

A LEADER COMMANDS RESPECT

Was Yosef a nudnik? Was Yaakov a good educator?

Playing Favorites

Anyone who was ever a camp counselor or in any position of authority knows that playing favorites is a real No-No!

Yet, in this week's Parsha, we find Jacob doing exactly that - he favors Josef over the other children.

From the day he was born, Josef was accorded special attention from his father. Jacob spent hours alone with Josef (taking special care to teach everything he learned from his masters Shem and Ever). To make matters worse, Jacob made a special colorful coat especially for Josef. When the brothers saw Josef in his special coat they envied him so much, they couldn't get themselves to say something nice to him.

What makes this story even harder to understand is the fact that Jacob himself suffered from just the same mistake. Isaac openly demonstrated more love for Esau than for him. Yet Jacob still goes ahead and does the very same thing to his children.

The Talmud in Shabbat states, "One should never treat one son differently than the others. Jacob did and because of that his descendants were brought to slavery in Egypt."

What did Jacob think he was doing?

Also, Josef himself didn't help the situation at all. He had a dream that his brothers' wheat sheaves bowed down to his sheaf. When he told his brothers they hated even more for it. They said, "Do you think you're going to rule over us?"

But when Josef has another even more provocative dream wherein not only his brothers but his father and mother as well all bowed to him, instead of keeping the dream to himself he begs his brothers to listen to it. They of course were enraged by what they heard. Still Josef went and, in the presence of all the brothers, tells the dream to his father! Jacob even rebuked Josef for arousing his brothers' anger.

The question is, as the Rebbe asked, at the age of seventeen Josef was supposed to be a mature and wise boy, especially after having been trained so extensively by his father. How could it be that such a bright young man should be such a *nudnik*? Knowing that his brothers were already envious of his superior stature in the family, he should have kept his mouth shut. It doesn't make sense that time and again he purposely aggravates the situation. He was too smart for that.

So what were Jacob and Josef actually trying to accomplish with all this?

Seeing the Future

Perhaps we can explain it this way:

Jacob wasn't just a father who had favorites on one son. Jacob actually foresaw that Joseph will be his successor as the leader

of the Jewish nation. That's why he made Josef the colorful coat and that's why Jacob took such pains to pass on all of his masters' teachings specifically to Josef. Jacob was simply preparing Josef for his future role as the "Rebbe" of the fledgling Jewish nation.

The brothers, however, couldn't take this. They expected Reuben, the firstborn, to assume leadership once their father passed away. Not Josef — the second to youngest. So they despised him for this.

Josef, in an attempt to win acceptance among his brothers told them about his two dreams. In our tradition, a dream is one 60th of prophecy, and that's for regular people. For a Tzaddik it's much more than that. Josef's dreams were outright prophecies.

By relating the dreams to them, Josef was trying to tell his brothers that it was not by his own choosing that their father was setting him apart from them nor was it Jacob's own idea. Rather, so had been decided in heaven.

True Leadership

Sadly, his plan backfired. Not only was he not accepted among his brothers because of the dreams, they actually hated him more because of them.

We find that the Chabad Rebbes typically did not leave a will in which they declared who was to be the next Rebbe. Why? Unlike a "Boss," a leader must be chosen by the Chassidim due to his own merits. A boss can be set upon a people by a higher power. But a leader has to be someone whom the people *want*

to listen to. He has to be someone whom the people would run after and pester him until he agrees to lead them.

Perhaps we can gain a deeper understanding of this matter through what the Alter Rebbe writes about the mitzvah of appointing a Jewish king. He explains that the main mitzvah is to appoint someone against his own will, specifically someone who does not want to lead.

It's like the stories of some of the leaders of the Mishnaic and Talmudic eras, for example, Rabbi Yehuda ben Tabai and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya. They both ran away to Egypt to escape the pestering of the Jewish people. But the people didn't give up and they chased them all the way to Egypt and dragged them back to Israel to lead the people. The same thing happened with Rabbi Shimon ben Shatach.

Moses also tried begging out of it when G-d asked him to lead the Jewish people. You might ask: how can one shirk the responsibility of freeing the Jewish people from slavery?

The answer is that this is the nature of these people who are destined by Divine providence to be leaders. They are loath to accept the crown of leadership. In the end they are forced to accept that position by the people they are to lead.

This is what happened with Josef. He did end up leading the Jewish people but it was not thanks to the stripes on his coat or the dreams of glory that he had. He became a leader by first sinking to the level of an imprisoned Egyptian slave and only then Pharaoh realized that "there must not be any man as wise as you." Then his leadership qualities were discovered.

Be A Leader, Not A Boss

What's the lesson for each of us?

I've often been asked, "Does it say in the Torah that children must listen to their parents?"

Of course we all know that it's in the Ten Commandments, "Honor your Father and Mother."

When they hear that they say, "Well, can you tell my son that? He never listens to a word I say!"

Parents, you have to know that you're not the "Boss" in your house. You're the leader of a household. A boss demands respect, a leader has to be able to command respect. This means that Chassidim or children or whoever is following you has to be able to listen to you because they want to, not because "I said so!"

If you try to boss your children around or direct them along the right path, you may or may not be successful. Rather, *lead* them down the straight and narrow path and you have good chances that you'll have a lot of *nachas*.