

It has been a heavy several weeks for those of us who believe that Torah should be ethical, and therefore a while since I've written a straightforward parshah devar Torah, but one cannot let emergencies make us forget why we love learning lishmoh (about which I hope to write more soon). For this week, therefore, I will let others carry the ideological battle – here is a [link](#) to my teacher Rav Aharon Lichtenstein Shlita's magisterial response to the pesak about selling and leasing apartments to nonJews in Israel, translation by SBM alumnus Rabbi Elli Fischer, and here are links to the powerful and provocative responses of [Rav Yehudah Gilad](#) (translated by Rabbi Ross Singer), [Rav Shmuel Reiner](#) (Hebrew), and [Rav Yoel bin Nun](#) (Hebrew) – while my devar Torah is intended purely for the sake of learning¹. The Tzohar rabbinical organization in Israel has also released a statement strongly opposing the pesak, along with several halakhic articles supporting their position.

I have always loved quoting Rabbi Norman Lamm's wonderful routine about the blessing of Efraim and Menasheh. Rabbi Lamm enjoyed saying that Yosef, by placing the sons in age order, showed himself a conservative establishment figure; Yaakov, by crossing his hands, engaged in disestablishment; and thus Yosef, in seeking to correct his father, became an antidisestablishmentarian. (By standing firm, Yaakov presumably became an 'antiantidisestablishmentarian').

The fun of using antidisestablishmentarian in a sentence should not conceal the serious point dramatized here. Yaakov's relationship with Esav was shadowed by his reversal of the birthright; Yaakov then inflicted the same kind of fraternal relationship on Yosef by favoring him above his older brothers; and now, over Yosef's objection, he apparently puts Ephraim in the same position with regard to Menasheh.

Our focus this week, however, will not be on the substance of Yaakov's decision, but rather on the dialogue that precedes it. We'll approach it via another entertaining sidelight.

Yosef comes to his father, whom he has heard is dying. After some initial conversation, the narrator informs us that Yisroel saw the sons of Yosef, and asked "Who are these?" Yosef replies "They are my sons, whom G-d has given me in this". The Theodore-Albeck edition of Bereshit Rabbah comments here that Yosef brought out the boys' mother Osnat, who was apparently blinded (*s?u?ma*) in one eye. How did this midrash derive the condition of her eyes, and why on earth does it matter?

Here is my suggestion:

The rule regarding carrying on Shabbat is that, in order to be liable for violation, one must carry a significant amount. Mishnah Shabbat defines a significant amount of eyeshadow/paint as enough to ornament one eye. But why would such an amount be significant – don't women generally paint both eyes? Rav Huna in Talmud Bavli 80a explains that some particularly modest women paint only one eye. Rashi explains that they cover their faces, leaving only one eye exposed so as to see, and paint that eye.²

The Talmud Yerushalmi cites the Rabbis of Caesarea stating that a woman blinds (*soma*) one eye and paints the other. It seems likely that the Yerushalmi is describing the same custom as the Bavli³. On that assumption, it emerges that Yosef's wife Osnat was not blind in one eye; rather, she was exceedingly modest, and revealed only one eye in public. Yosef presumably brought her before his father in order to demonstrate this trait of hers.

Where does this ironic story, of a woman being brought before a man so as to show off her modesty, come from? Textually, it seems to be rooted in the word *bazeh*, via this. It is a commonplace of rabbinic exegesis to interpret a conversational *zeh* as referring to something that can be pointed to, as in the haggadah (*ba'avur zeh*). Thus if Yosef tells his father that God gave him children *bazeh*, the most likely referent is their mother. Other midrashim have Yosef producing his *ketubah*, apparently to show that they were the product of a legitimate relationship.

¹ I apologize for not translating the background sources, owing to time pressure. The essay should be understandable regardless.

² I welcome other information as to where this was or is practiced by women.

³ This is noted by Korban haEdah on the Yerushalmi

Why does Yosef feel compelled to produce proof of modesty or legitimacy? Rashi cites a midrash which understands Yaakov's question "Who are these?" as follows: Yaakov lost his awareness of the Divine Presence when he tried to bless Efraim and Menasheh. He therefore asked "Who are these?", meaning "Why are these unworthy of blessing?", with the implication that something must be wrong with their parentage. Yosef therefore responds either by legitimating the relationship or demonstrating Osnat's worthiness.

Rashi and the midrash are actually more specific, claiming that Yaakov lost his awareness because he foresaw that Efraim would produce the proverbially sinful Yarav'am ben Nevat, founder of the breakaway Kingdom of Israel who reintroduced golden calf-worship to the Jews so as to compete with the Judean Beit HaMikdash, and that Menasheh would produce the sinful dynasty of Yehu. The apparent textual hook for this is the word '*eileh*', taken as a reference to the cry "*Eileh* E-lohekha Yisroel" (These are your G-d's O Israel) that went up for the original Golden Calf in Exodus.

Rashbam, as is his wont, responds with a completely reductive reading. Jacob can't see well enough to recognize Efram and Menasheh, and so he asked. The apparent problem with this reading is that it is not until the next verse (10) that the text informs us that Yaakov could not see; verse 8 tells us that he in fact saw the sons of Yosef, and that he has already mentioned Efraim and Menasheh specifically in this conversation.

Rashbam's response is that Yaakov could make out shapes, but not well enough to recognize faces. This is plausible, but the evidence/parallel Rashbam offers in support of his thesis is nothing less than astounding. Rashbam notes that the Torah says "for a man cannot see me (*yir'ani*) and live", and yet the prophets Mikhah and Amos both refer to themselves as "seeing G-d" (*raiti et Hashem*). Astonishingly, he does not resolve this contradiction by distinguishing between physical and spiritual sight; rather, he argues that the prophets saw G-d unclearly, perhaps a reference to the "dark speculum", (*aspaklarya she'einah meirah*) which is a rabbinic metaphor for the experience of prophets other than Mosheh.

Finally Rashbam reads *bazeh* as referring to Egypt. Malbim apparently follows Rashbam's lead on the first level of interpretation, but adds a level of meaning. Yosef's sons were wearing Egyptian, rather than distinctive Jewish clothing, which made Yaakov suspicious of their worthiness for blessing. Yosef therefore responded that G-d had given him these children *bazeh*, and such clothes were politically necessary in Egypt. I think it is best to see Malbim as bridging Rashi and Rashbam. He sees no reason to make the text depend on a prophetic insight that it does not mention, but he does feel that the conversation has the implicit subtext that Yaakov needs to be reassured that Joseph's children are worthy.

Rashi's reading is actually somewhat paradoxical, or at least ironic: Yaakov loses his sense of the Shekhinah when Efraim and Menasheh approach because he has a powerful prophetic experience! I think this is one reason that Netziv offers an almost entirely opposite reading.

Netziv notices, to my mind compellingly, that questions of the form "Who are you?", or "Who are these?" occur elsewhere in Bereishit: Esav asks about the camp he has met (33:8), and Yitzchak asks Yaakov twice before blessing him (27:18 and 27:32). The thematic connections between these scenes are obvious, as mentioned in the second paragraph above, but I think Netziv makes the straightforward literary claim that these are rhetorical questions rather than inquiries about facts. They initiate formal, ritual conversations about critical relationships. In particular, they are the prelude to blessing.

On this basis, and on the basis of the shift between the names Yaakov and Yisroel, Netziv contends that Yaakov asks this question not because the Divine presence has suddenly left him, but rather in preparation for calling Divine blessing down on Efraim and Menasheh.

I suggest a compromise reading: These introductory rituals are indeed preparation, but it is not inevitable that they will succeed; the road to blessing requires that the right responses be given. Yaakov knows full well that when Yitzchak asked "Who are you, my son?", a truthful answer would not have led to blessing.

In this light, by asking Yosef "Who are these?", Yaakov shows apparent willingness to trust Yosef, remarkable in light of his own experience. Note that Yaakov has just finished stating (48:5) that only Efraim and Menasheh will receive independent portions of his legacy; Yosef might well have been tempted to sneak some other son in to receive a compensatory blessing. But

Yaakov's trust is limited – by crossing his hands, he shows Yosef that he could not actually have been fooled. This may be a useful parallel to the scene at the end of Chapter 47 in which he demands that Yosef swear to bury him in Canaan, after Yosef has already agreed.

Shabbat shalom!

Aryeh Klapper

בראשית פרק מז

ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה –
ויאמר ליוסף:

"הנה אביך חלה!"

ויקח את שני בניו עמו - את מנשה ואת אפרים.

...

ויאמר יעקב אל יוסף:

"... ועתה:

שני בניך הנולדים לך בארץ מצרים עד באי אליך מצרימה - לי הם;

אפרים ומנשה - כראובן ושמעון יהיו לי.

ומולדתך אשר הולדת אחריהם - לך יהיו;

על שם אחיהם יקראו בנחלתם. . . ."

וירא ישראל את בני יוסף.

ויאמר:

"מי אלה?"

ויאמר יוסף אל אביו:

"בני הם, אשר נתן לי א-להים בזה."

ויאמר:

"קחם נא אלי ואברכם."

ועיני ישראל כבדו מזקן - לא יוכל לראות;

ויגש אתם אליו, וישק להם ויחבק להם.

ויאמר ישראל אל יוסף:

"ראה פניך לא פללתי, והנה הראה אתי א-להים גם את זרעך!"

ויוצא יוסף אתם מעם ברכיו, וישתחו לאפיו ארצה.

ויקח יוסף את שניהם - את אפרים בימינו משמאל ישראל, ואת מנשה בשמאלו מימין ישראל - ויגש אליו.

וישלח ישראל את ימינו, וישת על ראש אפרים - והוא הצעיר;

ואת שמאלו על ראש מנשה - שכל את ידיו, כי מנשה הבכור.

ויברך את יוסף ויאמר:

"..."

וירא יוסף כי ישית אביו יד ימינו על ראש אפרים וירע בעיניו;

ויתמך יד אביו להסיר אתה מעל ראש אפרים על ראש מנשה:

ויאמר יוסף אל אביו:

"לא כן אבי! כי זה הבכר - שים ימינך על ראשו."

וימאן אביו ויאמר:

"ידעתי בני, ידעתי - גם הוא יהיה לעם, וגם הוא יגדל;

ואולם אחיו הקטן יגדל ממנו, וזרעו יהיה מלא הגוים."

ויברכם ביום ההוא לאמור:

"בך יברך ישראל לאמר: 'ישמך א-להים כאפרים וכמנשה!'"

וישם את אפרים לפני מנשה.

Genesis 48:8-10

Yisroel saw the children of Yosef.

He said to him: Who are those (*mi eileh*)?

Yosef said to his father: "They are my sons, whom G-d has given me in this (*bazeh*).

He said: "Bring them please to me, and I will bless them".

But the eyes of Yisroel had been made heavy by age, so he could not see . . .

משנה מסכת שבת פרק ח:א-ג

המוציא יין כדי מזיגת הכוס . . . כחול כדי לכחול עין אחת:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פ עמוד א

עין אחת הא לא כחלי!?

אמר רב הונא: שכן צנועות כוחלות עין אחת.

מיתבי: רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר: כחול - אם לרפואה כדי לכחול עין אחת; אם לקשט בשתי עינים!?

תרגמא הילל בריה דרבי שמואל בר נחמני: כי תניא ההוא בעירניות.

רש"י לתלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פ עמוד א

"צנועות" - שהולכות מעוטפות ואין מגלות אלא עין אחד לראות, וכוחלות אותו בעירניות - בנות כפרים אין צריכות צניעות כל כך, שאין שחוק וקלות ראש מצוי שם ועמה מועטין, ואין מכסין פניהם, וכוחלות שני עיניהם.

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת שבת פרק ח דף יא טור ב/ה"ג

"לבבתיני באחת מעיניך" -

רבנן דקיסרין בשם רבי בון בר חייה: שכן אשה סומה באחת מעיניה וכוחלת חברתה ויוצא לשוק.

קרבן העדה

מביא פסוק זה לראיה שדרך הצנועות לצאת באחת מעיניה מכוסה ואחת מגולה

בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק) כ"ו פרשה צד:ח-ט

"וירא ישראל את בני יוסף [ויאמר מי אלה]" -

אמ' ר' אימי: מי הוא זה שהוא עתיד להסב את ישראל לעבודה זרה ולהפיל מהם חמשים רבוא ביום אחד.

ר' חנינה בריה דר' אדא אמ': מניין מ"י.

"ויאמר יוסף אל אביו בני הם וגו'" -

הוציא לו את אסנת סומה מאחת מעיניה.

רש"י בראשית פרק מח פסוק ח-ט

"וירא ישראל את בני יוסף" -

בקש לברכם, ונסתלקה שכינה ממנו,

לפי שעתיד ירבעם ואחאב לצאת מאפרים, ויהוא ובניו ממנשה:

"ויאמר מי אלה" -

מהיכן יצאו אלו שאינן ראויין לברכה?

"בזה" -

[הראה לן] שטר אירוסין ושטר כתובה, ובקש יוסף רחמים על הדבר ונחה עליו רוח הקדש:

רשב"ם בראשית פרק מח:ח-ט

"וירא ישראל" -

אעפ"י שכת' לפנינו (ו) "לא יוכל לראות", יש רואה דמות אדם ואינו מכיר דמות פניו,

וכן "לא יראני האדם" וכת' "ראיתי את ה'":

"בזה" -

במלכות הזאת:

מלבי"ם

"וירא ישראל" -

מלבושי העברים היו משונים ממלבושי המצרים, ויוסף שהיה קרוב למלכות, וכן בניו, היו לובשים כמלבושי שרי מצרים,

וכמ"ש של בית רבן גמליאל היו משנים מהלכתן משום כבוד מלכות,

וע"כ תמה יעקב ואמר "מי אלה",

"ויאמר יוסף בני הם",

והם צדיקים ויראי ה',

ומה שאתה רואה אותם משונים במלבושיהם מפני "אשר נתן לי א-להים בזה", שנולדו בזה המקום והמקום והמצב מחייב זאת.

נצי"ב מח:ח

"ויאמר מי אלה" –

בלא ספק הכירם, ידע שהמה בני יוסף,
שהרי עדיין לא הזכיר הכתוב "ועיני ישראל כבודו מזקן",
וגם נהי שלא הכיר בטוב מי מהם מנשה ומי אפרים, מכ"מ הי' אפשר להכיר קומתם ותוארם הכללי,
ותו, אם הית' השאלה פשוטה שלא ידע שהמה בני יוסף, ובא יוסף להודיע, א"כ לא הי' נצרך להאריך כ"כ, אלא לומר
בני המה!?

ומזה בא הדרש שנסתלק ממנו רוה"ק כפרש"י.
אכן לפי הפשט,

כאן החל יעקב להמשיך עליו רוה"ק ולברכה, שהרי עד כה דבר בבחינת יעקב . . .