



פרשת ויגש
Parshat Vayigash

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BEING GREAT
RABBI AVI WASSER

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REBECCA ADLER ('23)

MISHAEL SOMMERS ('23)

LIZI BUGAY ('22)

ADAM DENNIS ('21)

With the opening line of this week's parsha, ויגש אליו יהודה, we are thrust into the dramatic confrontation between Yosef and Yehuda. Upon Yosef's threat to enslave Binyamin, Yehuda stands up to the Egyptian viceroy,

and there follows a clash that leads us to the climax of the saga of the sale of Yosef and his ultimate reunification with his family. From this scene, through the lens of Chazal, we gain a fascinating insight into the Torah's view of leadership.

The midrash teaches us that this confrontation between Yaakov and Yosef is the scene being alluded to in the following pesukim from Tehillim:

כִּי הִנֵּה הַמְּלָכִים נִוְעְדוּ עִבְרוּ יַחְדָּו. הֵמָּה רָאוּ כֵן תִּמְהוּ נִבְהָלוּ
נִחְפְּזוּ

“The kings were assembled, they came together. As soon

as they saw, they were astounded and frightened, they rushed away. Fear took hold of them, and they were in pain, as a woman in labor pain” (Tehillim 48:5-6).

This is a puzzling description of the scene. First, why are Yehuda and Yosef referred to as kings? Yosef is a powerful ruler, but still only a second-in-command viceroy. It is true that later on, in Parshat Vayechi, Yaakov designates Yehuda as the tribe of kingship. But at this point in time, nothing has really transpired that would designate Yehuda as a king. Why, then, are Yosef and Yehuda referred to in this way?

Also, the onlooking brothers are described as astounded and frightened, to the point of pain -- why? Does the fact that one wears a crown instantly instill such an intense fear in those around him?

Let's explore the concept of kingship or rulership. How does one achieve that status? At first glance, one might suggest it is the result of having power over others. A king is someone who commands and must be obeyed. Upon reflection, though, it could be argued that it is more than that. Many rulers throughout history have had

a lot of power but lived in fear of losing that power. They lived in a constant state of angst and isolated themselves for fear of being assassinated. Could we call such a person a king? This sounds more like the life of a prisoner! In our modern democratic system, the president and commander-in-chief is the candidate who collects the most votes, usually based on how bad he was able to make his opponent look in an ad campaign. Certainly, this does not make someone a ruler. So what makes someone a leader of the Jewish People? How does one become a *gadol ha'dor*, a leader of the generation? That status is not won by election, or war, or taken by force, like other positions of power.

Rav Yosef Leib Bloch, in *Sefer Shiurei Daas*, offers a definition of greatness: one who takes responsibility for their own actions and has power and control, not over others, but over themselves. To the degree that a person is in control of his or her many emotions and actions, to the degree that one utilizes their abilities correctly and does not let himself fall prey to every fleeting whim or desire, he is defined as great, as a *gadol*. And to the extent that people recognize this in him, they will willingly follow his lead. This person is a true ruler. This is how one becomes a king.

Yehuda and Yosef were *m'lachim al atzmam*, rulers over themselves, and are therefore referred to as kings in the pesukim in Tehillim. The midrash teaches us that Yehuda merited that his family would be the tribe of kings because he admitted to his role in the episode with Tamar. The courage and strength of character that it took for Yehuda to admit guilt, despite the opportunity to cover for himself, was the “stuff of kings,” so to speak. The midrash also teaches us that Yosef’s meteoric rise, from lowly dungeon prisoner to ruler of an empire, was in the merit of his refusal to succumb to any temptation in the house of Potiphar.

And this, Rav Bloch tells us, is what the brothers witnessed in the confrontation between Yehuda and Yosef. Not the crown or physical strength. It was the giant personalities of two men who were able to live up to such high moral standards that caused their brothers to recoil in awe.

We all strive for greatness, and sometimes that seems like a distant and elusive goal. But the truth is that greatness is achieved through making a choice, sometimes small and sometimes large, that affirms our commitment to a life of responsibility, character, and morality. And that is something we have an opportuni-

ty to do all the time.

MAN PLANS, GOD LAUGHS

REBECCA ADLER ('23)

In Parshat Vayigash, the pasuk tells us:

וַיִּפֹּל עַל צְוֹאֲרֵי בְנֵי־מִן אָחִיו וַיִּבְרַךְ וּבְנֵי־מִן בָּכָה עַל צְוֹאֲרָיו

“Yosef fell on his brother Binyamin’s necks and cried, and Binyamin cried on his neck” (Bereishit 45:14). At first glance, this is an emotional reunion between two brothers who haven’t seen each other in years. But if you take a closer look, the Hebrew grammar does not seem to be correct. וַיִּפֹּל עַל צְוֹאֲרֵי בְנֵי־מִן

literally means that Yosef fell on Binyamin’s necks, plural; what is this supposed to mean?

Rashi takes this scene and extracts a beautiful message from it. He says that Binyamin’s two necks represent the two Batei Mikdash that would be in the land of Binyamin but ultimately be destroyed -- that is what Yosef is crying about.

The Sfat Emet comments on Rashi, asking, why would Yosef be thinking about the destruction of the Batei Mikdash during such a joyous moment? He explains that Yosef recognized the root of their family problems: *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. After revealing himself, Yosef might have thought that his family was done with *sinat chinam*, but he knew that the Batei Mikdash (specifically the second one) would eventually be destroyed because of the same flaw that tore his family apart. Yosef was happy to see Binyamin, but he understood that their reunion wasn’t going to end the problem of hatred within the Jewish people. How would Yosef be able to cope with this?

Even after years of living in Egypt and not living the typical Jewish life with his family, Yosef remained true to his values. When Yosef reunited with the rest of his brothers, he said

וַעֲתָה אֵל תַּעֲצָבוּ וְאֵל יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי מִכְרַתְּם אֶתִּי הֲנֵה כִּי לְמַחֲיָה שָׁלַחֵנִי אֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵיכֶם

-- “But now do not be sad and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that God sent me before you” (Bereishit 45:5). Even living in a non-Jewish land didn’t stop his beliefs from thriving, as he recognized that Hashem had a master plan that included the horrible experiences he went through. Yosef always knew his dreams would come true because of his strong belief in Hashem, while the rest of the brothers tried selling him in the hope his dreams wouldn’t come true. We can learn from Yosef’s incredible *emunah* in Hashem that even though he knew *sinat chinam* would destroy the Beit Hamikdash,

he still recognized that Hashem knew best. Although we are in *galut* and these times are unprecedented, we need to strengthen our *emunah* in Hashem to ultimately rebuild the third Beit Hamikdash! We should be like Yosef and look at our troubles with a positive attitude because everything fits into Hashem's plan.

A DIRECT PATH

MISHAEL SOMMERS ('23)

In this week's parsha we see the moment where Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, the shevatim. He asks them if his father is alive and when he receives the good news, he sends them on their way back to Canaan to give their father food, cattle, and clothing. Before they leave Egypt, Yosef tells them:

“וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת אָחָיו וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֵל תִּרְגְּזוּ בַדֶּרֶךְ”
“And he sent off his brothers, and they went, and he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the way” (Bereishit 45:24).

The simple translation of *תִּרְגְּזוּ* is anger, frustration, but what does that mean in the context of the brothers' journey? What does it mean to us and what did it mean to the shevatim?

To answer this question we must read the commentary of Rashi, who provides two *geshmak* answers. First, Rashi explains that it means:

אל תתעסקו בדבר הלכה, שלא תרגזו עליכם הדרך
-- don't involve yourselves in matters of halacha, so that the way does not cause you to stray.” Yosef didn't want his brothers to engage in halachic discussion because maybe the road would become unsteady and they would be distracted and get lost. The second and deeper answer suggested by Rashi is:

לפי שהיו נכלמים, היה נדאג שמא יריבו בדרך על דבר מכירתו
-- because the brothers were ashamed of what they had done, Yosef feared that they might argue on the way about the sale of Yosef the Yishmaelim. One brother would say that it was the other's fault, and the other would respond that the first brother spoke lashon hara about him to make the others hate him.

The message that we can apply to our lives is to be people who are responsible and conscientious of every action we make and thereby try to avoid unwanted issues and problems in the future. May Hashem bless us to be that kind of person and help us with anything that comes our way. Shabbat Shalom.

STARTING ANEW

LIZI BUGAY ('22)

This week's parsha, Vayigash, opens with Yehuda's reaction to Binyamin being found with the viceroy's (Yosef's) silver cup in his possession. Binyamin is sentenced to servitude but Yehuda speaks up and says:

וְעַתָּה יֵשֵׁב נָא עִבְדְּךָ תַּחַת הַנְּעִר עִבְדֵי לְאֹדְנֵי וְהַנְּעִר יַעַל עִם אָחָיו. כִּי אִיךָ אֶעֱלֶה אֶל אָבִי וְהַנְּעִר אֵינְנוּ אִתִּי כֹּן אֶרְאֶה בְרַע אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אֶת אָבִי וְעַתָּה יֵשֵׁב נָא עִבְדְּךָ תַּחַת הַנְּעִר

“Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father” (Bereishit 44:33-34).

Yehuda is faced with a similar situation as years prior when he allowed his brother Yosef to be sold as a slave. However in this instance in Parshat Vayigash, he steps up in an attempt to save Binyamin. The Rambam teaches that complete teshuva is when someone is faced with the exact situation including the same desires but changes their behavior and acts morally. By stepping up to save Binyamin, Yehuda showed Yosef that he had modified his behavior and changed his ways.

Similarly, Yosef chose Binyamin to be cast into servitude because he is Yosef's full brother and a potential subject of the other brothers' jealousy. Yosef wanted to see if the brothers still harbored any ill will towards Rachel's child, Binyamin. Therefore Yosef places the brothers in a very similar position to the one he was in, to see if they would really do *teshuva gemura*. Once Yosef realized how much they had changed, he could not restrain himself and demanded that everyone in the room get out so that he could reveal his true identity to his brothers. Rashi provides an explanation as to the reason Yosef dismisses all the Egyptians from the room. He suggests that Yosef could not bear the Egyptians seeing his brothers getting shamed. Yosef, to his credit, did not want to embarrass the same brothers who treated him improperly (Bereishit 45:1). It shows tremendous character that Yosef did not hold a grudge towards any of his brothers despite the fact that they sold him into slavery!

A theme in this week's parsha is character development and maturity. Yehuda did not repeat his mistake of years past, defended his brother Binyamin, and offered to accept Binyamin's punishment. Yosef matured by not embarrassing his brothers even though he had a justifiable reason to be resentful. The initial story in Parshat Vayigash teaches us that we should learn from

our past, avoid repeating mistakes, modify our previous imprudent behavior, and never hold a grudge against others.

HATRED FOR SURVIVAL

ADAM DENNIS ('21)

When Yosef's brothers emigrated to Egypt, he gave them advice about their upcoming discussion with Pharaoh. The advice he gives is that when Pharaoh asks what their occupation is, they should tell him that they are herdsmen. Through this, they would get the land of Goshen to live in and graze their sheep on. However, although this seems nice, it would actually lead to hatred of the Jews because the Egyptians viewed sheep as gods. If Yosef knew this then, why would he advise his brothers to take this path?

A story with Dr. Asher Wade, a lecturer at Yad V'shem, the Holocaust museum in Yerushalayim, helps us understand the depth of Yosef's *etzah*. Dr. Wade happens to dress like a Chasidic Jew and has received many interesting reactions to his attire. On one such occasion, a woman looked at him angrily and said, "it's people like YOU who caused the Holocaust to happen." Her statement was based on the premise that people hate people who are different. He responded to her by asking, "tell me, where did the Nazi hatred start? In Eastern Europe where so many Jews were still strongly identifiable as Jews, or in Austria and Germany where the Jews were largely assimilated?"

Two hundred and ten years after they arrived in Egypt, at the time of Yetziat Mitzrayim, the *Yidden* were barely recognizable as a nation. They worshipped idols and were lax about performing mitzvot such as brit milah. The only thing that remained from their past was their style of dress, Hebrew language, and Jewish names.

Although Yaakov and his family came to Egypt to survive the famine, Egyptian society was not conducive to their survival as a nation. Through the advice Yosef gives, he is essentially establishing the continuation of the Jewish nation. Because the Jews were separate and looked down upon, they were able to maintain some aspects of their Yiddishkeit, and when the time to leave eventually came, they were still recognizable as Jews despite their level of practice -- and the nation was able to continue.

The 70 Jews that originally descended to Egypt were the roots of the entire nation. This 70 is opposed by another 70, the 70 nations of the world. These nations try to attack us spiritually, not just physically. Their method of attack is through assimilation. When Jews assimilate, their Judaism is put in great danger. It is through uniqueness that we stand apart and can fully dedicate ourselves to Hashem.

Yes, Yosef put his family through Egyptian hatred, but without this, there would be no Jewish nation. By maintaining their identity in those three areas, they were able to make it out of the Egyptian exile and become a nation. Otherwise, there would be no nation to take out of Egypt. Yosef's advice regarding hatred was actually all love.

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