



Use A Jewish Twitter Handle

What lesson can we learn from Joseph and Benjamin? And why do all Chabad rabbis name their children with the same three-four names?

My Children's Names

I once had a family over for Friday night dinner. As we sat down to eat, we introduced them to our children, "This is Mushkie, this is Mendy, etc." Later that evening they asked me who my children were named for. "Well," I said, "Mushkie is named for the Rebbe's wife, Mendy is named after the Rebbe. Levi is named for the Rebbe's father and Chanie, the Rebbe's mother." The man gave me this quizzical look and asks, "You named your children after the Rebbe and his family, and your wife was OK with it? Didn't she want to name them after someone in her family? One or two children I can understand but so many of them?"

But then my wife said that she too wanted her children to have the names of the Rebbe's family.

Recreating the Problem

Over the past few weeks we have been reading the story of Joseph's sale. The Torah dedicates almost a third of the book of Bereishit to this story.

This week we finally read the happy ending to the story when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers with those immortal words, "I am Joseph!" He then falls onto the shoulder of his brother Benjamin and they break down in tears. Joseph requests that they return home

immediately and bring their father back to Egypt.

The narrative continues with Joseph giving each of the brothers a change of clothing – and to Benjamin he gave 300 silver pieces and five pairs of royal clothing.

Now here comes the obvious question:

How could Joseph treat Benjamin better than the others? Why is he giving Benjamin preferential treatment when he, knows, better than anyone in the whole world, the consequences of playing favorites – especially in that family! Yet here he is giving Benjamin more than the others. He's creating a situation where the brothers should have cause to feel jealousy of Benjamin. Could it be that this great Tzaddik should stumble on the very same mistake that caused him such pain and suffering?

The Talmud answers that Joseph foresaw that Benjamin would have a descendant who would wear five garments. That is a reference to Mordechai who, at the end of the Purim story, emerged from the king's palace wearing five royal garments.

But that answer is what we call “remez” or allegorical; there must be a more practical explanation for this.

(Others have explained that Joseph was trying to make up for the trouble he caused Benjamin by putting the “magic goblet” in his sack. When the brothers found out about it, they began to beat him on the back and to insult him deeply. They said, “You are a thief the son of thief, and you have shamed us! You are your mother's son — for so did she shame our father when she stole Laban's idols.”

This answer too, is insufficient, for Joseph had been favoring Benjamin from much before the story of the missing goblet — when Joseph made a meal for the brothers. Benjamin's portion was five times the

size of any other's, when Joseph and his wife Asenath (Osnas) and their two sons added their own portions to Benjamin's. So it obviously wasn't only payback; it was real favorites.)

So we're back to the question of how could Joseph do something that would ignite the brother's jealousy of Benjamin?

True Brotherly Love

Perhaps we can learn the answer from the following Rashi:

The verse says that Joseph had to run out of the room where the brothers were eating for his mercy was aroused and he began to cry. Rashi explains that his mercy was aroused because he asked Benjamin, "Have you a brother from your mother?"

He replied, "I had a brother, but I do not know where he is."

"Have you any sons?"

He replied, "I have ten."

Joseph asked, "And what are their names?"

He replied, "Bela and Becher, etc."

Joseph asked, "What is the significance of these names?"

Benjamin replied, "All of them are connected to my brother and the troubles that befell him. Bela- because he was swallowed up (נִבְלַע) among the nations; Becher — because he was the firstborn of my mother; Ashbel — because G-d put him into captivity (שָׁבַא אֶל-ל); Gera — because he was a stranger (נִתְגִּיר) in a lodging place; Na'aman because he was very pleasant to look upon (נָעִים); Eichi and Rosh — because he was my brother and he was my superior (רֵאשִׁי); Muppim — because he learned from the mouth of (מִפִּי) my father; Chuppim —

because he did not see my wedding (חופה), neither did I see his; And because he descended (ירד) among the nations.”

The Rebbe explains that when Joseph was sold as a slave, Benjamin was only nine years old. Yet, throughout all of those years, he never stopped thinking about Joseph and his troubles. So much so that he expressed this yearning in something as important as the names of his children! He didn't name a single child after one of his grandparents or in honor of something that happened in his own life. All ten children were named for his brother who had been taken from him when he was nine years old. Of course with his wife's consent.

When Joseph heard this, his mercy was stirred and he just had to cry.

This is in fact written clearly in the Midrash: Josef gave Benjamin 300 silver pieces; thirty pieces for each son, for they were named for him.

So when the time for gift giving came and Benjamin received more, the brothers understood that Benjamin who lived and breathed “Joseph” and even named his sons for him — they understood that Benjamin would get more. There was no risk of jealousy.

Jewish Reminders

What is the lesson for us?

If you truly love someone or something, you'd like everything to remind you of that. This is why Jews give donations in the amount of Chai (\$18) — for Chai means life.

Therefore, try to arrange everything that you do in a way that it will remind you of your Jewishness. Whether it's the password on your computer or the code to your front door use a Jewish number, like 13 — the bar mitzvah age, or 26, the numerical value of G-d's name. If you have to choose a username for your email or your social media, pick a Jewish name. I had a friend whose IM was “Zohar.” Even your

telephone number, your company name and your license plate can all remind you of Jews and Judaism.

You can come up with your own names but the idea remains the same. Benjamin loved Joseph so he named all of his sons for him, so we all need to make sure that every activity we do should somehow remind us of who we are and to which nation we belong.