here. The points that will be noted here are most sparse compared to the wealth of sources and thought that he brings.

There he brings us the teachings of Rambam in the Sixth Perek of *Shemonah Perakim*.

Rambam there discusses the relative value of two types of superior personalities. One is termed **מעולה** and the other is termed **מושל בנפשו**.

The first, as elucidated by the Rosh HaYeshiva, is an extraordinarily pious individual, as the term implies. The second is a most righteous person, but one who is in constant conflict and struggle to maintain his righteousness.

The latter succeeds in his efforts and is thus **מושל בנפשו**, he rules with his soul. That is, he is able to gather his inner spiritual strength in order to overcome the severe challenges to his *ruchaniyus*-spirituality.

Who is greater? See Rambam there and the above article for a discussion.

However, Rav Aharon Soloveichik ZT”L makes it clear that only one of these great persons can be a leader of the masses.

To be a leader requires a connection with those who will be under the leader’s jurisdiction. If it will not be a dictatorship, then those subjugate to the leader’s direction must feel a connection with him. They can feel a connection with the **מושל בנפשו** because they can identify with his struggles. He is one of them, on the one hand and, yet, he sets an example for them because they can identify with his challenges.

On the other hand, the **מעולה** lives such a lofty life, the masses, while appreciating him, admiring him and holding him in the highest esteem, cannot accept him as their leader. He is too lofty for them. They cannot follow in his footsteps because his footsteps are angelic and they are flesh and blood. They cannot have identification with an angel.

Let us now take this point and apply it to the picture that Yosef saw. If that picture arose from his own *neshama*, from the depths of his spirituality, it is stunning indeed.

Here is a person involved in the most physical of actions, and in a particular action that is sinful and thus is meant to drive away spirituality and nonetheless his righteousness is so exceptional that he has holy visions that arise from within himself overcome the gross sinful physicality in which he is about to take part.

The greatness of Yosef is so exceptional that he cannot become the leader of men because his footsteps are untraceable and cannot be imitated.

Yehuda is the king. On the one hand he is 'everyman'. He is subject to error. On the other hand, he can serve as a model of a ruler because first and foremost he is מושל בנפשו; he rules over himself.

Because that is the pattern of the way of life of Yehuda, others can identify with him and seek to emulate him.

We are not called upon to judge either Yosef HaTzaddik or Yehuda, and certainly not to be involved in judgmental comparisons.

We are called upon to look at those great personalities that the Torah presents to us, in the way that Torah and Chazal bring us. We are obligated to observe their character and nature so that from the lesson that they can teach us, sometimes עשה טוב – what to do and at other times סור מרע – what not to do, we can learn about ourselves, guide ourselves and seek our place in the honor roll of Jewish history.

As B'reishis begins its approach to its culmination, we can look and see if our 'beginning' is leading us to point of accomplishment and achievement that we seek and desire.

Shabbat Shalom

Chanukah Sameach

Rabbi Pollock