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**To Raise a Brother**  
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This week's sedrah contains one of the most misunderstood episodes in the Torah. On face value, it would appear that 10 of the sons of Yaakov despised their own brother Yosef. They tried to kill him by throwing him into a pit. Eventually, they sold him to a group of merchants traveling to Egypt.

There are numerous questions to be asked on this:

How could Jacob show favoritism to one son by giving Yosef a multicolored coat (37:3)? He, having experienced the hatred of his brother, Eisav, should have known better.

Why was Yosef "playing around with the children of Bilha and Zilpah" (37:2)?

Why did Yosef report all the brothers' evil plans and actions to Yaakov (ibid)?

How could future leaders of the tribes of Israel commit such an act?

The answer I would like to give is based on the sefer "*Vayeifk Yosef*" written by Reb Leib Friedman which goes through all the Midrashim and Talmudic sources to deduce the following explanation.

Yosef was a very pious man. We know this from how he managed to spurn the advances of Potiphar's wife when he was a servant at her house in Egypt. Yosef steadfastly kept his Yiddishkeit even in lowly

Egypt, which was perhaps the most spiritually deprived country at the time, steeped in witchcraft and magic. When the Jewish people eventually left on the Seder night, our Rabbis tell us they were at the 49<sup>th</sup> and penultimate level of *tumah*, spiritual impurity.

Yosef is known as "Yosef Hatzadik," Yosef the righteous man. However, he was very humble and tried to hide his good deeds. He did this by goofing around with his brothers and by spending time in the mirror apparently beautifying himself and playing with his hair, which gave the impression he was not spending his time studying Torah. In fact, he was studying even as he carried out mundane activities. However, he was so good at hiding his greatness that even his own family were fooled. They thought he was the "black sheep" of the family. Yaakov thought that, just like his father and grandfather had wicked sons, so did he with Yosef. Yosef's brothers were also concerned with this.

Therefore, they formed a plan. There are two main ways to help children who go off the path and need extra help:

Show them extra love, attention and hope this will help the child to turn back to the right path.  
Distance yourself from them, which could shock them into behaving.

As the father, Yaakov decided to adopt the first approach and show Yosef extra love and attention. He made him a beautiful multicolored coat from the finest delicate wool. He gave him additional private time and taught him all the special parts of Torah he had learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever when he studied there for 14 years prior to his meeting with Lavan. He hoped he could nurture him into becoming a true tzaddik. This approach works on the premise that a person shows how much they care about the other person, including for their spiritual well-being. We show them that we believe the best ways to have a good and meaningful life in this world, as well as in the world to come, are by keeping the Torah and being a good Jew. We show that we want them to share in the happiness and reward that awaits us all.

"And the brothers saw that their father loved them more than all his brothers so they hated him and were not able to speak nicely to him" (37:4). Having seen Yaakov adopt the first method and seemingly fail, the brothers adopted the second method and pushed Yosef away. They hoped that by giving the impression they wanted nothing to do with him, he would change his ways. Perhaps he would be shocked into behaving the way a leader of one of the twelve tribes of Israel should.

"And Yosef dreamed a dream and told his brothers" (37: 5). This was like a dagger into the hearts of the brothers. After all Yaakov's efforts to give Yosef extra love and affection and the brothers' efforts to shun and spurn him, Yosef still had visions of grandeur. Their attempts to mould him into a righteous man fitting to be a leader of Israel had seemingly failed. Therefore, it was time for "plan B." The brothers now thought that Yosef would turn out like his uncle Eisav and great uncle Yishmael, both of whom were wicked men until they repented just prior to death. Taking a lead from their grandfather Avrohom who banished Yishmael from his house, the brothers formed a plan to eradicate Yosef.

They voted him liable for the death penalty because of the licentious gossip he constantly relayed to Yaakov. They reasoned he could cause Yaakov to curse them and ruin their chances of being leaders of Israel. Therefore, they considered Yosef a danger to them, and it is allowed to cause harm to another on grounds of self defense.

The Midrash tells us they, at first, tried to fire arrows at him from a distance not wanting to harm him with their own hands. When HaShem spared Yosef from the arrows, the brothers set vicious dogs upon him. Finally, they elected to kill him with their own bare hands.

Reuvain spoke up and suggested they give him more time, thus saving Yosef's life. Maybe a little "alone"

time in a pit would do the trick. It was hoped that Yosef would be spooked into realizing he had to wake up and change his ways. This was to be his last warning. But, in the end, the brothers sold him to merchants and got rid of him. They reasoned that, if he was not going to conform, he had to be driven away as was their great-uncle Yishmael.

The brothers still feared their father, Yaakov, so they made up a story that Yosef was savaged by a beast. The hope is that we now see the brothers in a better light. After all, they all went on to be inscribed on the breastplate worn by the Cohen Gadol. It also must be stated that this entire episode was the will of HaShem, as we can see from how the events unfolded. Yosef was to become viceroy of Egypt which would facilitate the Jewish nation ending up in Egypt, and their subsequent redemption.

There is an important lesson for us living in the year 5774; we must not act hastily when it comes to major *chinuch* (education) decisions for our children. We must evaluate each child and determine which path works best for that particular child. There is a proverb in Mishlei (22:6): "Educate a child according to HIS own path." No two children are the same. "Just as everyone's face is different, so are their intellects and character traits" (Talmud). Sometimes a child needs extra love and affection, but not at the expense of other children in the family. Children can be scarred for life from their early experiences. Everyone needs to feel loved and appreciated. Every child wants to feel as if he's the most important person in the eyes of his parents. Let us take the message of this week's sedrah and may HaShem grant us heavenly help in raising and educating our children to be good Jews and upstanding people.

Shabbat Shalom