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Beyond Pshat

The Power of Truth
Parshas Vayigash

Posted on December 13, 2002 (5763)

By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky
Seeing Life Clearly

At the beginning of this week's parsha Yehuda approached Yosef, whom he knew only as the Viceroy of Egypt, to plead, argue and threaten for the release of Binyamin. The Viceroy's goblet had been discovered in Binyamin's sack; "He shall be my slave," declared the Egyptian ruler in the closing verse of last week's parsha "and you go up in peace to your father."

But the brothers refused to go in peace. Yehuda, their spokesman and leader, and the one who assumed personal responsibility to Yaakov for Binyamin's safe return, pleaded: "How shall I come to your servant my father, and the youth is not with us? - since his soul is so bound up with his soul- it will happen that when he sees that the youth is gone, he will die, and your servant will have brought down the hoariness of your servant our father in sorrow to the grave."

Yosef could not restrain himself any longer and asked all the Egyptians in the room to leave and said to his brothers, "I am Yosef; is my father still alive?" And his brothers could not answer him, because they were overwhelmed with shame and bewilderment before him.

The Brisker Rav z'l comments that in the previous parsha (prior to Yosef's revelation), Yosef asked his brothers, "Is your aged father of whom you spoke at peace? Is he still alive?" and his brothers answered him, "Your servant our father is at peace; he still lives." The difficulty is why did Yosef ask his brothers again if his father was still alive? There had been no new developments since the initial inquiry and his brothers were not aware of any new facts about their father Yaakov, yet Yosef asked the question again - why?

The Brisker Rav explains that in actuality the second time Yosef inquired about Yaakov it was not a question to be answered. It was a rhetorical question that was asked after Yehuda had recounted how Binyamin was so close to their father and that if they did not return with him, Yaakov would

die. They had implied that Yosef was cruel, scheming, and heartless to separate their aged father from the son that he loved so much. It is at this point that Yosef said, "I am Yosef; is my father still alive?"

By saying this to his brothers, Yosef intended to remind them of what they had done to him without being concerned about the consequences for their father. There was no one closer to Yaakov than Yosef and his brothers did not consider the effects of their actions against Yosef on their father. They had thrown him into a pit, sold him into slavery, and informed Yaakov that he had been killed. Yet his brothers were so consumed with themselves and their own concerns that they did not consider the consequences.

Yosef was giving his brothers mussar (rebuke) by implying that they should analyze their own behavior toward him before accusing him of being heartless and cruel. Yosef's brothers could only focus on his failings vis-à-vis Binyamin and did not look at their own shortcomings and lack of sensitivity. Therefore when Yosef said, "I am Yosef; is my father still alive?" his brothers were silent with shame because they had realized the injustice they had done.

The Gemara in Sotah tells us that after Yaakov passed away he was taken by his children to be buried in Eretz Yisroel (in the Machpelah). At that point, Esav appeared and demanded that Yaakov not be buried there because it was his burial plot. Esav started to argue vehemently back and forth with Yaakov's children. Chushim Ben Dan, a deaf grandson of Yaakov, watched this heated debate and witnessed the disgrace of his grandfather lying unburied while Esav argued for the plot. Chushim Ben Dan became so enraged by this disgrace that he took a club and beheaded Esav.

Reb Chaim Shmuelevits zt'l asks why was Chushim Ben Dan the only person to react to the disgrace of Yaakov while the debate continued? Why did none of Yaakov's other children sense the disgrace? Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz answers that Chushim Ben Dan was deaf and therefore not involved in the fray. He was removed from the argument and was therefore able to remain objective- thus recognizing the disgrace that was occurring. However, all of the other sons were completely involved in the argument and preoccupied with stating their own point of view rather than tending to the burial of Yaakov. They did not have the same level of clarity as Chushim who could clearly see the chillul Hashem without hearing the self-absorbing debate that surrounded him.

All of us are caught up with our own issues to the exclusion of everything else. We are consumed with our own self-centered emotions, goals and desires that cause us to lose our objectivity. Yosef's brothers were completely involved in their own concerns to the point of not taking into account the tragedy that befell their father as a result of their actions against Yosef. They regretted their actions later; however initially, they glossed over them at the time because they could not see beyond themselves. So too was it with Yaakov's children at the time of his burial.

The Gemara tells us that a person who is blind is considered like a dead person. The question is why? The answer is that when one sees things we are drawn into them. By seeing our surroundings we gain a personal self interest in many situations, which diminish our objectivity and clarity. Yitzchak, who had poor eyesight in his old age, was able to maintain objectivity and clarity. We find that Hashem associated his name with him (Elokei Yitzchak) even though Hashem's name is usually associated with a person who has passed away. This is the case because a person who is still alive could always become a heretic and Hashem does not want to be associated with heretics. From this, we see that Yitzchak could not become a heretic while he was still alive.

We find that Moshe pleads with the Jews to "see" the path of life (Torah), which is before them. Because if we are able to focus on the "seeing" the world through the eyes of Torah and not our own conflicted and non-objective vision, we will be able to have clarity. 3. The Power of Truth

The Torah tells us that when Yosef, who was of the youngest of the brothers, revealed himself to his brothers they were bewildered and overcome with shame in his presence. The Yalkut states, "Woe to us on the

Day of Judgment! And Woe to us on the Day of Rebuke!” We find that Bilaam who is referred to as the “wise man of the nations of the world” beat his donkey and it spoke back to him. The donkey told Bilaam to stop beating it and reminded him of all the good it had done him. When Bilaam heard the words of his donkey he was stunned and silenced because its words of truth had been a rebuke- thus giving him an understanding of the wrong that he had been doing.

Yosef, the youngest and least respected of the brothers intensified the level of shame experienced by his brothers when they heard his rebuke which were only words of truth. The degree that Bilaam (the wise man of the nations) was taken aback by hearing the truth was intensified by the fact that it was his donkey that had communicated it to him. We see from these incidents that when truth is revealed to a person, he will acknowledge it regardless of its source.

The Yalkut continues- that when Hashem will judge and admonish each one of us – how much more will we be silenced into shame. The Chazal are drawing an analogy between the situations of Bilaam and his donkey, Yosef and his brothers, and ourselves when we will come before Hashem. If Yosef’s brothers were overwhelmed with shame when they were confronted with the truth from their youngest brother – how much more ashamed will we be when Hashem (who is the most exalted King) will confront us with the truth about our lives? If Bilaam was ashamed from the truth from his donkey – how much more ashamed will we be on the Day of Judgment before Hashem? We will be completely unable to respond to any of Hashem’s claims.

A person is able to evade the truth if they are able to put it within their own context (perspective); however, if the truth is revealed in a way that is outside of our their own context then they will be compelled to confront it. Therefore if truth cannot be evaded, then one must deal with it. The Chazal suggest that we deal with the truth because ultimately there will be a reckoning before Hashem.

The Mishna tells us that a person will never sin if he considers three things: From where he comes, to where is he going, and before whom he will stand in judgment (before Hashem). Rabbanu Yona in Perkei Avos explains that while we are alive as physical human beings we have the tendency to be able to forget our actions regardless of how shameful they are. Therefore to understand Rabbanu Yona one could say that as a result of our physicality, we have a natural instinct of survival- we cannot tolerate extreme guilt.

We cannot live with guilt and therefore we have short memories. However when our physicality is shed and we become spiritual beings after our death there is no way to forget our actions. Our actions will stand before us eternally and shame us without the ease of forgetfulness. We will no longer be able to evade the truth. This is how Rabbanu Yona explains the Mishna. If we could understand that when the soul departs from our body that our actions will remain before us forever, we would never sin.

We are able to cope with many situations in life, although we know they are wrong because our short memory causes them to fade out. Often we are interested in maintaining our self-esteem by hiding from the truth. If a person could maintain his self-respect he could justify anything. The moment that there is a chance that he may lose his self-respect; he is able to deal with the truth without his ego interfering. When Yosef confronted his brothers with the truth, they at that moment saw the ugliness of their actions; however, over time they would be able to forget this experience. The reality is, as Rabbanu Yona explains, that our actions will never be forgotten and we need to be cognizant of that.

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The Secret of Forgiveness by Rabbi Yehoshua Berman

In this week’s parsha, we read of the dramatic moment when Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers. This moment is the climactic end of a twenty-two-year period that began when Yosef’s brothers sold him into slavery. It is at this very moment that we discover a truly remarkable aspect of Yosef’s character.

The verse states, "And Yosef was unable to bear for all those standing by him and he called [out] 'take out every man from before me' and no man stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers (Gen. 45:1)."

What exactly was it that "Yosef was unable to bear"? Rashi elucidates: "He was unable to bear that the Egyptians would be standing there before him and listening when his brothers would be shamed when he would make himself known to them."

This is truly amazing! The enormous, pent-up emotions that Yosef must have had building up inside of him over the past twenty two years would be more than sufficient to cause even the most lucid mind to become lost in a tempest of confusing thoughts at such a moment. Simply being separated from one's family for more than two decades - without any communication whatsoever, and without having any idea if he would ever see them again - would be quite emotionally taxing and would not leave much room for clear, considerate thought at the time of reunion.

Yosef, however, was standing before the very brothers that deliberately caused him his untold suffering. They tossed him - totally stripped of his clothing - into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, and sold him into slavery. They thereby brought upon him the tremendous anguish of being a lonely slave far away from his father and home that were so dear to him. Furthermore, it was a result thereof that he had to bear the ongoing test and temptation of his master's wife. That in turn led to him being thrown into jail under humiliating circumstances, etc. etc. All this was directly caused by the brothers - through their deliberate actions - who were now standing before him!

We would surely have empathized with Yosef had he acted somewhat insensitively toward his brothers at this difficult moment. He certainly had sufficient reason to overlook a form of consideration that many would have likely disregarded even with nothing bothering them at all.

But not Yosef! Yosef was inscribed for eternity as a paramount example of the extent to which one must care for and be sensitive to one's fellow Jew. One of the greatest ways that this sensitivity is manifest, as was so with Yosef's sensitivity to his brothers, is by how much effort one puts forth to minimize the embarrassment of another.

We must ask ourselves, though, how indeed was Yosef able to muster such tremendous inner strength to overcome and overlook any feelings of ill will toward his brothers, to the extent that he showed them such delicate care and sensitivity?

In truth, Yosef himself answers this question: "And Yosef said to his brothers...And now do not be saddened...that you sold me [to] here because for [a source of] livelihood did the Almighty send me before you...And now [it is] not you that sent me here rather the Almighty... (Gen. 45:4-8)."

Yosef perceived his long chain of difficult and tempestuous life experiences as an ongoing act of hashgacha pratis, Divine providence. Yosef understood that irrespective of the power of another human being to affect others, Hashem is always in control; always watching and guiding the course of history. He understood that whatever role the impact of his brothers' free will may have played in respect to his life experience,(1) it would always remain minimal and inconsequential, because, ultimately, what happens to us is always from On High.(2)

The result of this worldview is that Yosef did not retain any trace of anger or ill will toward his brothers. He loved them just as much as before they had wronged him, and he expressed this when he displayed the utmost of care and sensitivity towards them.

By trying to emulate - on whatever level we can - Yosef's conviction and trust in Hashem, we can empower ourselves with the ability to overlook and completely forgive any pain that we may have suffered at the hands of others.

NOTES 1. See the first Biur Halacha in siman 218. 2. See Seifer Ha'Chinuch Mitzva 241.

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

date: Thu, Dec 21, 2017 at 3:21 PM

subject: **Parsha Q&A** - Parshat Vayigash

What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?

44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham. Alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.

Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?

44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.

Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?

44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.

What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers "Go up to my father"?

45:9 - We learn that Eretz Yisrael is higher than all other lands.

What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?

45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke lashon hakodesh.

Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?

45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of Mishkan Shilo built in Yosef's territory.

Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?

45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.

What did Yosef mean when he said "Don't dispute on the way"?

45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.

What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?

45:27 - His ruach hakodesh (prophetic spirit) returned.

Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?

46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.

"I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?

46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.

What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?

46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.

Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?

46:10 - Dina bat Yaakov.

When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?

46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.

Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?

46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.

Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?

46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.

Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?

47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.

What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?

47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.

Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?

47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.

Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

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[Written and Compiled by Rabbi Eliyahu Kane & Rabbi Reuven Subar
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman]

<https://theshmuz.com/parsha-article/vayigash-locking-in-the-moment-Vayigash>

Locking in the Moment

Rabbi Benzion Shafier

“And Yosef hitched up his wagon and went up to greet his father, Yisroel, towards Goshen, and he appeared before him, and he fell on his neck and he wept, and he fell on his neck more.” — Bereishis 46:29

A most joyous reunion

Yosef was the most beloved of Yaakov's sons. All of the Torah that he learned, he taught to Yosef. In Yosef, Yaakov saw brilliant intelligence and wisdom. In Yosef, he saw all of the attributes of his beloved Rochel — the kindness, the beauty, and the leadership qualities needed to head a nation. In Yosef, he recognized all of his own life events playing out in parallel.

When Yaakov gave the kisonos pasim (the coat of many colors) to Yosef, it was a symbol that established Yosef as the leader of the brothers. To Yaakov, Yosef represented the greatest of the Shvatim (tribes) and the future of the Jewish nation.

When the brothers came back with the report that Yosef was murdered, Yaakov was inconsolable. The tragedy was so profound that none of his children and none of the dignitaries who came to visit could comfort him. For years, the intensity of mourning didn't leave Yaakov. His beloved son was gone.

Finally after twenty-two painful years, father and son were reunited. The joy and emotion of the moment is difficult to imagine — deep yearnings of the heart finally realized. Yosef was so moved that he kissed his father, and then hugged him and cried, not just with tears, but with profuse crying that it seemed as if it were without stop. However, Rashi notes that Yaakov did not kiss Yosef, nor was he crying. He was reciting the Shema.

This appears as a rather odd activity. Of all times, why did Yaakov see fit to read the Shema right then?

Yaakov was locking in the emotion. It would seem the answer to this question is that Yaakov felt such intense emotions at that moment — possibly more intense joy than he had ever experienced — that he wanted to capitalize on those feelings. He didn't want them to simply pass; he wanted lock them in, to put them into concrete form so that they would become eternal. He wanted to take that extreme sense of joy and completion that he felt and use it to reach a new level. With the high that he experienced, he proclaimed HASHEM's sovereignty of all. “You, the Master of the universe, have brought my son back to me.” He recognized HASHEM with an unparalleled sense of appreciation and proclaimed the majesty of HASHEM with a level of complete clarity that he may well never had reached before.

This wasn't the first time that Yaakov said Shema

Obviously, this wasn't the first time that Yaakov read Shema. He had accepted HASHEM's dominion on a daily basis for decades and decades. But this was a new level of understanding that he was only able to obtain through these powerful emotions.

Emotions wax and wane. This concept has great relevance to us. In the course of our lives, we experience highs and lows, times of great joy and times of deep sorrow, times of excitement and enthusiasm, and times of boredom and listlessness. There are times when we are passionate and fervent, and there are times when we are apathetic. None of these states remains for long. Like waves of an ocean, they come, they go, and when they are gone, we remain the same as before — unchanged.

Emotions are tools for growth

The ability to capture the moment, to convert it into something permanent, is one of the keys to growth. If a person has a dramatic realization, if an event occurs that is the undeniable result of HASHEM's direct involvement

in his life, there is a sense of appreciation of recognition. But that feeling will pass. That sense of clarity will leave.

Sometimes we are so moved by a sudden turn in circumstances that we say, "It is hashgacha!" (Divine intervention) But obvious as it may be at the moment, ten minutes later that sense of clarity is gone. The only way to prevent that it from passing is to put that emotion into action, to take that understanding and make it permanent.

Thank You HASHEM

Sometimes even the most elementary action can have a profound effect, something as simple as saying thank you. If a person says the words, "HASHEM, I recognize that these events were not by chance. I see that it is You Who orchestrates this world and I thank you," this statement can take a fleeting recognition and make it lasting. Even though the concept was already clear, going through the process can have a dramatic effect on whether this understanding actually remains and changes my perception.

On the good and on the bad

On the opposite side of the spectrum are painful experiences — loneliness, suffering losses, failing in business. Nobody wishes for them and nobody wants them. However, when experiencing them, a person does have a very different perspective on themselves and on life. Gone is the feeling of independence, gone is the illusion of infallibility, and gone is the aura of superiority. In that sense, these are peak moments, moments of extraordinary clarity.

Ironically, the pain will pass and be forgotten. The question is: will the gain pass with it as well? If a person doesn't take concrete steps to make that vision permanent, it too will pass and become just part of a distant memory.

When a person reaches a new level of understanding, that experience can be an event of life that happens and passes. But with one small step, it can become a permanent part of the person.

By training ourselves to lock in these peak moments, we can take life experiences, moments of unique lucidity, and make them part of ourselves. Often, all it takes is a simple conscious action, a decision, or a small change to make lofty concepts and emotional highs permanent — changing who I am forever.

<http://etzion.org.il/en/intractable-question-why-did-yosef-not-send-word-his-father>

The Intractable Question: **Why Did Yosef Not Send Word to his Father?**

By Rav Yoel Bin-Nun

Seven hundred years ago, Ramban (Bereishit 42:9) posed a difficult question, one which continues to puzzle whoever studies the book of Bereishit:

How is it that Yosef, after living many years in Egypt, having attained a high and influential position in the house of an important Egyptian official, did not send his father even one message to inform him (that he was alive) and comfort him? Egypt is only six days' travel from Chevron, and respect for his father would have justified even a year's journey! ... [It would] have been a grave sin to torment his father by leaving him in mourning and bereavement for himself and for Shimon; even if he wanted to hurt his brothers a little, how could he not feel pity for his aged father?

Ramban's own astonishing answer to his question is that Yosef's goal was to guarantee the fulfillment of his dreams. Even after the first dream had been realized, he intensified the deception in order to fulfill the second dream. He did everything in its proper time in order to fulfill the dreams, for he knew they would be fulfilled perfectly.

Abarbanel (chap. 41, question 4) poses the same question, but more bluntly: Why did Yosef hide his identity from his brothers and speak harshly to them? It is criminal to be as vengeful and recriminating as a serpent! ... How is it that as his brothers were starving and far from home, having left their families and small children and, above all, his aged, worried and suffering

father waiting for them, did he not show compassion, but rather intensified the anguish by arresting Shimon?

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama (Akedat Yitzchak, 29, ques. 9; see also Abarbanel, chap. 41, ques. 6) finds Ramban's solution puzzling.

What did he stand to gain by having his dreams fulfilled? Even had there been some advantage, that would not have justified sinning toward his father! And as for the dreams, let the Giver of dreams provide their solutions. It seems very foolish to strive to fulfill dreams, as the fulfillment does not depend on the dreamer's will.

Professor Nechama Leibowitz, in her commentary to Bereishit (p. 327), believes that dreams can indeed be acted upon. She cites as proof Gideon, who hears a Midianite tell a dream, and acts upon it (Judges 7:13,14), as well as the Babylonian exiles (Ezra 1), who did not wait for the seventy years of Jeremiah's prophecy to pass, but returned on their own, beforehand.

In my opinion, Prof. Leibowitz is mistaken. There are two differences between her examples and the case at hand, both of which are mentioned as well by R. Yitzchak Arama.

First, neither Gideon nor the Babylonian exiles committed a grave offense in following their dreams. Their dreams did not contradict honoring parents, and certainly did not call on them to cause others grief. Secondly, Scripture itself clearly differentiates dreams from prophecy:

Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream;
And [let the prophet] who bears My word speak My word truthfully;
What is straw to wheat? The Lord has spoken.

(Yirmiyahu 23:28)

As the Talmud (Berakhot 55a) explains:

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: Just as wheat cannot exist without chaff, there cannot be a dream without false elements.

Rabbi Berekhia said: Although a dream may be partially fulfilled, it will not be fulfilled in its entirety. How do we know this? From Yosef, as it is written: "The sun (representing Yosef's father), the moon (his mother), and eleven stars [are bowing down to me]," and at the time, his mother was no longer alive.

The prophet Yirmiyahu teaches us that dreams are the outer shell of prophecy, just as chaff is the outer shell of wheat. The true prophet is able to separate grain from chaff in order to eventually produce clean flour for baking. It is dangerous to confuse the different levels, to the point where every inspired man is considered to be a prophet or seer; we could never clearly perceive the word of God. We need not deny the existence of great visionaries - or underrate their importance - even when we affirm that they are, after all, not prophets.

The Torah distinguishes Yosef's dreams from the prophetic dreams of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. The Patriarchs' dreams appear as pathways to divine revelation. In the Covenant between the Halves (berit bein ha-betarim), Avraham first sleeps and has a vision, and then receives God's word (Bereishit 16:12- 13; 17-18). Ya'akov has a dream in which he sees a ladder and angels, and then God speaks to him. In Yosef's dreams, however, there is no outward prophecy or Divine revelation. Even in Yosef's solving of dreams, there is only a general feeling of prophecy:

Solutions come from God; please tell me [your dreams]. (40:8)

Not I [but] God will answer for Pharaoh's well-being. (41:16)

Only after completing his explanation does Yosef become more confident: God is committed to doing this, and God will do it quickly. (41:39)

It is significant that Yosef uses God's universal name "E-lokim," and not the Tetragrammaton or Kel Shakkai, names God uses when He reveals Himself to Israel.

For all the parallels the Midrash draws between Ya'akov and Yosef (Bereishit Rabba 84:6), the Torah clearly differentiates the dreams of one from those of the other. This distinction draws a dividing line between the degree of revelation shown to the Patriarchs, on the one hand, and to Yosef and his brothers, on the other.

Clearly, Yosef's dreams are prophetic, and not mere nonsense. However, they are a form of ruach ha-kodesh (holy inspiration), rather than nevu'a (prophecy; see Maimonides' Guide to the Perplexed II:45, where he specifically mentions Yosef as being on the "second level" of prophecy; see also Akedat Yitzchak ad loc.). Ya'akov himself provides the appropriate response to Yosef's dreams:

His father was angry at him and said: "What is this dream you dreamt? Shall I and your mother and brothers come and bow down to you?" ... but his father awaited it. (Bereishit 37:11)

R. Levi adds:

He (Ya'akov) took pen in hand and wrote down on what date, at what time, and at what place. (Ber. Rabba, 84:11)

Dreams like this are precisely the kind of experience about which the Akedat Yitzchak writes, "Let the Giver of dreams provide their solution." These dreams are not granted in order to be put into action by the dreamer.

Together with the sheer experience of prophecy, these dreams grant us the power to wait. A dream which comes true without our active involvement is one that we can acknowledge, after the fact, as a prophetic dream. Only an outright prophecy, such as God's word to Gideon, should lead to action without first waiting. Certainly, only an outright prophecy can suspend a commandment, and only as a temporary measure (see Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah, ch. 9); it is unthinkable that a dream, the outcome of which is still uncertain, should suspend the fulfillment of a commandment even temporarily. Nevertheless, it is clear that Ramban considers these dreams to be full-fledged prophecies. This position is diametrically opposed to that of the Gemara (Berakhot 55a).

Even if we accept the Ramban's position on this point, his explanation of Yosef's behavior is untenable. The first dream was fulfilled when the brothers arrived in Egypt the first time.

Yosef was the ruler of the land; it was he who provided for all the inhabitants. Yosef's brothers came and bowed to the ground before him. (4:26)

There were ten brothers then, excluding Binyamin, who was at home. They had come to obtain grain - the sheaves in the dream.

The second dream is fulfilled when they bring Binyamin and meet with Yosef at his palace for a meal, honoring him and offering him gifts:

Yosef came home, and they brought him the presents they had with them to his house, and bowed down to him. (43:26)

After all eleven stars had bowed down to Yosef in his own right, as second to the king of Egypt, without any direct connection to the grain, their father's turn comes:

He greeted them and said: "Is your old father, whom you mentioned, at peace? Is he still alive?" They said: "Your servant our father is at peace; he is still alive." They bent down and bowed. (43:27-28)

This painful scene, in which Yosef's brothers prostrate themselves before him in their father's name, and refer to him as "your servant our father," is the fulfillment of the second dream, in which the sun and the moon bow down to Yosef. The entire family (other than his mother, who was no longer alive) has bowed down to Yosef, albeit indirectly - in Ya'akov's case - and without realizing the full significance of their actions.

This scene will repeat itself when Yehuda begs for Binyamin's safety and refers to Ya'akov four times as "your servant our father" (44:14,24,27,30-31). It must be noted at this point that Yosef arranged this episode in order to keep Binyamin in Egypt (since he could not foretell how Yehuda would react) AFTER the second dream had been completely fulfilled. The dreams had all come true before Ya'akov's arrival in Egypt, including the dream in which Ya'akov bows down to his son. In fact, he does not physically bow to Yosef when they are reunited in Egypt; none of the commentators suggest that he did.

The Torah does tell us that when Ya'akov was on his deathbed, Yosef came to see him, and "Yisrael bowed at the head of the bed" (47:31). But it is not clear whether his bowing is before Yosef or before God (Megilla 16b, Sifri

Devarim 6) - the simple reading suggests the latter - and certainly, his bowing does not come about through Yosef's initiative. It is precisely the verse cited by Ramban in support of his contention which actually contradicts his theory:

Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. He remembered the dreams he dreamt and told them: "You are spies." (42:8-9) It is clear that only at this point does Yosef remember his dreams, as he suddenly realizes that the first dream has been fulfilled (see Rashi to 42:9). Since Yosef remembers his dreams only when his brothers arrive in Egypt, why did he not send word to Ya'akov before that? As ruler of Egypt, it was certainly within his capacity to do so.

Ramban answers that the ten brothers' bowing down at the first meeting was not the realization of the first dream, as the eleventh brother had not yet bowed down to him. Yosef's first dream, however, does not specify the number of brothers making sheaves! Binyamin could not have been in the fields with them at the time, as he was eight years younger than Yosef and hence only nine years old.

Thus, even in a dream Yosef could not have seen Binyamin working in the fields. Even if we accept Ramban's assertion that these dreams are prophetic, we may not distort the content of the dreams. The second dream is never completely fulfilled, as Ya'akov himself did not bow down to Yosef, nor did Rachel, who had not been alive for many years. The family's economic dependence on Yosef cannot be considered a literal fulfillment of the sheaves' bowing down before him.

Ramban himself apparently realized the difficulties inherent in attempting to coordinate the story of the goblet with the dreams. He therefore proposes a second motive for Yosef's actions at this point:

The second affair, which he caused by means of the goblet, was not intended to trouble them. Yosef was afraid that they hated Binyamin, or were jealous of their father's love for him as they had been jealous of [Yosef] ... Perhaps Binyamin had realized that they had harmed Yosef and this had led to acrimony between them. Yosef did not want Binyamin to go with them lest they harm him, until he had verified their love for him. (Ramban, 42:9)

Abarbanel agrees:

Even after Yosef tested his brothers by accusing them of espionage, he was still not certain whether they loved Binyamin or whether they still hated Rachel's children, so he focused on Binyamin to see whether they would try to save him. (chap. 42, quests. 4,6)

In the words of Akedat Yitzchak:

Yosef's intentions were evidently to see whether they still hated him or whether they regretted their actions. (chap. 42, question 2)

This second solution is no less problematic than the first. First of all, we cannot avoid the feeling that the exegetes are attempting to explain away what seems to be an accidental outcome as a preconceived plan of events. The Torah itself indicates that Yosef simply had wanted to keep Binyamin behind, after their brothers had gone home. Possibly he feared that they would harm Binyamin at some point, as Ramban suggests, or he may have wished to reveal his identity to Binyamin alone and discuss with him plans for bringing Ya'akov to Egypt. He may even have intended to force Ya'akov to come to Egypt by holding Binyamin hostage. It might be that he simply wanted to hear from Binyamin all that had transpired since he was sold. He may have wanted Binyamin's cooperation in establishing the tribes of Rachel as a separate entity. But it seems utterly far-fetched that Yosef planned the affair of the goblet so that Yehuda would intervene and offer to be enslaved instead of Binyamin, forcing Yosef into an emotional situation in which, losing his self-control, he would finally reveal his identity.

All of this indeed came about, but none of it was premeditated. Yosef could not have intended to test his brothers' attitude toward Binyamin. What would he have done if, as was quite possible, they had accepted the situation as God's will, as punishment for their sin, and left Binyamin with him as they had left Shimon? Would this have proven either that they were not sorry for what they had done to Yosef or that they did not love Binyamin? Does

submission to the power of a tyrant prove anything? When Avraham agreed that Sarah be taken by Avimelech, did that mean he did not love her? She herself did not object to this unpleasant means of survival in a strange land (Bereishit 12:10; see Ramban and Ha'amek Davar ad loc.).

At no point in Yehuda's long speech is there any mention of the brothers' feelings toward each other or toward Binyamin. Yehuda's expressed concern is with his "old father" whom they left behind, and who interested the ruler so much. Ya'akov is Yehuda's last resort, and Yehuda plays it for all it is worth, hinting all the while at Yosef's responsibility for any outcome.

Can we be sure that, had Yehuda not committed himself to his father under penalty of "eternal guilt," that this outburst would have occurred? It can certainly be taken as a sign of repentance in general. But it was not evoked by any feeling of love or pity toward Binyamin or Yosef, but rather by a feeling of responsibility to his father.

There are two explicit references in our story to the brothers' attitude toward Yosef. The first is during their first visit to Egypt; the second is after Ya'akov's death.

Yosef hears his brothers express regret at their behavior towards him, when they had only just arrived in Egypt. This regret is coupled with the realization that all that is befalling them is a result of that behavior: They said to each other: This is our fault, because of our brother; we saw his suffering when he cried out to us and we did not listen; That is why this misfortune came upon us. (42:21)

Yosef restrains himself at this point, apparently with some difficulty, and maintains his deception. At no later time does he acquire any new insights into their character. This confession was elicited freely without any pressure whatsoever; they never imagined he could understand them "because the interpreter was between them."

After Ya'akov's death, the brothers return to Yosef fearing retribution.

Yosef might wish to harm us. (50:15)

Most commentators believe that they then lie and invent the story of Ya'akov's deathbed charge, in order to save their lives (Rashi on 50:16; Ramban on 45:27). Their bowing to Yosef at this point, knowing who he is, may be considered the final fulfillment of the dreams.

His brothers also bowed down to him and said: "We are your slaves." (50:16-18)

In our attempt to Yosef's motivation for waiting so many years, and then deceiving his brothers, we have ruled out the desire for forcing the dreams to come true - as "dreams come to us without our consent" - and certainly do not justify torturing old and suffering parents. Furthermore, as we saw earlier, Yosef remembers his dreams only when his brothers appear before him in Egypt.

Testing their regret could also not have been the reason, as he had already heard them express repentance in his presence. He revealed himself later only because he heard of his father's suffering. True, the brothers, especially Yehuda, were found to be repentant. This was, indeed, part of a master plan. But the plan was devised not in Yosef's court, but in a higher domain: The brothers were occupied with selling Yosef, Yosef was occupied with mourning and fasting, Reuven was occupied with mourning and fasting, Ya'akov was occupied with mourning and fasting, and God was occupied with creating the light of the Messiah. (Ber. Rabba 85:4)

When Yosef does follow his own initiative and asks the chief cupbearer to intercede before Pharaoh on his behalf, he spends two more years languishing in prison.

In summary, I believe that our question outweighs all its proposed solutions. What, then, do I believe to be the correct understanding of Yosef's behavior? The answer will have to wait until next week's shiur. In the meantime, I invite readers to submit answers of their own to office@etzion.org.il.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120512215642/http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.61/11vayiga.htm>

PARASHAT VAYIGASH

Why Did Yosef Not Send Word to his Father?

A Solution

By Rav Yoel Bin-Nun

Last week, we explored a variety of explanations for Yosef's puzzling behavior vis-a-vis his brothers and father. None of these could adequately answer the glaring question: Why, during all his years of servitude and his rise to power, did Yosef not send a letter to his father telling him that he was still alive? What could possibly justify the anguish he caused his aged and loving father?

I would like to propose a solution which accounts for many perplexing aspects of the story.

Our entire outlook on this story changes if we accept the fact that Yosef did not know that his brothers had fooled his father with the coat, the blood, and the lie that Yosef had been devoured by wild animals. Such thoughts never occurred to him! Hence it was Yosef who spent thirteen years of slavery in Egypt and the following years of greatness wondering: "Where is my father? Why has no one come to look for me?"

All the factors are now reversed, when seen from Yosef's point of view. Egypt is, after all, close to Canaan, and Ya'akov was a rich, important and influential man, with international familial and political connections. The Midianites or Yishmaelites who brought Yosef to Egypt were his cousins; is it possible that no one from that caravan could be located in all those years? Yishmael, Medan and Midian were all children of Avraham; even after they had migrated to Eastern lands, they certainly could be located. Ya'akov had manpower enough to marshal herds and flocks as a gift for Esav; surely he had manpower to search for Yosef. We know that Ya'akov does not search for his son, as he thinks Yosef is dead, but Yosef has no way of knowing this.

Yosef's wonder at his father's silence is joined by a terrible sense of anxiety which grows stronger over the years, as seasons and years pass by and no one comes. Yosef's anguish centers on his father: the voice inside him asking "Where is my father?" is joined by another harsh voice - "Why did my father send me to my brothers that day? Why did they strip off my coat the moment I arrived and throw me in the pit? Didn't he know how dangerous Shimon and Levi are, especially since I had brought him negative reports about them? What did my brothers tell him when they returned? Can he really have had no idea at all of what they had done?"

The voices resound and intertwine, eliciting alternating waves of fear and helplessness, of anger and hatred. Being thrown into the pit, the kidnapping to Egypt, slavery - a few months would be enough to drive him mad - and no one ever comes.

Finally, a quiet acceptance of his fate replaced the anguish. His brothers must have succeeded in convincing Ya'akov, and HE HAD BEEN DISOWNED. Leah must have convinced Ya'akov that his vain and arrogant son, who dreamt of ruling over them all, had to be disposed of before he destroyed the household. Had Avraham not consented to Sarah's insistence that he expel Yishmael, despite his love for Yishmael? Had not God Himself sanctioned this? Had not Esav lost his birthright? And had not Yitzchak capitulated to Rivka in choosing one son over another? Perhaps God Himself had told Ya'akov that Yosef had sinned and had to be expelled.

Thirteen years of torment brought in their wake a quiet acceptance of his fate. He would live according to his father's traditions but apart from his home. He would not sin against God even though He had rejected him; he would not be seduced by his master's wife. Years later, when Yosef rides in the viceroy's chariot, when he shaves his beard and stands before Pharaoh, it is clear to him that God must have decreed that his life would be lived separately from his family's.

Yosef gives expression to this feeling expression in the name he gives his eldest son, born of an Egyptian wife:

He called him Menashe, because "God has made me forget (nashani) all my labor and my father's house." (41:51)

To forget his father's house! Yosef is more subdued when his second son is born:

[He named him] Efraim, because "God has made me fruitful (hifrani) in the land of my suffering." (41:52)

Yosef's entire world is built on the misconception that his father has renounced him, while Ya'akov's world is destroyed by the misconception that Yosef is dead. Yosef's world is shaken when his brothers stand before him, not knowing who he is, and bow down to him. At that moment, he must question the new reality he has created for himself; "he remembers the dreams he dreamt about them" and he is thrown back into the past.

Stalling for time, he begins a line of inquiry - and action - which is geared to one end: to find out why his father had rejected him, if at all. He aims to keep Binyamin behind, so that his maternal brother can tell him all that has transpired. After the conversation with Binyamin, he will be able to decide whether to remain silent or to speak out.

All Yosef's actions from this point onward - including arresting Shimon - are directed towards this goal. He wanted both to get information (could Shimon have been interrogated in prison?) and to force Ya'akov to send Binyamin to Egypt. The cup was planted in his sack not to test Yehuda - how could he have predicted his older brother's outburst? - but just the opposite. Yosef assumed the brothers would not be able to save Binyamin, and this would be his means of keeping Binyamin with him, ostensibly as his prisoner.

This was Yosef's plan to find out what had happened and how to deal with it. Yehuda's response was an attempt to obtain Binyamin's release by appealing for mercy for his aged father. In so doing, he tells Yosef - totally unintentionally - exactly what Yosef wanted so desperately to hear, thereby freeing him and eventually Ya'akov, from their mutual errors.

Your servant our father said to us:

You know that my wife bore me two sons.

One has left me; I said he was devoured and I have not seen him since.

[If] you take this son too and tragedy befalls him, you will bring my old age down to She'ol in agony. (44:24-30)

Yosef needs to hear no more. He finally realizes the naked truth: No one has cut him off at all! Not Leah, not his brothers and, least of all, his father. He has not been forgotten!

Yosef could no longer restrain himself before all who were standing before him, and cried:

"Have every one leave me!"...

and he cried out loud...

and he told his brothers:

"I am Yosef; is my father still alive?" (45:1-3)

Does he live? Is he yet my father, who loves me and has not forgotten me? Is it possible?

Each of the players in our scene had a plan, and pursued that plan. But the plan which was finally revealed was a higher plan, geared at bringing Ya'akov's family to Egypt and creating the Jewish people.

All the "forgetting" is revealed to have been a tragic mistake. Ya'akov symbolically acknowledges the divine plan when, even though he is blind, he knows that he must take his hand off the head of Menashe (whose name connotes forgetting) and place it on the head of Efraim (whose name connotes fruitfulness).

The misunderstanding, however, does have its results. Not Yosef, but his two sons, will replace him in the list of twelve tribes.

And now, your two sons born to you in the Land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt are mine; Efraim and Menashe, like Reuven and Shimon, belong to me. (48:5)

The ten tribes who were exiled and not heard from since (see the dispute in Sanhedrin 110b-111a about whether they will return), the division of the Israelite kingdom into two, all the "forgetting" of our ancient forefather - are

but illusions. All of what we consider reality is revealed as secondary to the Divine plan - "Our father is still alive."

If we look at the text, and the text alone, this conclusion is well-nigh unavoidable. This interpretation is directly based on Yehuda's words, paraphrasing his father: "I said he was devoured and I have not seen him si." Now we see why these words caused Yosef to break down and reveal himself - for he learned for the first time that his father was deceived; his father did not reject him! Now we understand why Yosef names his son Menashe, "forgetting." Only this interpretation is free of the assumption that Yosef meticulously planned exactly what transpired, while the Torah itself presents the climax as a total surprise to all who were involved in it.

This explanation is also mandated by the historical paradigm, as it is presented in the Torah's view of Jewish history:

Is Efraim My cherished son, the child I played with, that when I speak of him, I should be reminded of him? But My insides pine for him; I will be compassionate toward him, says the Lord. (Yirmiyahu 31)

Jewish history reverberates until our times with questions of forgetfulness and dispossession (see esp. Yirmiyahu 3 and 31) - and, on the other hand, the discovery of errors and repentance.

"Twelve brothers are we" - not one is missing! If one seems missing, it is only an illusion, a tragic misconception which will, at the correct time, be revealed.

And finally, only this explanation merges with the Jewish mystical tradition, which differentiates between the revealed and the hidden, between the best-laid plans of even the purest of men and the plans of Providence, and weaves even failings and misunderstandings into the light of the Redemption, bringing all twelve tribes together at last.

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Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

date: Wed, Dec 20, 2017 at 1:33 PM

subject: Parshat Vayigash 5778 - Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

VAYIGASH

The statement of our father Jacob to the Pharaoh of Egypt that "my years of life have been few and most unpleasant" is most perplexing. We all know the well-known anecdote that one of the most disappointing things in life is to ask someone how he or she is and they actually tell you. One would've expected that Jacob would have answered the Pharaoh in a general, positive fashion.

Rashi interprets the answer of Jacob in the light of his deteriorated physical condition that he presented to the Pharaoh. He wanted Pharaoh to realize that the lines in his face were well-earned. He also wanted him to realize that the lives of even the most righteous of people and the holiest of families can also be troubled and difficult.

He was teaching the Pharaoh the great lesson that in this world good is its own reward and that it does not necessarily carry with it physical comfort and emotional serenity. He was telling the Pharaoh not to judge him or his family by the shortsighted yardstick of material success and lifelong leisure. This was his explanation of the great Jewish lesson, 'that the race is neither to the swift nor success to those who deem themselves to be wise.' The Pharaoh is accustomed to immediate reward and benefit, to royal garments and gilded chariots. Jacob informs him that that this is a false measure of life and achievement. Though Jacob lived a stormy and often tragic life, it is he who blesses the Pharaoh for he, Jacob possesses the gift of the future and of immortality.

How sad it is if a person has to look back at one's lifetime and feel that somehow life cheated him or that he deserved better! The ability to deal with the vicissitudes of life, its downs as well as its ups, in the strength of belief that everything is from the hand of our Creator, has always been the great characteristic of the Jewish people.

Jacob can look back upon the life of turbulence, disappointments and sadness and yet see for himself and his progeny greatness and immortal memory. The Pharaoh must have realized that a blessing from this old broken Jewish stranger was of enormous value to him in Egypt. Often times in history it is the unlikely and seemingly downtrodden individual who holds the key to future developments and to the correct worldview of situations and conditions.

As long as Jacob lives there will no longer be a famine that will affect Egypt. The Pharaoh must have undoubtedly realized the gift of this blessing to Egypt. But like many people who will receive blessings in this world, he seems not to be impressed sufficiently by the matter to change policies, attitudes or behavior.

But Jacob and his descendants will haunt Egyptian society for centuries until it finally will overwhelm it. This has been the lot and mission of Israel over its very long, troublesome but great history.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com>

date: Thu, Dec 21, 2017 at 9:07 AM

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27)

The First Psychotherapist

The phrase "Jewish thinker" may mean two very different things. It may mean a thinker who just happens to be Jewish by birth or descent - a Jewish physicist, for example - or it may refer to someone who has contributed specifically to Jewish thought: like Judah Halevi or Maimonides.

The interesting question is: is there a third kind of Jewish thinker, one who contributes to the universe of knowledge, but does so in a recognisably Jewish way? The answer to this is never straightforward, yet we instinctively feel that there is such a thing. To give an analogy: there is often something recognisably Jewish about a certain kind of humour. Ruth Wisse has interesting things to say about it in her book, *No Joke*. [1] So does Peter Berger in his *Redeeming Laughter*. [2] Humour is universal, but it speaks in different accents in different cultures.

I believe that something similar applies to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. So many of the early practitioners of psychoanalysis, with the marked exception of Jung, were Jewish that it became known in Nazi Germany as the "Jewish science." I have argued - though my views on this have been challenged - to the contrary, that by taking the Greek myth of Oedipus as one of his key models, Freud developed a tragic view of the human condition that is more Hellenistic than Jewish. [3]

By contrast, three of the most significant post-war psychotherapists were not merely Jewish by birth but profoundly Jewish in their approach to the human soul. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of Auschwitz, developed on the basis of his experiences there an approach he called Logotherapy, based on "man's search for meaning." [4] Though the Nazis took away almost every vestige of humanity from those they consigned to the death factories, Frankl argued that there was one thing they could never take away from their prisoners: the freedom to decide how to respond.

Aaron T. Beck was one of the founders of what is widely regarded as the most effective forms of psychotherapy: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. [5] Among patients suffering from depression, he found that their feelings were often linked to highly negative thoughts about themselves, the world and the

future. By getting them to think more realistically, he found that their mood tended to improve.

Martin Seligman is the founder of Positive Psychology, which aims not just to treat depression but actively to promote what he calls "authentic happiness" and "learned optimism." [6] Depression, Seligman argued, is often linked to pessimism, which comes from interpreting events in a particular kind of way that he calls "learned helplessness". Pessimists tend to see misfortune as permanent ("It's always like this"), personal ("It's my fault") and pervasive ("I always get things wrong"). This leaves them feeling that the bad they suffer is inevitable and beyond their control. Optimists look at things differently. For them, negative events are temporary, the result of outside factors, and exceptions rather than the rule. So, within limits, [7] you can unlearn pessimism, and the result is greater happiness, health and success.

What links all three thinkers is their belief that (1) there is always more than one possible interpretation of what happens to us, (2) we can choose between different interpretations and (3) the way we think shapes the way we feel. This gives all three a marked resemblance to a particular kind of Jewish thought, namely Chabad Chassidut, as developed by the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745-1812). The word Chabad stands for the initial letters of the three intellectual virtues, chokhmah, binah and da'at, "wisdom, understanding and knowledge," which influence the more emotional attributes of chessed, gevurah and tiferet, "kindness, self-restraint and beauty or emotional balance." Unlike the other Chassidic movements, which emphasized the emotional life, Chabad Chassidism focused on the power of the intellect to shape emotion. It was, in its way, an anticipation of cognitive behavioural therapy.

Its origins, however, lie far earlier. Last week I argued that Joseph was the first economist. This week I want to suggest that he was the first cognitive therapist. He was the first to understand the concept of reframing, that is, seeing the negative events of his life in a new way, thereby liberating himself from depression and learned helplessness.

The moment at which he does so comes when, moved by Judah's passionate plea to let Benjamin return home to their father Jacob, he finally reveals himself to his brothers:

"I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."

Note what Joseph is doing here. He is reframing events so that the brothers will not have to live under an unbearable burden of guilt for having sold Joseph as a slave and deceived their father, causing him years of undiminished grief. But he is only able to do so for them because he has already done so for himself. When it happened, we cannot be sure. Was Joseph aware, all along, that the many blows of misfortune he suffered were all part of a divine plan, or did he only realize this when he was taken from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, and then made Viceroy of Egypt?

The text is silent on this point, but it is suggestive. More than any other character in the Torah, Joseph attributes all his achievements to God. This allows him to do what, in secular terms, Frankl, Beck and Seligman would all have advised him to do if he had been one of their patients: think of a mission he was being called on to fulfill (Frankl), reinterpret misfortune as possibility (Beck) and see the positive elements of his situation (Seligman). Not only was Joseph freed from a physical prison; he freed himself from an emotional prison, namely resentment toward his brothers. He now saw his life not in terms of a family drama of sibling rivalry, but as part of a larger movement of history as shaped by Divine providence.

That is what makes me think that the work of Frankl, Beck and Seligman is Jewish in a way that Freudian psychoanalysis is not. At the heart of Judaism

is the idea of human freedom. We are not prisoners of events but active shapers of them. To be sure, we may be influenced by unconscious drives, as Freud thought, but we can rise above them by "habits of the heart" that hone and refine our personality.

Joseph's life shows that we can defeat tragedy by our ability to see our life not just as a sequence of unfair events inflicted on us by others, but also as a series of divinely intended moves, each of which brings us closer to a situation in which we can do what God wants us to do.

We can't all be Joseph, but thanks to R. Shneur Zalman of Liady in spiritual terms, and to Frankl, Beck and Seligman in secular ones, we can learn what it is to change the way we feel by changing the way we think, and the best way of doing so is to ask, "What does this bad experience enable me to do that I could not have done otherwise?" That can be life-transforming.

NOTES: 1. Ruth Wisse, *No Joke: Making Jewish Humor*, Princeton University Press, 2013. 2. Peter Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: the comic dimension of human experience*, Boston, de Gruyter, 2014. 3. There were undeniably Jewish elements in Freud's work, most notably the fact that though he himself called psychoanalysis the "speaking cure," it is in fact the "listening cure," and listening is a key feature of Jewish spirituality. 4. Frankl wrote many books, but the most famous is *Man's Search for Meaning*, one of the most influential works of the 20th century. 5. See Aaron T. Beck, *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders*, Penguin, 1989. See also his important *Prisoners of Hate: the cognitive basis of anger, hostility and violence*, HarperCollins, 1999. 6. Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, Free Press, 2002; *Learned Optimism*, Basic Books, 2008. 7. Seligman admits that there are things about us that we can't change, but there is much about us that we can. See Martin Seligman, *What you can change and what you can't*, London, Nicolas Brealey, 2007.

from: avizelefsky@ date: Fri, Jan 6, 2017 at 12:16 PM
subject: Parsha Shmooze by **Rabbi Bezael Rudinsky**
[As transcribed by Avi Zelefsky]

This week's parsha begins by stating that yehuda was anticipating war with yosef.

The blatant question is, why is yehuda preparing for war now? There were so many times where he could have gone to war! When they were accused of spying, when shimon was kept in prison, and many more places! Yosef seemed to be a very harsh ruler before. Yet, when the goblet was found in binyomin's sack and yehuda said that they will all be slaves, yosef becomes nice and says that he'll only take binyomin. The torah implies that yosef actually agreed to yehuda's request of taking everybody as prisoner, but then he changed his mind. A possible explanation for that is that we know that there is a rule that if there everybody is responsible for theft if it is done in a group, even if it was only carried out by one person. But that rule is only if the theft is for monetary benefits. But if it was stolen for a religious purpose, only the thief is obligated to pay. Yehuda said that it was a monetary theft, so they all needed to go to prison. But yosef said that it was a religious theft, because he "used that goblet for witchcraft." That was why he felt that only binyomin was chayav to stay in prison. Suddenly now, yehuda is ready to fight. Why?

Later on in the parsha, yosef gives a pair of clothing to each of his brothers, and he gives five pairs to binyomin. Why create jealousy? He was sold down to mitzrayim because of favoritism!

The gemarah in megillah answers that yosef was alluding to the future, that mordechai would walk out with five pairs of clothing from the king.

But why cause jealousy now just to allude to something in the future?

Yosef said to his brothers that they shouldn't feel bad, because Hashem sent him down to give them food for the famine, which would take place for another 5 years. This would fulfill that which he told pharaoh that the famine would last for 7 years. Yet, the famine stopped after two years when yaakov came down! What's going on? Yaakov was afraid to go down to mitzrayim. Hashem told him not to worry because He would be with yaakov, and He would bring him up. Hashem also assured yaakov not to worry because yosef would keep his eye out for yaakov.

Why would yaakov need comfort that yosef would watch him if Hashem guaranteed that He would watch him?

Yosef made the whole mitzrayim slaves to pharaoh. Why did he do that? A person can't give gifts to a goy!

In the haftorah, yechezkel tells how by the redemption there will be two sticks: one representing yehuda, and one representing yosef. What does this have to do with the geulah?

Reuven and gad went over to moshe and said that they wanted to receive land outside of Eretz yisroel. In the end, Hashem says that it is okay, and moshe says yes, but

he gives them rebuke. Then, he decides to throw in half of shevet menashe. Why throw in a shevet that never asked to leave, and why break the shevet in half?

Yosef had a mission: he needed to lead everybody in galus. His job was to establish torah, and peace between klal yisroel.

Menashe was spit because they were the bridge that connected the Jews outside of erez yisroel to the Jews inside erez yisroel. Moshe specifically chose Menashe because they were decedents of yosef, and he specifically divided them in half to connect all of the Jews.

Yosef couldn't bring down the shevatim without achdus. Yehuda was looking to have that achdus as well. So long as yosef was throwing harsh decrees at them all was good, because then they can all be together. They would all go to prison together. But when yosef was "nice" and decided to separate the brothers - that's when yehuda was willing to wage war. Yehuda saw the unity of klal yisroel as a necessity. And when yosef saw that this is how yehuda felt, he revealed who he was.

Yosef also needed to make sure that the torah was kept properly. The brisker rav explains that this is why yosef made all of mitzrayim slaves to pharaoh - he didn't want the Jewish people mixing with them. The consolation that Hashem gave to yaakov - that yosef was watching him, was saying that he was watching that the torah would be kept.

If one looks carefully at the parsha, yosef never said that the seven skinny cows ate the seven fat cows and that the seven skinny stalks ate the seven fat stalks. He never mentioned the number seven. This was to show that there was potential not to have the seven years of famine. It would be less if the torah was kept. Once yaakov came down to mitzrayim, the famine stopped.

The whole destruction of the beis hamikdash was because of hatred between klal yisroel. The sticks of yehuda and yosef show unity - what we need in order to rebuild the beis hamikdash.

If we keep the torah and we love our brothers, then moshiach will surely come.

Drasha - Parshas Vayigash Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Uneasy Questions

In most surprising ending in a Biblical saga, 11 men stood before their youngest brother, Yoseph, humiliated and threatened. Yoseph, in his role as viceroy of Egypt, had incarcerated Binyamin and left his siblings fighting him for his release. Otherwise, they would have to answer an aging father who would certainly die if Binyamin would not come home. They pleaded, begged and cajoled — then they threatened to go to war over Binyamin. Yoseph is impressed.

Suddenly he reveals himself as the brother they had sold to slavery 22 years ago. "I am Yoseph," he declares. "Is my father still alive?" The brothers stood in shock and disbelief.

Many commentaries ask why Yoseph asked a question when he knew the answer. His brothers spoke all along about their father and the anguish he would sustain lest Binyamin not be returned to him.

What message was Yoseph sending?

A man walked into the office of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn with tears flowing down his cheeks. "Rebbe," he pleaded, "I need your help. I have no means of supporting my family, and my wife has gone into severe depression as the doctors suspect one of our children may have leukemia. I am at the verge of bankruptcy and only despair looms on the horizon."

The Rebbe's sympathy was obvious. Quickly he took all the money that he had in his desk and then summoned his sexton. "Have you any cash on you?" the Rebbe asked. "I need whatever you can spare to help a Jew in trouble."

The gabbai (sexton) responded to his mentor's request and handed the sum of nearly \$2,000 to the Rebbe.

After the indigent man left the house the Gabbai innocently asked the Rebbe, "That was not for the man who just left here — or was it?"

"Surely," exclaimed the Rebbe. He has nine children, including one who may be very ill. His wife is on the verge of a breakdown and he is in a state of despair."

"Despair?" exclaimed the sexton. "Nine children? That man has two kids, a wife who shops nicely on the Avenue and makes a modest living. Things may be a little tight — but he's not at all desperate!

"You mean his wife is not ill?"

"No!"

"His child is not ill?"

"No!"

He is not even going bankrupt?"

"By no means!"

"Wonderful," the Rebbe smiled, "I could not bear to hear the pain of such terrible news. How good is it to hear that one less Jew is suffering." The next day the Rebbe called in his Gabbai and returned the \$2,000 he had borrowed from him.

In revealing himself to his brothers, Yoseph had choice words to tell them. He could have chided them, taunted them and called their misdeeds upon them. He didn't. All he wanted to know is, "How is father feeling? Is it really true that he survived the tragedy of my sale? Is he still able to come see me?"

Often when we are wronged we have opportunities to harp on the conduct of those who harmed us. In his opening revelation Yoseph didn't. He picked up the pieces. He did not choose to discuss the past deeds that were dead and gone. He just wanted to speak about the future, his father, and his destiny.

Good Shabbos!

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Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Weekly Torah Portion » Advanced » **The Guiding Light**

Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Vayigash(Genesis 44:18-47:27)

Reunions

Vayigash is characterized by a number of dramatic reunions between Joseph and his family. It is instructive to analyze the actions and attitudes of the great people who were involved in these emotional occasions. The most powerful of all the reunions was clearly that of Joseph with his father Jacob. Yaakov surely felt indescribable joy at seeing his beloved son after twenty two years of separation, having believed that Joseph was no longer alive. What did Yaakov do when he finally saw Joseph? Rashi tells us that he said the Shema.(1) Some commentaries understand that he was fulfilling one of the two daily obligatory recitations of the Shema; they discuss why he chose this point to fulfill his obligation of Shema. However, the Maharal writes that Yaakov was not fulfilling the daily obligation of Shema. Rather he was saying Shema as an expression of his great connection to God at this joyous time. Instead of focusing purely on the joy of seeing his son, he tried to direct all his happiness to love of God. He chose Shema in particular, because this represents an acknowledgement of how everything God does is ultimately for the good. Moreover, it involves kabbalat ol Malchus Shamayim,(2) which means that as a result of one's recognition of God one totally subjugates himself to God's will.(3) The most striking fact about Jacob's actions is that, even on an occasion of such great natural emotion, he strove to connect all his natural joy to Jacob and emphasize his subjugation to Jacob.

The Torah writes further that Joseph acted very differently in this same reunion. The Torah states: "Joseph harnessed his chariot and went up to meet his father, to Goshen; and he appeared to him, fell on his neck, and he wept on him excessively." (4) Rashi explains the clause, "and he appeared to him," to mean that Joseph appeared to Jacob. The Ramban asks, that these words seem superfluous - once we know that Joseph fell on Jacob's neck it is obvious that Joseph appeared to his father.(5) Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains the significance of the fact that Joseph appeared to Jacob: He notes that it is evident that Joseph himself felt great joy at the prospect of being reunited with his beloved father after so many years. However, Joseph approached this reunion with only one intent - to provide his father with as much joy as possible in being reunited with his son. Therefore, Joseph made a conscious effort to 'appear' or 'make himself seen' by his father when they met.(6) He disregarded his own desire to see his father at that moment of reunion, and his single goal was to provide his father with as much joy as possible.(7) We see from this explanation that Joseph had a very different intent from his father in this joyful reunion. Jacob focused purely on his connection with God at this time, whereas Joseph concentrated on the mitzvah of kibud av v'eim (honoring one's parents) to the greatest degree possible. The common denominator between the two was that the intent of

both was purely to do what they perceived to be God's will at this time. This shows a tremendous level of constant awareness of God and a permanent desire to do his will, even at the height of one's own natural emotions.

We learn similar lessons in this vein from the earlier reunion in the Torah Portion between Joseph and Benjamin. The Torah tells us: "Then he [Joseph] fell upon his brother, Binyamin's neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck." (8) The Rabbis tell us that the two brothers saw through ruach hakodesh (9) future calamities that would take place in their portions of land in the land of Israel: Joseph cried over the destruction of the two Temples that would be in Benjamin's portion whilst Benjamin mourned the destruction of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) of Shiloh that would be in Joseph's portion.(10)

Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman discusses why they had such a vision at this time in particular. He explains that their thoughts and emotions were constantly directed to spirituality. Thus, despite the great emotion they felt at this time, their concerns were only spiritual. Had they only been focusing on their personal feelings, they would not have merited to receive ruach hakodesh. The fact that they did receive it at this time, demonstrates their lofty thoughts even at the heights of this powerful reunion.(11) This is another example of how the righteous approach moments of great joy. There is a further lesson in how the two brothers reacted to their sad vision. It is noteworthy that they did not cry over the future destructions that would take place in their own portions, rather over the loss in the other brother's portion. This shows, that, even in the midst of receiving ruach hakodesh, the brothers maintained a very high level of selflessness and sensitivity for others.

We have seen the great righteousness of Jacob, Joseph and Benjamin, in how they conducted themselves at the height of their emotions. This demonstrates their constant sense of connecting to Go and doing His will. Whilst their level seems unattainable for us, there are a number of ways in which we can strive to emulate them in our daily lives. Indeed, Jewish law dictates that even at times of great joy, we direct our happiness to God. For example, on the occasion of the birth of a child we say the blessing of shehechyanu or hatov vehameitiv.(12) Likewise, we say one of these blessings when we acquire a new item that gives us great joy. We can also emulate the heightened sense of bein adam lechaveiro (interpersonal relations) that Joseph and Benjamin demonstrated at their reunion. Even at a time of great joy, they thought about other people more than themselves. A common example where this can be emulated is when a person is celebrating some kind of happy occasion. At such a time, one can easily become totally absorbed in his own joy and not notice other people. Yet this is an apt time to make the guests and well-wishers feel good by showing them that we are really happy to see them. This gives them a sense of importance and being appreciated. May we all merit to emulate the great personalities in the Torah, by serving God even at times of great emotion.

NOTES 1. Rashi, Bereishis, 46:29. 2. This literally means, 'acceptance of the yoke of HaShem's Kingship'. It involves total submission to HaShem's will.

3. Gur Aryeh, 46:29, os 10. 4. Bereishis, 46:29. 5. Ramban, Bereishis, 46:29.

6. The Hebrew word used in this verse is 'vayeira' which is normally translated as, 'appeared' but it can literally be read as, 'he made himself seen' - Rav Shmuelevitz seems to understand that this is how the verse should be read - that Yosef 'made himself seen' to Yaakov. 7. Sichos Mussar, Maamer 25, Parshas Vayigash, p. 105. 8. Bereishis, 45:14. 9. This is a form of prophecy. 10. Bereishis Rabbah, 93:12, Megillah, 16b. 11. Ayeles Hashachar, Bereishis, 45:14. 12. Shechyanu is said on the birth of a baby girl, and hatov hameitiv is said when a baby boy is born.