

Mr. Relevant

Category: Bereishis, Vayechi

Who is the new rising star in football, and which biblical characters does he resemble?

Lately, football is in the news. Damar Hamlin's shocking injury captured the attention of the world. And how many of you have heard about Brock Purdy?

A few experts here in our community told me that he's a new rising star in football, playing for the San Francisco 49ers.

Last year, he was the last player — of 262 players — to be drafted into the NFL. Usually, such a person is nicknamed "Mr. Irrelevant" of the year. But when all of the supposed stars of the 49ers were injured, the team had no choice but to put him on the field, and it turns out that Mr. Irrelevant is actually quite relevant. He brought a number of consecutive wins to his team, and is now seen as the future of football.

What's interesting about him is that he talks like a chassid. Whenever he's interviewed, he speaks about his faith....., "Every time I play - no matter what happens - I want others to see G-d through my actions. Every time I step on the field I want to bring Him glory. Even when we lose, I point to G-d and thank Him for the opportunity. Everything happens for a reason."

This reminded me of several biblical figures who are also seen as "Mr. Irrelevant" and turned out to be very effective.

The Unwanted Child

King David was born to a very prominent family. His father Jesse (Yishai) was a famous personality who would be welcomed by throngs of people wherever he went. Jesse had seven sons, and like their father, they were very well-known and would accompany him during his travels. There was one exception — the youngest son, David, was not a welcome part of the family. His brothers kept him at a distance, and the attitude trickled into the general public as well.

This is actually stated by King David explicitly in the book of Psalms: “I was strange to my brothers, and an outsider to the sons of my mother” (Psalms 69:9). He also looked different; his brothers were tall, while he was short and redheaded — he was a ginky, and he didn’t look like he was related to his siblings.

Being an outcast from his family, he found solace in the open expanses of the desert where nobody bothered him, and where he was able to meditate and pray to his heart’s desire. He would occasionally visit his family, and at some point they decided to make him the shepherd of the family’s flock. He would spend most of his time tending to the sheep and their pasture far away from home, and he saw his family only on occasion.

One day, the prophet Samuel arrived in Bethlehem. Samuel was the prophet who had appointed King Saul as the first Israelite king. Now, after King Saul had failed to fulfill G-d’s will, G-d had informed Samuel that Saul would lose the kingship; He instructed Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the new future king.

Samuel arrived in Bethlehem and invited Jesse and his sons to a sacrificial feast. As they arrived, Samuel saw the oldest son, Eliav, a tall and handsome man. He was sure that this was the future king. But in his prophetic eye, he heard G-d’s say, “Don’t pay attention to his image and to his height, because man sees with his eyes, but G-d sees into one’s heart.” This wasn’t the right man for the job.

Jesse then presented his second son, but again, G-d told him that it wasn’t the right match. All seven sons were introduced to Samuel, and all were rejected. Samuel was surprised. “Do you have any more children,” he asked Jesse?

Jesse suddenly “remembered” that he had another child. “The small one, the shepherd...” he said, hinting to Samuel that this wasn’t the man he was looking for. But the prophet insisted; he wouldn’t begin the feast until David was brought before him. When the young redhead finally appeared, he heard G-d’s voice: “Arise and anoint him.”

Samuel anointed David, and at that moment, David changed. He was no longer the meek, quiet, unwanted son of Jesse. The spirit of G-d rested upon him, and he became a new person (Shmuel 1, Chapter 16).

However, other people didn’t treat him differently. His brothers, who had

watched him be appointed by the prophet, weren't very impressed. They sent him back to tend to the sheep while they went to do a more important task; they joined King Saul in his war against the Philistines, who had long been threatening the Israelites. The future king wouldn't be present during all the action.

But then Jesse, his father, wanted to send provisions for his older sons, so he asked David to be the delivery boy. "Take 10 loaves of bread and run bring them to your brothers in the military encampment," he told him. (By the way, this story is strikingly similar to the story of Joseph).

King David arrived at the campsite, where he heard Goliath bellowing a challenge from the enemy encampment: Instead of both armies going to battle, the Israelites should pick one warrior to fight with Goliath; the victor would win for his entire army, and the losing army would be considered subservient to the winning one.

Seeing Goliath and his brute strength, nobody was willing to take up his offer. Suddenly, David heard a message from the king: "Whoever wins Goliath will receive my daughter's hand in marriage."

David volunteered for the task, but his older brothers chastised him. "What are you doing here altogether?" His brother asked him. "You're just here as a spectator!" Remember, his brother had watched the prophet Samuel anoint David to be the next king, but he still treated him like an outcast.

We all know the end of the story: David killed Goliath and went from being Mr. Irrelevant to the most relevant person in Jewish history. He not only became king, but also became the father of the royal Jewish dynasty, which will be culminated with their great-great-great-great-grandson, the Moshiach himself.

The Unwanted Brother

This very same story happened to Joseph. At the outset, he was also Mr. Irrelevant. He was the young brother who everybody hated. Despite, or perhaps because of, his dreams of being a king, his brothers couldn't stand him and sold him into slavery. He sat in prison for 12 years without receiving a single visit from a friend or acquaintance. And then, in the course of a few minutes, he became the most relevant person in the world, the leader of the world's greatest empire. And

when a famine spread throughout the world, everyone became irrelevant — the only relevant person was Joseph.

This is very evident in this week's Torah portion. It is 17 years after the famine ended, and the story is about Jacob's passing, but if you pay attention, the entire Torah portion revolves around Joseph.

At the beginning of the portion, it is Joseph who is told that his father is sick and comes to visit him. Jacob gives him his last will and testament — to be buried in the land of Israel — and even bows to his son. Afterwards, Joseph brings in his sons, Menasheh and Efraim, for Jacob to bless them, and an entire story about Jacob's hands unfolds.

Jacob then spends time with his sons, blessing them before his passing, but then the story again reverts to Joseph. He speaks to Pharaoh about arranging the funeral, he leads the funeral all the way to Canaan, and his presence at the funeral draws the Canaanite kings as well.

Following the funeral, the story continues to be about Joseph. The brothers are afraid that Joseph will now use their father's absence to take revenge, and they make an effort to appease him. It's all about the person who was once Mr. Irrelevant.

The Lesson

The Jewish people were always small in number. This is baked into our DNA; the Torah says, "you are a minority among the nations." But nonetheless, we are the most relevant — not in our own merit, but because we spread G-dliness to every corner of the world.