

Vayechi

Did Yaakov Ever Know?

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As Sefer Bereishis comes to a close, we are left wondering about many unanswered questions. After the dramatic reunion of Yosef and his family in last week's Parsha, the Torah leaves out more than fifteen years of the subsequent story, skipping to the end of Yaakov's life. One can only imagine what the continued relationship between Yosef and his father looked like, not to mention Yaakov and his grandchildren. Being that this entire drama unfolded from one primary incident, the question remains- Does Yaakov ever find out that the brothers sold Yosef?

Due to the lack of explicit sources, many commentaries put together clues and inferences to try answering this question. The *Da'as Zekeinim (Bereishis 48:1)* points out the peculiarity of the phrases "and he called for his son, Yosef" (47:29) and "someone told Yosef 'your father is ill'" (48:1). Why was Yosef not aware of his father's condition? Was he not cherishing their rekindled relationship after twenty-two years without him? The *Da'as Zekeinim* explains that throughout these years Yosef avoided Yaakov in order to keep secret what the brothers did. If Yaakov would have known, Yosef thought, he would curse them and "destroy the entire world". Similarly, the *Ramban* explained in last week's Parsha (45:27) that the brothers never told Yaakov in fear that he would curse them like he ended up doing to Reuven, Shimon and Levi (49:3-7).

This alone may not be proof enough that Yaakov never knew. Even if this were the case, it could still be possible for the brothers to have told Yaakov at the very end of his life, when he could no longer curse them. In fact, the *Chasam Sofer* explains later in the Parsha (*Toras Moshe 50:16*) that the brothers *did* tell Yaakov about selling Yosef, but only after they received their blessings.

This question really demands closer attention, however, in light of what the brothers tell Yosef after Yaakov's passing. In a seeming moment of panic, the brothers wanted to make sure that they remained on good terms with Yosef, even without Yaakov watching (this alone may imply that Yaakov never knew). They tell Yosef that Yaakov told them to relay the message that he should forgive them for "their crime". Assuming this statement refers to them selling him, it clearly shows that Yaakov *did* know. So why the disagreement? Is it not an explicit *pasuk*?

The Gemara in Yevamos (65b) learns from this statement of the brothers that 'one is allowed to change [the truth] for the sake of peace'. The most basic understanding of this line is that the brothers simply lied, and Yaakov never said that because he never knew about the sale. If we look at Rashi there, but more specifically on the *pasuk*, there is another way to understand this statement. Rashi says that they "changed the truth" in that Yaakov never told them to instruct Yosef. This was not because he never knew, but because Yaakov did not suspect that Yosef would ever take revenge (why the brothers suspected him now is also unclear. See *Maharsha* to the Gemara).

With this Gemara in mind, our question becomes more significant than whether or not Yaakov gained proper closure on his sons' interactions. The Gemara in Yevamos is teaching us the level in which one is allowed to lie in order to secure peace. If Yaakov really *did* know about the selling, then the brothers merely lied about the fact that Yaakov told them to tell Yosef. It could have very well been Yaakov's opinion. If this were the case, then the Gemara is just teaching that one is allowed to express someone else's opinion without their permission. If, however, Yaakov had no knowledge of the selling, then the Gemara's lesson is that much stronger: One is allowed to entirely fabricate an event or opinion in order to ensure peaceful relations.

Whether or not Yaakov knew what the brothers did is a question with support on both sides. Nonetheless, a striking idea that emerges is that truth is not an absolute value. Competing moralities present difficult situations, and the Torah teaches us that in the face of truth, peace and safety take precedence.

