



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Vayigash

HAMELECH

Shock of a Lifetime

As the curtain closed last week at the end of *Parashat Miktetz*, it was a most dramatizing scene. Tension filled the air. The royal goblet had been found in Binyomin's pouch and now he was under threat to be detained and kept as a slave in Egypt while his brothers were released and urged to return home. Yehudah was not letting go of his charge so easily.

With this, we begin *Parashat Vayigash*, with Yehudah approaching and pleading to the ruler of Egypt, begging for Binyomin's freedom, explaining how painful the separation would be for their father.

Yosef is backed into a corner. Perhaps he had wanted to carry on his act just a bit longer. But now he was forced to reveal himself, not before he made sure that there would be no onlookers, so as to spare his brothers from unnecessary embarrassment. He utters his famous line, "I am Yosef; is my father still alive?" and his brothers were totally flabbergasted. They were utterly speechless.

One Step Further

Our Sages wish for us to study this encounter and learn from it how to prepare for a different encounter which is in store for each one of us. Rabbi Elazar (Hagigah 4b) would cry when he arrived at this verse. He thought to himself, "If Yosef's brothers could not find their tongues upon meeting up with their long lost brother, how will we be able to handle Hashem's day of reckoning with us?!"

The Medrash says it like this. Yosef was younger than his brothers (those who were involved in his sale). Nonetheless, they could not handle his chastisement. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu will come and prove to each person where he went wrong, we surely will be unable to defend ourselves.

Why is Yosef's revelation referred to as chastisement? What reprimand lay beneath his words?

Justification

Most people view themselves as totally justified. They have reasons and explanations for everything they do. They think: No matter what questions Hashem will ask me, why I did this or didn't do that, I'll have a good, acceptable answer or excuse. I'm all set. Nothing to fear.

The truth is quite different. It behooves us to take a few moments to internalize this idea here and now, as such introspection may help to minimize the degree of agony and discomfort at the grand "showdown" each of us will have to experience, sooner or later.

Dovid Hamelech

Without deviating from our topic too much, let us discuss briefly the exchange between Natan HaNavi and Dovid Hamelech in the aftermath of Dovid's sin with Batsheva. Dovid is taken to task for having done what he did, but Hashem did not send Natan to tell Dovid off in a straightforward manner. Rather, Natan came with a story, as if anxious to know how the king would render judgment in such a scenario.



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Natan begins telling his tale of two neighbors, one rich and one poor. The rich man owns much livestock, plenty of sheep and cattle. The poor man has but one sheep, and it is dear to him as his own child.

When a visitor came to the rich man and he wished to serve him a sumptuous meal, instead of taking one of his many candidates for fresh beef, he goes ahead and usurps his poverty-stricken neighbor's one dear sheep, and puts it on the platter for his guest.

Dovid Hamelech does not let Natan finish his story. Angrily, he interjects, "That rich man deserves to die! He must pay back for the theft of that sheep quadruply!"

Natan immediately retorts, "You are that man!" and shows him how his actions reflected that of the rich man in the story. This is a prime example of "*tochachah*" – reprimand, in which the recipient is made quite aware of the extent of the atrocity he has committed.

Din and Tocheicha

In the aforementioned Midrash, Abba Kohein Bardela speaks of two concepts: *Din* and *tocheichah*. *Din* is judgment. *Tocheichah* is proof or reproof. Perhaps we would have expected *tocheichah* to precede *din*. But we see in the instance of Dovid Hamelech that he first was given to pass judgment in a similar case and only subsequently was it proven to him that he himself was guilty of a similar crime. This is a very compelling method to get a message across.

We see it in reference to Yosef and his brothers as well. As Binyomin's case was being heatedly discussed, the brothers went all out to try to

defend him and explain why he should be allowed to reunite with his father.

After this whole debate, Yosef uttered just two words which threw his brothers into a frenzy. "*Ani Yosef.*" With this, he was forcing them to revisit all that they had done to him twenty-two years prior, without taking their father's welfare into account. He was proving to them that their actions seem to contradict their words.

Who is Yosef?

For twenty-two years, the brothers lived with a false impression of their brother Yosef. Now, we must know that we are dealing with very holy people, the founding fathers of our nation. Nonetheless, there was a miscalculation, a misjudgment. The brothers truly felt that Yosef was a *rodef* (pursuer). They judged him to be a threat to their existence. His stories and his dreams seemed to indicate that he was on the path towards pushing them aside, leaving only himself to father the Chosen Nation.

There was a question as to how to deal with him. There were basically three views voiced amongst the *shevatim*. Some said to terminate his life on the spot. A second view was to throw him into the pit and let the poisonous snakes do the job. Yehudah, the leader, felt that both of those approaches were too harsh and instead he should be sold to Ishmaelites, and if he really deserves to die, the Ishmaelites can take care of that. In the end, that was the path they chose.

Then they had to contend with the issue of their father and Yosef's disappearance. The holy *shevatim* were not lowly and deceitful people, *chas veshalom*. They sat and discussed the various options and came to the conclusion that



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Yaakov Avinu would not accept their reasoning behind their actions. They felt that for the sake of unity of the family they had to relay the information in a backhanded manner and not reveal the matter of the sale. Just to show how righteous they were, it is recorded that Hashem agreed to this decision and therefore He, as well, did not reveal to Yaakov what had truly transpired. Yes, Yaakov was pained deeply at Yosef's disappearance, but from the brother's perspective, this was the only option.

Pulling Out the Carpet

Rabbi Azarya Fiju (author of *Gedulei Terumah*), in his sefer, *Binah Lelim*, makes the following startling observation.

The brothers met up with a number of challenges, yet they were able to face them all and respond. First, they were accused of espionage. They did their best to prove their innocence. Later, they discovered that the money they spent had reappeared. After the initial surprise, they came up with a plan to return it.

When they were brought to Yosef's palace to dine with him, they were also taken aback, but here too, they mustered the courage to explain themselves and apologize to the man in charge. Finally, when the "stolen" goblet was discovered, they had plenty to say, trying to get Binyomin out of trouble.

When did they throw their hands up? Only when Yosef revealed himself. Now they were face to face with their younger brother whom they had ruled to be worthy of death or severe derision. And here he was, almost on the throne, basically in charge of the entire world.

All at once, their entire *hashkafah* about him was blown to pieces. In retrospect, they, the Great *Sanhedrin*, had made a grave error, and all of the pain they had caused Yaakov and Yosef was totally unwarranted. Now, they had nothing to say for themselves. They were humiliated beyond words.

Each One of Us

We read this and shudder. But it does not end there. It is not just "them" and something way back in the past. It is "us", something very real, in our entire present and future.

Abba Bardela wants us to take this to heart. He mentioned two examples of those who were left speechless upon receiving *Tochachah*. One was Bilaam after being put in his place and proven so wrong by his own faithful donkey. And the other is all that we have said here about Yosef and the *shevatim*. What is there left to say?

What will be with us when the One and Only will take us to task for our misdeeds? Will we really have justification? We cared so much about the brand name of our clothing, the quality of our furnishings, etc. We spent hundreds of dollars on doctor appointments, specialists, medical care; gave in our car to get fixed and paid whatever price the mechanic charged, without blinking an eyelid.

But, for some reason, when it came to *mitzvot*, we got skimpy and grumpy. Why does an *etrog* have to cost so much? Can't I make do with a cheaper pair of *tefillin*?

When we "had" to travel for leisure, a special vacation, perhaps overseas, we had no problem waking up any hour of the night to catch the flight or the bus or train. But to get to *Shacharit*



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on time? *Mincha*, *Maariv*? A *shiur*? That's too hard?

We just "had" to leave *shul* early because we're running late, but minutes later, we have all the time in the world to *shmooze* about nonsense?! Something is askew in our judgment calls, and if we don't fix it soon, it will be pointed out to us when it will be most painful and embarrassing!

That we not Suffer Humiliation

Rabbi Zeira (Berachot 16b) would add a short prayer at the end of his silent *Amidah*: May it be Your will that we not sin so that we will not be embarrassed nor humiliated from our ancestors.

In Moed Katan 9b, we find that the best blessing a person can receive is not to be embarrassed in this world or the next.

Yes, we pray for this. In the blessing for the righteous "that we not be embarrassed;" in the blessing before the *Shema*, "that we not be humiliated for eternity;" in *Birkat Hamazon*, "that we not be shamed... forever and ever."

What is this "shame", "embarrassment" and "humiliation"? It is the revelation that our justifications had no real backing. They were just a façade. We are praying constantly that we merit to live lives according to Hashem's true will, not full of excuses which will be proven to be baseless.

A Grandchild is Different?

Rav Sholom Schwadron once saw a child fall, wounded. He went over to see how he could be helpful. From a distance, a woman saw Reb Sholom helping the injured child. She called out, "Don't worry. He'll be okay. *B'ezrat Hashem*, everything will work out."

As she approached, she suddenly discovered that it was her own grandchild. At that, she became frantic, screaming, "What happened?! Are you okay?! *Oy vey!* Is everything alright?!"

Now it was Reb Sholom's turn to offer words of encouragement. "Don't worry. It's not so bad. He'll be okay."

Reb Sholom concluded from this episode that people tend to be two-faced. When it's someone else's child, "*Nu, nu*. He'll be okay." But when it's mine, "*Oy vey!*"

If we really cared about every Jew, then we would express more concern when we witness or hear of other people's pain. And we would be more calm and confident when we ourselves or our loved ones need an extra dose of *tefillah* or attention.

Putting on the Right Pair of Glasses

So let us learn from the *parashah* to do our utmost to see things from the Torah's perspective of truth. Since a person is naturally subjective and not objective, this demands a great deal of discipline and thought, and consultation with the wise and sagacious. Taking counsel from *Talmidei Chachomim* and not relying on our own judgment, especially in areas where we tend to be biased, is our best bet at living "the true life" and minimizing future long-term embarrassment.

May we soon see the fulfillment of the words of the *novi* (this week's haftorah) heralding the reunion of all of our farflung brethren, with the arrival of *Moshiach* and the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*, speedily in our days.

Fondly,
Mordechai Malka