**Vayeishev 5776: Kindred Spirit**

By Rabbi Joshua (amiably known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

*Dedicated by Dr. Larry Bryskin, in memory of his father, Sam (Yitzchok Shlomo ben Leibel HaLevi) Bryskin, whose yahrzeit is on Kislev 23.*

One of the difficulties in understanding the saga of Yosef and his brothers is why Yaakov, sensing a tension between the brothers, sent Yosef to see them in Shechem alone, thus exposing him to danger. The Netziv, in his Haamek Davar, makes a very interesting observation about Yaakov’s understanding of Yosef's personality, in line with his famed Biblical introduction, in which he points out a crucial aspect of the personality of the patriarchs in general and of Yaakov in particular.

The trait that the Netziv refers to is that of yashrus, behaving in a decent, friendly way with everyone, despite any ideological differences that may exist. The book of Bereishis is referred to by the rabbis as the book of the yesharim, because of this trait of the patriarchs. We see this especially with Yaakov, who immediately struck up a friendship with the shepherds of Lavan, asking about their welfare, and suggesting a more productive work ethic. The Netziv says that this was the trait that Yaakov discerned in Yosef as well, and that this is what the Torah means when it says that Yaakov loved Yosef more than his other sons, because he was a ben zekunim to him, a child of his old age, i.e., that he shared his personality traits.

Although Yosef seemed to generate tension among his brothers by relating his dreams to them, his ultimate purpose was for their good. My teacher, Rav Aharon Soloveichik, pointed out that just as Yaakov dreamed of a ladder, reaching from heaven to earth, indicating his vision of acting in this world to effect spiritual goals, so, too, did Yosef, although he did so in two separate dreams.

Understanding Yosef's personality, Yaakov felt assured that, ultimately, he would reconcile with his brothers, and, with his general orientation towards others, even idolaters, he would be able to see his dreams to fruition, in accord with God's plan for the nation. This trust bore itself out in Egypt, where Yosef saved that nation from its poverty.