



PARSHAT VAYESHEV

This Shabbat, we will read Parshat Vayeshev, which describes the hatred of Yosef's brothers towards him, the plot to sell him, and how Yosef ended up in Egypt.

A commonly asked question arises: The sons of Ya'akov were to be the chief "builders" of the nation of Israel. They were all Tzaddikim (righteous people). How did it come to pass that they could have done such an evil thing to their brother Yosef?

One answer given in the midrash is that they were motivated to do what they did because they thought they were doing amitzva. They knew that they would all be necessary in the formation of the nation, and they feared that Ya'akov was going to choose Yosef alone, leaving no role for the rest of them. After all, hadn't Avraham chosen Yitzchak over Yishmael? Hadn't Yitzchak chosen (in the end) Ya'akov over Esav? Perhaps the same was now happening with Yosef over the other brothers. They had to stop it from happening and sold Yosef away.

Unfortunately, even Tzaddikim have character flaws. The midrash continues by saying that even though they may have RATIONALIZED their actions as a mitzva, as explained above, their "true" motivation was simply that of envy. That envy was at least caused in part by a certain degree of haughtiness on the part of Yosef, and as we read through the next few Parshiot, we see that they all suffer some punishments for these errors.

We may all be able to solidly justify many of the things we do. But what are our TRUE motivations? If we stopped to think about it, we may realize that sometimes, we are only fooling ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Cohen