

## Parshat Vayeshev – December 8, 2012

There is something curious in the history of generations. We evaluate and criticize our parents. We decide which characteristics we would like to repeat and which not, and yet, many times we find ourselves doing just those things we criticize on them. We hear them speak through our mouth, repeating phrases, attitudes, the same patterns but a generation later. Sometimes we criticize ourselves for it or just begin to understand how our parents were.

Jacob was no exception: He suffered during his childhood his parents' predilection for one of their two sons. "*Yitz'chak favored 'Esav (...) Rivkah favored Ya'akov*" (Gen 25:28). And though those preferences were responsible for the disintegration of the family, he continued repeating the pattern. He had twelve children with his wives and concubines, but the only one who deserved his unconditional love was Joseph, the son of Rachel, the woman he loved. He does not hide his feelings, it is an open and frank favoritism: "*Israel loved Yosef the most of all his children*" (Gen. 37:3). Jacob does something that his young sons could not tolerate: Gives Joseph the ornamented tunic. The consequences were immediately seen: "*they began to hate him and reached the point where they couldn't even talk with him*" (Gen. 31:19-20).

To make things worse, Joseph has dreams of self-grandeur and shares those dreams with his brothers. *“His brothers retorted, “Yes, you will certainly be our king (...) And they hated him still more for his dreams and for what he said”*. The fate seems sealed: They went to look for the sheep and Jacob sent Joseph *“to see whether things are going well with your brothers”* (Gen 37:14). The brothers saw him coming and *“They said to each other, “Look, this dreamer is coming! So come now, let’s kill him”* (Gen 31:19-20).

I think is in this moment when the process of dehumanization toward Joseph begins. They can’t see him as his brother anymore; he was only “the dreamer”. Being not a person, it was easier for them to think about taking his life.

When we look at other human being only as an adjective, as an attribute or condition, is not difficult for us to hate him/her. It's easy to kill a black person, a communist, a fascist, a Jew. More difficult is to kill a human being with a name, a history and a destiny. When we transform our fellow into a “thing”, we also lose our own human condition.

Shabbat Shalom!