

Parsha Vayigash

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1. Being Able to Move Ahead in Life Despite Adversity

The Torah tells us that when Yosef's first son was born, **"Yosef called the name of the firstborn Manasheh for 'G-d has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household'"**, Yosef wished to express his thanks and praise to Hashem for causing him to forget his hardship so he named his firstborn Manasheh (In Hebrew `Nashani' means "caused me to forget"). In the pasuk his "father's household" refers to Yosef's brothers. Why did Yosef feel so fortunate that Hashem caused him to forget his hardship and what his brothers had done to him? One may think that it may be important to remember suffering in order to be reminded of one's fallibility and keep one humble. Yosef did not say that his suffering had ended; he merely wanted to give thanks and praise to Hashem.

Very often a person may have a negative experience that is difficult to surpass and get beyond. The lingering memory of the negative experience may be so strong and consuming that it prevents one from seeing the many blessings in one's life and is completely distracted by the thoughts of the pain of the experience. Even though the experience is in the past, it is a human tendency to remember and to feel ongoing anger and frustration from the experience. Rather than focusing on the opportunities that are present, the person is caught in the past and cannot move ahead with his life.

The incident, which Yosef experienced with his brothers, was traumatic and painful. He pleaded with his brothers as they pulled him from the pit without any compassion and sold him into slavery. Yet Yosef forgave his brothers and was able to later divorce himself from that emotional pain that his brothers caused him. He was able to overcome any feelings of hatred or anger towards his brothers and he realized that this was a great blessing, which was not typical of the human experience. Yosef recognized that Hashem helped him resolve all the negativity within himself towards his brothers and he wanted to thank and praise Hashem for this blessing. Yosef therefore named his firstborn Manasheh.

Yosef also realized that had he not been given the blessing to forget his painful past he would not have been able to focus on the opportunity in Egypt to become the Viceroy and to ultimately protect and nurture the Jewish people.

The Rambam teaches us in *Hilchos Deios* about human nature and our inherent characteristics. The Rambam speaks about how people anger easily, have insatiable desires, or can be unmoved by tragic events (to name a few characteristics). He says that a person needs to strive to be at the equidistant point from the extremes of these inherent human characteristics. This Rambam, unfortunately, is often misinterpreted to mean that a person should be a "moderate Jew" when in fact this is definitely not the meaning of the Rambam. He states that one needs to be moderate with respect to one's behavior.

Why should we strive to be moderate in our behavior as the Rambam suggests? The answer is that a person processes information based on "feelings" and "emotions". For example if a person does not want to give charity, he will (even subconsciously) fabricate endless excuses why he should not give charity. Intellectualism does not enter into the calculation and his innate character dominates the analysis. Therefore if one is able to be at the equidistant point of his behavior, then he can have the ability to be objective and process information from an intellectual point of view. If a person operates completely through his emotions, resentments, or feelings, he is not able to be a functioning and objective person.

In life we experience many situations- some are very positive and some may be very negative. We may feel hurt and persecuted but we must not allow these feelings to undermine our efforts and to de-focus from the opportunities which Hashem gives us each day. This is why Yosef gave praise and thanks to Hashem. His pain and suffering was in the past (because of Hashem's blessing of forgetfulness) and he was able to move ahead and achieve greatness.

2. 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 zt'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.

4. We Need to Follow the Right Path

We read in this week’s parsha that after Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, they became overwhelmed with shame and were unable to respond. Yosef said to his brothers, **“And now, do not be distressed, do not be angry with yourselves for having sold me here, for it was as a supporter of life that G-d sent me ahead of you.”** Yosef told his brothers not to be “distressed/depressed” and not to be “angry” with themselves, which seem to be two contradictory emotional states. The emotion of anger emanates from arrogance or a sense of “self”, while depression or distress emanates from feelings of lowliness and worthlessness.

The Ohr Ha’Chaim Ha’Kadosh explains that Yosef had overheard a conversation between his brothers in which they expressed that the reason why they were experiencing so many difficulties was because Hashem was punishing them for ignoring the pleas of Yosef. His brothers expressed, in that conversation, that they were guilty of mistreating Yosef and that they were heartless. Yosef understood that this was the source of their “distress/depression.” Recognizing that his brothers’ distress was as a result of their guilty feelings, Yosef tried to ease them by telling them “do not be distressed”. Yosef said this because they recognized the wrong they had done- which itself was a correction.

The reason why Yosef’s brothers sold him into slavery was because they believed that he was trying to undermine their relationship with Yaakov in order to position himself as the leader of the Jewish people. By selling Yosef into slavery his brothers believed that his illusions of grandeur of one day leading the Jewish people and having his brothers bow to him would never come to fruition. What actually transpired was the exact opposite their intent. Yosef was able to rise to power only because his brothers sold him into slavery. He was summoned from prison to interpret

Pharaoh's dreams and subsequently was appointed Viceroy of Egypt – functioning as the supporter and protector of the Jewish people.

The irony of the situation was that Yosef's brothers believed that they were preventing him from reaching greatness by selling him into slavery when in fact they served as a catalyst for his success. Having realized that their efforts ended in opposite results, Yosef's brothers could have easily become angry with themselves. In order to address this, Yosef told his brothers not to be angry with themselves because his success was as a result of Hashem's divine plan and not their actions. They were not the cause of Yosef's success but rather Hashem deemed that Yosef should rise to power and lead the Jewish people.

Very often in life we pursue courses of action that we believe will bring us success yet they, G-d forbid, result in disaster. On the other hand we also confront situations, which appear to be tragedies, and they ultimately lead to positive results. This is only because Hashem controls the outcome and success of our actions. We can only pursue actions that are consistent with the Torah and trust that Hashem will bring about an outcome, which is in our best interest.

The Gemara in Taanis tells us the story of Nochum Ish Gamzoo (who was Rebbe of Rabbi Akiva). Nochum Ish Gamzoo was appointed by the Rabbis of the community to go to Rome with a chest of jewels (as a gift) in order to plead for the Jewish people. While staying at an inn on the way to Rome, the innkeeper, without Nochum's knowledge, stole the jewels and replaced them with dirt.

Subsequently, he appeared in Rome in front of the Emperor to present his gift. When the Emperor discovered that the chest was filled with earth rather than jewels, he became enraged and ordered that Nochum be executed. Nochum's response was, "*Gamzoo l'tova* (It is all for the best)." However, before sending him to the gallows, the Emperor asked Nochum, whom he knew to be a wise man, why he would forfeit his life so easily by presenting a gift of dirt. Nochum explained that the dirt was special because it was the same dust used by Avraham to vanquish the four mighty kings.

Hearing this, the Emperor sent batches Nochum's dirt to his troops who were then able to easily defeat their enemies. The Emperor spared Nochum's life and gave him a chest of diamonds, gold, and jewels as payment for the "magical dirt".

When Nochum returned to the inn where he had stayed, the innkeeper, who had stolen his jewels, noticed that he had returned with new riches in place of the dirt he had placed in the chest. The innkeeper immediately took a cartload of dirt to the Emperor and told him that it was the same as Nochum's. The Emperor tried the innkeeper's dirt with no success – his troops were slaughtered in battle. As a result the Emperor executed the innkeeper.

We learn from this that "*Gamzoo L'Tova* (It is all for the best)" means that what ever happens to us is in our best interests. Even tragedies, G-d forbid, that we may confront are in fact in our best interest because we are unaware of G-d's plan. Situations that may seem to be favorable for us may, G-d forbid, end as being detrimental. We can only do the right thing and leave the rest up to Hashem.

As the Gemara tells us that Chizkeyahu Ha'Melech (The King of Judah) chose not to procreate because he had foreseen through divine inspiration that the son that he would father would truly be evil. He subsequently fell ill and was on his deathbed. Yeshaya, the prophet, told Chizkeyahu that he would not recover if he did not perform the mitzvah of procreation. Chizkeyahu informed Yeshaya of his vision of having an evil son and Yeshaya responded by saying, "You should not meddle with G-d's hidden plan." We do not have the ability to understand the will of Hashem – We can only do the right thing.

5. The Special Dimension of Yaakov

The Torah tells us that when Yehuda pleaded before Yosef (the Viceroy of Egypt) for Binyamin's release, he highlighted reasons why the Viceroy should acquiesce. Yehuda said to Yosef, **"We have an old father and a young child of [his] old age; his brother is dead, he alone is left to his mother (va'yevasayr hu l'vaado), and his father loves him"**. Yehuda stressed that Binyamin was *left alone to his mother*, which means that since his mother Rachel passed away, he was the only surviving member of her family. Why did Yehuda mention that Binyamin was *left alone to his mother*? He could have simply stated that Binyamin was the most loved child of his elderly father – what was Yehuda adding by stressing *left alone to his mother*?

Although Yehuda knew that Egypt's culture and civilization was rooted in paganism, he understood that the Viceroy was not of this belief; but rather, Yosef believed in a monotheistic being who controlled the universe. The Viceroy, at an earlier encounter (with the brothers) had expressed himself – "I fear G-d", which was an indication of his beliefs. Therefore Yehuda understood that he was addressing someone who could appreciate concepts that relate to G-dliness and consciously crafted his message accordingly.

The Torah uses the same terminology, "*left alone*" regarding Yaakov. When he was on his way to meet his brother Esav he went back across the Yaabok River to retrieve "small earthenware vessels". The Torah states in parshas Vayishlach, "And Yaakov was *left alone* and a man wrestled with him..." What is the Torah stressing when it states that Yaakov was *left alone*? The Midrash explains that just as Hashem is exalted **alone** at a level which is not comparable to anything else in existence so too is Yaakov **alone** at a level that is not comparable to anything else. As a special spiritual being, Yaakov was at a unique level.

Rabbanu Bachaya explains that there are many similarities between Yaakov and Hashem as well as similarities between Yaakov's family and the heavenly retinue of angels, which surround the Heavenly Throne of Hashem. There are seventy angels that are classified into four groups. The Torah states that there were seventy individuals who went down to Egypt- these individuals emanated from Yaakov through his four wives just as the seventy angels emanate from Hashem. Rabbanu Bachaya explains that Yaakov is the spiritual representation of Hashem in the world. From this we can understand the expression, **"he alone is left to his mother (va'yevasayr hu l'vaado), and his father loves him"**. Yaakov loved Binyamin because he was *left alone to his mother*- he was the only surviving family member of Rachel. What is the meaning of this?

The Torah tells us that when Reuvain removed Yaakov's bed from the tent of Bilha after Rachel passed away and placed it in Leah's tent – it was considered a serious sin. The Torah considered this act as if Reuvain had relations with his father's concubine! Before Yaakov passed away he reminded Reuvain of the sin which he had committed by removing the bed of his father. Subsequently Reuvain fasted and wore sackcloth for forty years to atone for this sin. Why was it considered such a grave sin to remove Yaakov's bed from one location to another?

The Chazal tell us that our Holy Patriarchs are the location of Hashem's presence on this earth which is an indication of the type of special individuals they were. Just as the Holy of Holies in the Beis Ha'Mikdash (the Temple) contained the Divine Presence (*Shechina*), so too the Patriarchs were the location of the *Shechina*. Yaakov was the most special of the Patriarchs and if he decided that his location should be in the tent of Bilha then the *Shechina* is designated to be there and not any other location.

Rachel was the true *zeevug (soulmate)* of Yaakov. Therefore Yaakov's "location" was tied to Rachel and her offspring. Yaakov was associated with Binyamin because he was Rachel's only remaining child. Yaakov's "location" was Binyamin and if that is the case, then Binyamin is the location of the *Shechina*. The Gemara tells us that the Holy Ark (the *Aron*) rested in the portion of Binyamin in the Beis Ha'mikdash. Just as Binyamin is associated with Yaakov, his father, who is the location of the *Shechina*, so too will Binyamin's portion be associated with the location of the *Aron*.

Yehuda was communicating to the Viceroy of Egypt that Yaakov was synonymous with the

Shechina and Binyamin is intimately tied to Yaakov (G-d's presence on earth). Binyamin is *alone* in the sense that he is uniquely special because he is the son of Rachel and is therefore the appropriate location of the *Shechina*. Thus, Yehuda was telling Yosef that he could not disturb the location of the Divine Presence by withholding Binyamin.

Mishkan Shilo was in the portion of Yosef for over three hundred years and he was the eldest son of Rachel. In the time of the Third Beis Ha'Mikdash (may it be rebuilt speedily in our time) the Holy Ark will again be placed in the portion of Binyamin.