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 Yaakov Medan**

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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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**The Meaning of Yosef’s Dreams: Honor and Responsibility**

Summarized by Binyamin Frankel

Translated by David Strauss

**Dreams – Between Fiction and Prophecy**

Halakha's attitude toward dreams is rather complex. We find positive references that attribute significance to dreams, the most famous of which is perhaps: "A dream is one sixtieth of prophecy" (*Berakhot* 57b). But there are also statements that deny there is special meaning in dreams, such as: "It is impossible to have a dream without elements of nonsense" (ibid. 55a).

What then is the proper attitude to a dream?

First, it would seem that it was precisely about this question that Yosef and his brothers disagreed. Yosef was of the opinion that dreams have meaning, and therefore he hastened to tell his brothers about his dreams – because he believed they described the future reality. In contrast, the brothers thought Yosef was overdoing it with his dreams and that ultimately they would not come true; they disregarded the dreams and saw them as nothing more than indications of Yosef's megalomania.[[1]](#footnote-1) Their father Yaakov was conflicted – on the one hand, he rebuked Yosef, but at the same time, "he kept the matter in mind."

Yosef interpreted his dreams as foretelling that he would rule over his brothers, that he would be considered the firstborn and the one who would continue the line of Yaakov. He understood that his brothers would bow down to him and honor him as in the dream: "And behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me."[[2]](#footnote-2)

In the end, Yosef's brothers did in fact come to him in Egypt and bow down to him, but his rule was not only about the honor they showed him; it found expression mainly in the responsibility that he assumed to take care of them.

The tension that appears in Yosef's dreams – between understanding in light of a person’s feelings and the dream’s intended meaning, and in our case, between responsibility and honor – also appears in other places.

**"With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility"**

Moshe serves as a paradigm of a leader who cares not a whit about his own honor and only seeks the good of the Jewish people. Despite all the headaches and troubles he faces, he does not fall and worry about his own honor – except in the case of Korach, where some have argued that Moshe was indeed concerned with his own honor.

Avshalom comes on the scene with an aspiration to right wrongs, but he ultimately follows Achitofel’s advice and pursues honor and seeks to sleep with his father's wives. Even Shlomo, another son of David, falls when he is faced with the temptation of honor, despite the education he received from David regarding the matter.

David himself is no longer respected after the Batsheva affair, as is evident from the parable of the woman from Tekoa, and this lack of respect seriously undermines the integrity of his rule.

Honor and respect are important for leadership, so that the king will be able to exert influence, but they must be handled with care. Honor is not the goal; it is merely a tool that can help guide the people to a safe harbor.

**Respect for Parents and Rabbis**

The Torah commands us – and elaborates upon and spells out in detail – the importance of honoring one's parents:

1) "Honor your father and your mother."

2) "You shall fear your mother and your father."

3) "One who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

4) "One who smites his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

And other references.

Most parents understand this correctly – respect is a tool that can help them educate their children and bring them to a safe harbor. They strive to educate their children to the best of their ability, emotionally, intellectually, and financially. They really do not seek honor for themselves; they are wholly concerned with their children's welfare.

I wish the same could be said about all rabbis. The honor of the Torah that is due them is not an end in itself, but rather a means to give them the strength to lead their communities and the Jewish people as a whole, without disturbances, to a safe harbor. The honor due to rabbis is important, but unfortunately, today, this power is sometimes misused for less worthy purposes, certainly not what the Torah intended.

It is also appropriate to speak of politicians and other public figures. We do not expect them to be like parents or like Moshe Rabbeinu, but it is of utmost importance that they not be blinded by honor, that they remember that the good of the people must be their guide, and that they not pursue or exploit the honor they receive.

[This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Yaakov Medan on Shabbat *Parashat Vayeshev* 5775.]

(Translation edited by Sarah Rudolph)

1. As another statement of *Chazal* tells us: Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: A man is shown in a dream only what is in his own heart. (*Berakhot* 55b) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rabbi Chanan Porat taught that the dream was fulfilled when the sun and the moon stood still at the time of Yehoshua's battle in the Ayalon Valley – Yehoshua being a descendant of Ephraim, son of Yosef. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)