YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Vayeshev**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

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Dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky *z"l*,  
whose *yahrzeit* falls on the 19th of Kislev.  
May the world-wide dissemination of Torah through the VBM  
be a fitting tribute to a man whose lifetime achievements  
exemplified the love of Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

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In loving memory of my parents   
Shmuel Binyamin (Samuel) and Esther Rivka (Elizabeth) Lowinger *z"l*  
- Benzion Lowinger

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**The Meaning of the Two Pits in the *Parasha***

Summarized by Itai Weiss

Translated by David Strauss

At the end of the *parasha*, Yosef makes a seemingly reasonable request of the chief butler – that he mention him to Pharaoh. The chief butler, however, fails to fulfill this request:

The chief butler did not remember Yosef, but forgot him. (*Bereishit* 40:23)

The inability to remember is a very human trait. It happens often that we try to remember something but don't succeed. However, the Torah here includes another layer, that of forgetting – the unwillingness to drill something into one’s consciousness and remember it.

**Two *borot***

If we pay attention to Yosef's request, we will notice a familiar word there:

But have me in your remembrance when it shall be well with you, and show kindness, I pray you, to me, and make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the *bor*. (*Bereishit* 40:14-15)

The word *bor* is, of course, ambiguous: it alludes to the *bor*, i.e., the pit, into which Yosef was thrown at the beginning of the *parasha* (37:24), and it also bears the sense of a prison or dungeon, as we see at the beginning of the next *parasha*:

Then Pharaoh sent and called Yosef, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon [*ha-bor*]. And he shaved himself, and changed his clothing, and came in to Pharaoh. (*Bereishit* 41:14)

It seems that the purpose of using the word "*bor*" to describe the dungeon is to contrast the two instances of *bor.* Let us try to understand this contrast.

**The Pit of Personal Gain**

The second *bor* in the *parasha*, the dungeon, is a *bor* of personal interests. We won't dwell on the matter here, but I would argue that Potiphar was not convinced by his wife's claims. He knew Yosef was not to blame for what happened, but nevertheless, he decided that Yosef was an obstacle to the integrity of his family and therefore had him removed. None of this prevents Potiphar from continuing to sleep peacefully at night; it seems that what is happening to Yosef does not bother him at all. He did what he felt he had to do in the interests of his family.

Yosef's removal from the dungeon was also not done out of any pursuit of justice, but out of the political considerations of the chief butler. He is interested in solving Pharaoh's dream and it reminds him of his own dream in prison; it is only for this reason that he recalls Yosef as requested.

The second *bor* in the *parasha*,therefore, represents self-service at both ends: when Yosef is thrown in, and when he is removed. Not so the first *bor*.

**The Pit of Personal Change**

The Torah states that Israel loved Yosef more than all his other children. The reason for this is twofold: certainly the fact that Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's beloved wife, must have been a factor, but *Chazal* point to something else:

"And Israel loved Yosef [because he was his *ben zekunim*]" (*Bereishit* 37:3). Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nechemia [disagreed]. Rabbi Yehuda said: Because his features [*ziv ikunin*]were similar to his own. Rabbi Nechemia said: Because all the laws that Shem and Ever passed on to Yaakov, he passed on to him [*zaken*, elder,in the sense of wisdom]. (*Bereishit Rabba* 84)

Yaakov recognizes potential in Yosef to continue the legacy of Avraham. He recognizes in him something of himself, and therefore passes on to him everything he learned in the school of Shem and Ever. Yosef, for his part, is aware of his father’s hopes for him. He leads the sons of the maidservants, and he dreams about his destiny. Yaakov rebukes him for those dreams, but on the other hand, he “keeps the matter in mind” (37:11), because he knows these dreams are significant.

By bringing evil reports about his brothers to his father, Yosef reveals – in an immature and boyish way – his latent potential and his destiny, and for this reason, his brothers come to hate him and ultimately throw him into a pit.

This pit will bring the various characters to retrospective contemplation in the upcoming *parashot*. While it seems at first that the brothers are indifferent to Yosef's distress in the pit, and they eat and drink as if it does not concern them, we later discover that the experience permeated deep within them:

And they said one to another: We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. (*Bereishit* 42:21)

Yosef as well, who curls his hair and wears a striped robe, will one day stand before Pharaoh in a more mature manner, after shaving and changing his clothes, and Pharaoh will testify that he is no longer the same boy but a man:

And Pharaoh said to his servants: Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the spirit of God is? (*Bereishit* 41:39)

The first pit allows the house of Yaakov to coalesce. It sets into a motion a series of events that eventually will allow Yosef to understand that his role is not to move forward by himself, but to proceed together with his brothers, as a family. It brings the brothers to a sense of regret. It will eventually cause Yaakov's spirit to revive.

Each and every one of us is faced with challenges and struggles, in all circles of life. Often, we express our vision for the future in a youthful and immature way. Our task in the yeshiva is to shape an identity, through study and through deep contemplation of all areas of life. Our role is to become "men in whom the spirit of God is" and thereby realize our destiny in the world.

[This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Vayeshev* 5778.]