

# Torah Time Primer

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Resh Lakish, quoting Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, said, "A person should not favor one child over another, for Joseph's brothers hated him because their father made him a coat of many colors."

- Genesis Rabbah 84:8

וישב  
❖ (vayeshev)



This week's parashah:  
(Vayeshev Genesis 37:1-40:23)

*Parashah Vayeshev* tells the famous story of Yosef, Yaakov's favorite son, who garners the ire and jealousy of his brothers and gets himself sold into slavery in Egypt.

The story unfolds in Canaan, where Yaakov is settled with his twelve sons. Yosef is seventeen, and is a helper to his half-brothers who are the sons of Yaakov's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. Yosef reports his brothers' bad behavior to his father. Yaakov favors Yosef and demonstrates his affection by having an ornamental tunic made for Yosef. When Yosef's brothers see the ornamental tunic, they understand that their father favors Yosef and they become so jealous that they are unable to say anything kind to Yosef.

Yosef has a dream that he shares with his brothers. In this dream they are all binding sheaves but only Yosef's sheaf remains upright while his brother's sheaves bow low to Yosef's sheaf. Yosef's brothers reply asking, "Do you mean to reign over us?" and they hate Yosef more for his dream.

Yosef has another dream that he shares with his brothers and his father. In this dream the sun, the moon and eleven stars bow down to Yosef. This time, Yaakov asks Yosef, "What is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?"

One day, Yaakov sends Yosef to his brothers so he can report back on the status of the flocks. Yosef's brothers plot to kill him, but Reuven (who wishes to save Yosef) convinces his brothers to cast him into a pit instead of harming him. When Yosef approaches his brothers, they strip off his (continued on page 2)

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ornamental tunic and throw him into a pit. As the brothers sit down to a meal, they spot a caravan of Midianites. They sell Yosef to the Midianites for 20 pieces of silver as a slave and Yosef is brought to Egypt to be a slave to Potiphar, a courtier of the Pharaoh and chief steward.

Potiphar trusts Yosef and makes him his personal attendant. Yosef is successful in everything he does. However he angers Potiphar's wife by declining her advances. She falsely accuses Yosef of making sexual advances and Yosef is imprisoned. While in jail, Yosef interprets the dreams of two fellow prisoners, the cup-bearer and the baker. Yosef is correct in his interpretation and asks that the prisoners, when released, say a kind word to Pharaoh on his behalf. However they forget about Yosef.

Parashat Vayeshev also includes the story of the rape of Tamar; this is not text that we will share with the children.

### Our Objectives:

This week we will continue to explore the mitzvah of *Shalom Bayit*, as we look at the effects of sibling rivalry and ways to express our feelings and resolve conflicts peaceably. We will also introduce the mitzvah of *Sh'mirat Halashon*, choosing our words carefully to avoid gossip and hurtful words.

There are many intense feelings and actions described in *Parashah Vayeshev* that might be unsettling for young children. Therefore we will be sure to preview that 1) Yosef is not actually hurt, 2) his brothers feel remorse and 3) in the next *parashah*, Yosef reconciles with his brothers. In the classroom we will focus on what could be done differently to resolve hurt feelings and repair the damage.

Some Hebrew words your children may be exposed to:

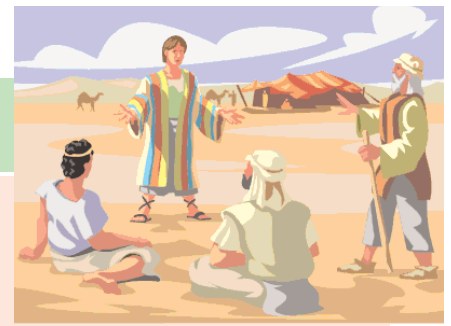
English	Transliteration	Hebrew
Brother	<i>ah</i>	אָח
Coat	<i>m'eel</i>	מַעִיל
Peaceful Home	<i>shalom bayit</i>	שְׁלוֹם בַּיִת
Guarding your speech	<i>sh'mirat halashon</i>	שְׁמִירַת הַלְשׁוֹן
Red	<i>adom</i>	אָדוּם
Blue	<i>kahol</i>	כָּחוֹל
Yellow	<i>tzahov</i>	צָהָב
Green	<i>yarok</i>	יָרוֹק
Purple	<i>sagol</i>	סָגוּל
Orange	<i>katom</i>	כָּתוּם
Pink	<i>varod</i>	וְרוֹד

**Activities supporting the themes in this week's Torah Time may include:**

Classroom activities may explore what it feels like to be the favorite, using a dramatic play prop of a multicolored coat. Other activities may include practicing how to give and receive compliments.

Other activities may give the children practice with the Hebrew words for different colors.

## Enhancing the Dinner Conversation.....



**Trigger Questions** can be used to initiate reflective conversation with your child, to help reinforce learning and to help you, the parent, clarify ideas for your child.

- 1) How do Yosef's brothers feel about him? Why do you think that they feel that way?
- 2) The parents in our preschool love each one of their children, but in this Torah story it appears that Yaakov loves Yosef more than his brothers. Why do you think that is? How do you feel about that? How could Yaakov show each of his children that he loved them?

### Questions your kids may have:

1. Why did Yaakov give his Yosef a coat of many colors? Why is that special?

These days it is easy to manufacture very colorful clothing and items used in home decor. However in ancient times it took much time and work to create fabrics with color, because dyes were difficult and expensive to obtain. Colorful yarns had to be handmade using natural sources of dye or purchased from foreign merchants. A coat of many colors was a very unique and expensive gift.

2. Why were Yosef's brothers so mean to him?

You can talk with the children about why Yosef's brothers did not like him and better choices that they could have made to resolve their hurt and angry feelings. This *parashah* provides a wonderful opportunity to focus on feelings between siblings (both positive and negative) and appropriate strategies to use when you disagree. Yosef made his brothers angry by tattling on them while they were working in the field, and jealous when he wore his coat and shared his dreams about them bowing down to him. Perhaps Yosef was not aware of the impact of his words because he was the youngest one.

Here are a few questions you can raise with your child related to the *mitzvot* of *Shalom Bayit* and *Sh'mirat Halashon*: "What are ways to disagree with a brother/sister without hurting them? Instead of throwing Yosef in a pit, could the brothers have said something to Yosef instead? Instead of reacting in anger, could they have advised Yosef to be more careful with his words because he was making the brothers jealous and angry?"

In the classroom we are helping the kids to say, "When you do X it makes me feel Y." This is part of healthy communication, and helps everybody become aware of the impact of their actions and words on other people's feelings.

### Children's Books on sibling rivalry:

Henkes, Kevin. *Julius: The Baby of the World*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1995.

Holabird, Katherine. *Angelina's Baby Sister*. New York: Viking Juvenile, 2006.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *Peter's Chair*. New York: BooksViking Juvenile, 1998.

Wells, Rosemary. *Noisy Nora*. New York: Puffin, 2000.

### Children's Books about vanity:

Pfister, Marcus and J. Alison James. *The Rainbow Fish*. New York: North-South Books, 1995.

## Questions you might have:

1. Why does Yosef include his mother in his dream about the sun, moon and stars bowing to him? Isn't she dead?

Yes, Raḥel dies while bearing Yosef's only brother, Benjamin in Genesis 35:19. The Bavli Talmud suggests that this inconsistency in the text demonstrates the rule that only part of a dream can come true (Ber. 55a). Rashi cites a midrash that identifies Yosef's mother with Bilḥah, Raḥel's servant (Genesis Rabbah 44:11). Some modern scholars suggest that this portion of the story was part of an earlier version of the story where Raḥel had not passed away.

2. Where is God in this story? The previous parshiot in Genesis include God's voice. What happened?

When one examines the text from a literary perspective, the style of writing is dramatically different. The story of Yosef reads more like a novella, with highly developed characters and detail that extends over several chapters. Also, much of the story takes place in Egypt as opposed to Canaan or Mesopotamia. One of the other characteristics of the shift in style as we approach the end of Genesis is the absence of a speaking God. (God does speak again to Yaakov in the next *parashah* and God's voice reappears in Exodus.) Rather, God is generally behind the scenes appearing to Yosef in dreams, and for extended periods while Yosef is in jail, seemingly absent. Here the emphasis is not on what God can do but on what Yosef does to and for himself with his words and his actions.

## Resources for Parents:

The Jewish Publication Society has posted the Tanakh on-line at [www.sacred-texts.com/bib/jps](http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/jps). For the full text of the Creation Story, please visit the website.

Visit <http://www.g-dcast.com/> for the animated retelling of this parashah!!

Berlin, Adele and Marc Zvi Brettler (Ed.) The Jewish Study Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004.

Bialik, H.N. and Ravnitzky, Y.H. translated by Braude, W.G The Book of Legends, Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash. New York: Schocken, 1992.

Fields, Harvey and Giora Carmi (Illust.) A Torah Commentary for Our Times. New York: URJ Press, 1998.

Freund, Richard. Digging Through the Bible: Modern Archaeology and the Ancient Bible. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009.

Kugel, James L. How to Read the Bible. New York: Free Press, 2007

The Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary. New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999.