

12-13-25 Message to Roeh Israel – *VaYeshev* (and he [Yacov] settled)
Torah Portion; 37:1 - 40:23
Haftarah: Amos 2:6 – 3:8
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Luke 2:41–47

When G-d Directs by a Mysterious Man

Central question of this message: Are you willing to be directed or encouraged by G-d when he uses a mysterious man?

We are in parasha *VaYeshev*. This means “and he settled”, referring to Yacov settling in the lands of his father’s sojourning. Its name comes from the first two words in the English, and the

Genesis 37:1-3

37 Jacob lived in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 37 Jacob lived in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan. 2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.

37:1 | וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ
 And dwelt Jacob in the land, was a stranger, wherein his father in the land of
 3427 3290 776 4033 9999 1 776

כְּנָעַן:
 Canaan.
 3667

2 אֵלֶּה הַדָּוָר הַלְלוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שִׁבְעֵי עָשָׂר
 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being old, seventeen
 428 9999 8435 3290 3130 9999 1121 7651 6240

שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־אֶחָיו בַּצֹּאן וְהָיָה נֶעֱר אֶת־
 years was feeding with his brethren; the flock and the lad with
 8141 1961 7462 854 251 6629 1931 5288 9999 854

בָּנָי בִּלְהָה וְאֶת־בָּנָי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא
 the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of his father's wives: and brought
 1121 1090 854 1121 2153 802 1 935

יוֹסֵף אֶת־דְּבָרָם רָעָה אֶל־אָבִיהֶם:
 Joseph their report. evil unto his father
 3130 853 1681 7451 413 1

3 וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶתְּבֹא אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־
 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because
 3478 157 853 3130 3605 1121 3588 9999

בֶּן־זָקְנִים הָיָה לוֹ וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים:
 the son of he old age: his and he made him a coat of many colours.
 1121 2208 1931 3807a 6213 3807a 3801 9999 6446

Before I delve into the main lesson for today, I want to dig just a bit deeper into the relationship that Yoseph had with his father Yacov.

I wish to focus on the part of the passage commonly translated into English as, “And Israel loved Yoseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age.”

Our scholars noticed some interesting things about this passage. First of all, Yoseph was not the last born. Benjamin was born when Yacov was older yet, and well after Yoseph had gone into Egypt. And just as importantly, all Yacov’s children were born of “his old age”, and Issachar and Zebulun were not more than a year or two older than Joseph.

Then there is the curious wording of the Hebrew in the passage. It says, *Ki-ben-z’kenim hu lo*. Which can be translated in a more accurate way as, “That son older age he was unto him.” They noticed it did not say, “*Ki-ben-z’kenim haya*.” Which would be “That son older age he was.” The actual Hebrew wording of the passage seems to suggest “as if” rather than “was.” That small distinction is important.

The scholars noted that the term “*ben-z’kenim*” could just as properly be applied to Yoseph rather than to Yacov. In Jewish understanding, a *ben-z’kenim* is a son who, although young in years, demonstrates a wisdom far beyond his age. In fact, the sages have postulated that Yacov taught Yoseph all that he had learned of G-d from Shem and Eber.

As an aside, it is clear from the gospels that Yeshua was indeed also a *ben-z'kenim*.

Luke 2:41–47.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, 44 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, 45 and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Regarding Yoseph, all these factors taken together led at least one of our scholars to conclude that Yoseph was chosen by Yacov to be his personal attendant, as he grew older. It was the custom of that time that an aging father would select one of the younger sons to fill this role.

This young son would not leave the side of the father. He would help his father move about, and do whatever he needed to do, and this young boy would not go out with the other brothers to tend flocks, and do other family chores.

So, Yoseph already had a somewhat “special” status in the family, evidenced by a somewhat special garment, even before the famous dreams began.

And, predictably, after the series of dreams predicting Yoseph’s rise to power over his siblings, and even his parents, a deep resentment among his brothers boiled to the surface.

It all came to a head when Yacov sent Yoseph to check-on his brothers as they were pasturing flocks.

Genesis 37:12–17

12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “Here I am.” 14 So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with

the flock, and bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 15 And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” 16 “I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” 17 And the man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’ ” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

The story of Yoseph is one of the most, if not the most, detailed narratives in all of Torah. It unfolds through four successive parashiot.

It is my experience that when G-d spends a lot of time discussing one particular thing, we would be well-served to pay particular attention that that thing. Today, that thing is a *person* – Yoseph. When G-d goes into great detail, then we should follow Him into those details – for they are important.

What none of the people playing-out the scenes of Yoseph’s life in this passage can see at this point is what G-d can see. He sees the future, and He has a plan to save the world.

G-d's plan follows the path that we can see played-out in this, and subsequent parashiot, as well as latter writings.

- Yoseph is destined to rule over the greatest empire of the Earth.
- Not only will his family one day bow to him, but all the nations will as well.
- Yoseph will be the source of life for all the people of the Earth, but first...
- He will be betrayed by his brothers, who will perpetrate lies about him.
- He will be declared dead by his family.
- He will be locked-away in a hole in the ground for a time
- He will emerge from that hole in a miraculous manner
- He will be immediately elevated to the second-most powerful position in the most powerful kingdom on Earth.
- He will lay-up treasures for his kingdom for a time.
- As the Earth descends into famine, he will be the one to whom all come for life.
- His brothers will one day also come to him, but will at first not recognize him, for they last saw him as the condemned man.
- His power and authority will cause his brothers to bow and tremble before him.

- He will, at the right time, reveal his true identity to his brothers, who will weep and gnash their teeth at what they have done to him from the beginning until now.
- His brothers will be required now to confess their sins to the father.
- The family will declare that although he was dead, he has now been brought back to life.
- He will gather his family together and bring them to the most fertile and desirable land in the world, because he loves them.
- He won't merely save his family from destruction, but he will save the world as well – only those who come to him for the “bread of life.”
- Yoseph invents the pictographic form of writing for the Hebrew language, which will one day be used to write-down all the words that the L-rd speaks to Moses. But then the story takes a different path...
- Because all the Hebrews are in Egypt, they come under the domination of a Pharaoh who does not know of Yoseph.
- The Hebrews are enslaved 400 years in Egypt.
- The Hebrews cry out to G-d for a deliverer.
- G-d raises up a deliverer in the person of Moses.
- Through great signs and wonders, G-d removes the Hebrew people – together with a great mixed multitude – from Egypt.

- G-d divides the sea, drowns the oppressors, and assembles the people at Mt. Horeb.
- G-d gives the assembled people the Torah.
- The Torah will now be transcribed for untold generations, to be the guiding light for our people, and to set the stage for the message proclaimed by the prophets, and the writings.
- In the fullness of time, Messiah comes to show us what it looks like to live-out Torah, and He then becomes our atonement sacrifice, which takes us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

But for any of this wonderful story to unfold, one thing must happen. Yoseph must find his brothers where they are pasturing flocks.

If Yoseph didn't find his brothers, and simply returned to Yacov with the shrug of the shoulders and a report of, "I searched diligently, but couldn't find them." what would have been the outcome? Nothing like the story G-d had planned for him... and for us.

So, let's really focus on this one piece first.

Genesis 37:15-16

15 And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” 16 “I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.”

The identity of this “man” has caused some speculation by our people over the centuries.

Rabbi Salomon ben Isaac (1040-1105) was a French Rabbi who wrote commentaries on Talmud and the Tanach. He is honored as a leading scholar of the Middle Ages. He is best known today by the acronym of his title and name – Rashi. Rashi says this unidentified being was the angel Gabriel.

Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (c. 1089-1092 to 1164-1167), often known as Ibn Ezra, one of the most distinguished Jewish biblical commentators of the Middle Ages, says this unknown man was a nothing more than a passer-by.

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (1194-1270), also known as Nachmanides, as well as Ramban, a leading medieval Jewish scholar has identified this “man” differently. He said, "the Holy One, blessed be He, sent him a

guide without his knowledge." I think Ramban is closer to the mark on this.

Although we will need to wait for the fuller revelation in the world to come to know the true answer, I believe that this "man" was no ordinary man. In the past, we have mis-identified both angels and even pre-incarnate Yeshua as merely a "man."

When Abraham encountered Yeshua and two angels at the Oaks of Mamre, he described them as three "men." See Gen 18.

When Joshua encountered Yeshua at Jericho, he mistook Him for a man. See Joshua 5:13-15.

In both instances, this "man" spoke with the very words of G-d, and with His authority. Furthermore, this being accepted worship. So, it had to be Yeshua.

Was the being that directed Yoseph to find his brothers an angel – most likely it was *at least* an angel. Was it Yeshua? Possibly. But I think we can be safe in concluding it was not a mere passer-by.

In the final analysis, it really doesn't matter what type of heavenly being this was. What is important is that this appointment with Yoseph was necessary to the plan of G-d.

We do know that angels walk among us in human form, and can be brought into our homes as guests. See Hebrews 13:1.

Another thing that has caught the attention of our people for generations is the “coat of many colors” statement.

The Hebrew word translated as “colors” is *passim*. This is the plural of the Hebrew word *pas*.

[OT:6446](#)  **pas** (pas); from [OT:6461](#); properly, the palm (of the hand) or sole (of the foot) [compare [OT:6447](#)]; by implication (plural) a long and sleeved tunic (perhaps simply a wide one; from the original sense of the root, i.e. of many breadths):

[OT:6447](#)  **pas** (Aramaic) (pas); from a root corresponding to [OT:6461](#); the palm (of the hand, as being spread out):

The Hebrew interpretation is uncertain today, but it could mean a long-sleeved coat which came all the way to the palm of the hands. This would

make it distinctive from a shorter-sleeved coat which reputedly was typically worn by shepherds of that time.

Or it could mean the coat had colorful (or distinctive) stripes on it as broad as one's hand. Or it could mean that it was a coat of very fine fabric, far fancier than the typical coat's construction of that time.

Rabbi Salomon ben Isaac – Rashi – wrote in his commentary on this passage, Genesis Rabbah 84:8:

פסים is a term for raiment of fine wool (Shabbat 10b). Similar is (Ester 1:6) כרפס “Fine linen and blue”. The same garment כתנת הפסים is mentioned (2 Samuel 13:18) in the story of Amnon and Tamar and we may therefore gather that it was made of very fine material. There is a Midrashic statement that in the word פסים we may find an allusion to all his misfortunes: he was sold to Potiphar (פּוֹטִיפָר), to the merchants (סוֹחָרִים), to the Ishmaelites (יִשְׁמַעְאֵלִים), and to the Midianites (מִדְיָנִים)

Another commentator, Rabbi David Kimhi (1160-1235) is known by the acronym Radak, was a noted Hebrew linguist, who wrote extensively about the Hebrew language, its etymology and structure. His writings

have been used as textbooks since. He wrote in his commentary on this passage:

ועשה לו כתונת פסים, the word פס is related to the same word in Daniel 5,5 פס ידא, palm of a hand. The cloth was made of differently coloured surfaces similar to garments made of soft wool which are made in a number of differently coloured stripes or sections. The garment looked very impressive, arousing the hatred of the brothers in addition to the fact that they hated him for spreading tales about them to their father. Our sages in Shabbat 10 seize upon this detail to teach us that a father must ever be careful not to arouse inter-fraternal jealousies, seeing that the fortunes of the Jewish people have been so negatively affected on account of five silver coins worth of angora wool which Yaakov spent more on Joseph's attire than he did on the garments worn by his other sons. The enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt was brought about as a direct consequence of this jealousy.

I show you all this to make the point that the coat made for Joseph was distinctive, and certainly of a far higher quality and appearance than the coats belonging to his brothers. What precisely *was* the difference? I don't know. But the difference may – or may not – have had anything to

do with colors at all. The English translators made a translational choice, and it is not illegitimate. But that doesn't make it also correct.

Paul describes what has been happening, and what is going to happen to Yoseph in his letter to the Roman congregation.

Romans 8:28.

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

I urge you to become so connected with G-d by your love for Him, and by your steadfast adherence to His ways, that He will call you to a special purpose to advance His kingdom in this world.

Then I believe if you need someone to help you find the way to the place that you need to be in order to advance His plan, then that same "man" will show up and give you some direction.

But just as it was with Yoseph, it might be with you today. If you are to accomplish a significant task in advancing G-d's kingdom, you might be required to go into a hole in the ground (or two), be sold into slavery, be

wrongfully accused, be betrayed by everyone you trust (to include your family), and the like.

You see, the soldiers for G-d on the front lines of His battles still get wounded, and some even die. But the part you play is vital to the outcome of the war against evil.

Regardless of the role you are selected to fill, you will not be in G-d's will unless you are actually in the battle. We are not called upon to sit on the sidelines and watch. We are not called to be in the rear of the battle zone. We are called to war. Put on the full armor of G-d, and stand with me on the battlefield.

I am going to take a few liberties with a famous speech given by Theodore Roosevelt, to make it relevant to the lesson of Yoseph.

The L-rd does not smile at the critic, nor at the scoffer who is quick to announce that a warrior stumbles, or how he might have done things better. The approval of the L-rd comes to the one who is actually in the battle, whose face is covered with sweat and dust and blood. This one fights with boldness, and although he falls short again and again, he is driven forward with great enthusiasm and devotion. This one gives

everything he can to advance the cause of the Kingdom of G-d. When he has a victory, he sees the triumph of high achievement. When he falls, he falls while giving everything he could give. Even his failures are precious to the L-rd, for he failed while striving greatly, and he never stayed down. He rose up to fight the next day, and the next. The L-rd has reserved near His throne a place for these warriors. It is a place of great honor, not like that place reserved for those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

And what about mysterious people who simply just show up in our lives unexpectedly in order to give us strength and direction?

Story of Rb. Nachum Chernoble...who spent his whole life raising money for poor brides.