

# פרשת וישב - Parashas Vayeishev

## Audacity of Hope

Bereishis 37

בראשית לו

**לב** וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת כְּתֹנֶת הַפְּסִים וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל אָבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֹאת מְצָאנוּ הַכֹּהֵן נָא הַכְּתֹנֶת בְּנֹדָה הוּא אִם לֹא.

**32** And they sent the fine woollen coat, and they brought [it] to their father, and they said, "We have found this; now recognize whether it is your son's coat or not."

**לג** וַיִּכְרָה וַיֹּאמֶר כְּתֹנֶת בְּנֵי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָּהּוּ טֹרֵף טֹרֵף יוֹסֵף.

**33** He recognized it, and he said, "[It is] my son's coat; a wild beast has devoured him; Yosef **has surely been torn up.**"

**לד** וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹלְתָיו וַיִּשֹׂם שָׂק בְּמַתְנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים.

**34** And Yaakov rent his garments, and he put sackcloth on his loins, and he mourned for his son many days.

**לה** וַיִּקְמוּ כָּל בְּנָיו וְכָל בָּנֹתָיו לְנַחֲמוֹ וַיִּמָּאֵן לְהִתְנַחֵם וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶרְדָּה אֶל בְּנֵי אָבִי וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ וַיִּבְכֶּה אֹתוֹ אָבִיו.

**35** And all his sons and all his daughters arose to console him, but he refused to be consoled, for he said, "Because I will descend on account of my son as a mourner to the grave"; and his father wept for him.

Shemos 22

שמות בב

**ט** כִּי יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ חֲמוֹר אוֹ שׂוֹר אוֹ שֶׁה וְכָל בְּהֵמָה לְשֹׂמֵר וַיָּמָת אוֹ נִשְׁבֵּר אוֹ נִשְׁבָּה אִין רֹאֵה.

**9** If a man gives his neighbour a donkey, a bull, a lamb, or any animal for safekeeping, and it dies, breaks a limb, or is captured, and no one sees [it],

**י** שְׂבַעֲת יִהְיֶה תְּהִיָּה בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם אִם לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בְּמִלְאֲכַת רֵעֵהוּ וְלָקַח בְּעֵלְיוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁלֹם.

**10** the oath of Hashem shall be between the two of them provided that he did not lay his hand upon his neighbour's property, and its owner shall accept [it], and he shall not pay.

**יב** אִם טֹרֵף יִטְרַף יִבְאֵהוּ עַד הַטְּרִפָּה לֹא יִשְׁלֹם.

**12** If it **has surely been torn up**, he shall bring witness for it; [for] the torn one he shall not pay.

**A Questions****Chapter 37, Verse 32 and 33**

1. Why do the brothers not clearly tell their story instead of leaving it to their father to “recognize” the coat and then to connect the dots?
2. Why does Yaakov conclude that a “wild beast has devoured” Yosef? The brothers had never mentioned this.
3. What connection might there be between Yaakov’s expression that Yosef “has surely been torn” and the identical wording in Shemos 22, 12?

**Ibid., Verse 34**

4. What does renting a garment signify?
5. Why did Yaakov not simply tear one, but all of his garments, as is implied by the plural?
6. What is the meaning of putting on sackcloth?

**Ibid., Verse 35**

7. There are laws in Judaism about the limits of grief. There is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless. Why did Yaakov refuse to be comforted?

**B Answers****Chapter 37, Verse 32 and 33**

1. *Why do the brothers not clearly tell their story instead of leaving it to their father to “recognize” the coat and then to connect the dots?*
2. *Why does Yaakov conclude that a “wild beast has devoured” Yosef? The brothers had never mentioned this.*
3. *What connection might there be between Yaakov’s expression that Yosef “has surely been torn” and the identical wording in Shemos 22, 12.*
  - Normally Yaakov’s sons would be held responsible for their younger brother’s disappearance. To avoid this, as in the case of later Torah law, they bring the remains as evidence. If those remains show signs of an attack by a wild animal, they must be absolved. Their request to Yaakov to “recognize whether it is [his] son's coat”, must be understood as a legal argument, meaning, “Examine the evidence.” Yaakov has no alternative but to classify the case to fit the legal parameters of a wild animal attack.

**Ibid., Verse 34**

4. *What does renting a garment signify?*
  - Clothes are the first way we play to the gallery. They define our outward appearance and help articulate our persona to others. The tearing of a garment signifies the withdrawal from a world that does no longer seem to be a safe and friendly place.
5. *Why did Yaakov not simply tear one, but all of his garments, as is implied by the plural?*
  - The trauma effected every part of him and the pain cut to the core of his being.
6. *What is the meaning of putting on sackcloth?*
  - Sackcloth is very uncomfortable and rough to the skin. Yaakov did not want to get comfortable in a reality without Yosef. His every move would remind him that something was terribly wrong.

**Ibid., Verse 35**

7. *There are laws in Judaism about the limits of grief. There is no such thing as a bereavement for which grief is endless. Why did Yaakov refuse to be comforted?*
  - Yaakov was forced to absolve the brothers from responsibility, without accepting Yosef’s death as final. His refusal to be comforted shows that, despite the “evidence”, Yaakov continued to hope that Yosef was still alive. That hope was eventually justified. Yosef was still alive, and eventually father and son were reunited.