

KushnerComments

Parshat Vayigash

Friday, January 6, 2017

ז תבת תשע"ז

From the Lower School

1. Which brother approached Yosef to save Binyamin?
2. What question did Yosef ask his brothers after revealing himself?
3. What did Yosef send his father so he knows he is still alive?
4. How many people from Yaakov's family came down to Mitzrayim?
5. How many years was it into the famine when Yaakov came down to Mitzrayim?

— *Rabbi David Schlusberg, HS, Judaic Faculty*
Answers can be found on the last page.

From the High School

A Lesson from Yaakov

In this week's *parsha*, we see a very emotional encounter between Yosef and his brothers. While Yosef is in Egypt serving under Par'oh, his brothers come to him in search of food during the famine. Before they leave, Yosef sticks one of his goblets in Binyamin's bag, to accuse him of stealing. Yehudah begs Yosef to spare Binyamin's life because he was the youngest child, and because his brother had died. Yosef orders everyone out of the room except for his brothers and he confesses to them who he really is. He then sends his brothers back to Eretz K'na'an to get Yaakov and bring him to

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Egypt. Initially Yaakov does not believe the brothers when they tell him that his son, whom he had previously been told had died, was alive; once he sees the wagons that Par'oh had sent to bring all of Joseph's family, however, he believes them. On his way to Egypt, Hashem comes to Yaakov in a vision to assure him that he should not worry, and that everything will be okay. The family safely arrives in Egypt, and Yaakov is finally reunited with his son. At the end of the *parsha*, it discusses the reason that Yaakov and his family should live in Goshen, and not near the other Egyptians, Egyptians thought that shepherds were an abomination because they worshiped sheep.

While reading this *parsha*, I was confused as to why Yaakov is afraid when going to visit his son. Shouldn't he be overjoyed, not nervous? In fact, this fear comes from the time of Avraham. Hashem told Avraham generations before that his descendants would be slaves. As he descends to Egypt, Yaakov worries that this is the time Hashem was referring to. He is scared that they will lose their identity as Jews and that they will just become Egyptians inside. He is nervous about the fate of Israel, the land that had been promised to him not so long ago. As such, Hashem makes sure that Yaakov does not worry, and He reassures Yaakov that his descendants will eventually return to Eretz K'na'an stronger than when they left. This apprehension says a lot about Yaakov's character. Even though he himself would not be a slave in Egypt, he is afraid for the well-being of his family and the future generations. He puts those he loves before his own feelings, a lesson that everyone can learn from.

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What a Speech!

There is a tremendous difference between a good speech and a great speech. Throughout history the world has been impacted by great speeches, not good speeches. Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address are two examples of powerful speeches that have shaped the world. A great speech doesn't just mean that it is captivating (which it must be,) but that it is informing you of a new or different perspective on something which you did not know. When Yehuda approaches Yosef, he delivers one of the greatest speeches in Tanach. We do not know when or how Yosef was planning to reveal himself to his brothers, but as Yehuda speaks, he strikes a chord with Yosef, and his speech causes Yosef to reveal himself to his brothers, seemingly prematurely. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks points out that there doesn't seem to be anything new about Yehuda's speech; he simply repeats the whole story to Yosef. What then is it about Yehuda's speech that causes Yosef to be moved by his words?

In answering this question, we might consider another question, as raised by the Ramban: The Ramban asks why, throughout Yosef's twenty-two years away from his home, does he never try to contact his father? After all, his father wasn't the one to throw him in a pit or sell him as a slave! One answer (not offered by the Ramban, but by Rav Yoel Ben-Nun) to this question is that all along, Yosef believed that his father was responsible for what his brothers did to him. This theory stems from a few pieces of circumstantial evidence. First, Yosef was originally sent to the town of Dotan by his father, who asked him to check on them. Secondly, the last recorded conversation between Yosef and his father was when Yosef revealed the second dream of that stars to him. In the dream, the sun and moon, representing Yaakov and Rachel, were bowing down to him. This really upset Yaakov, as he said

From the High School

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responded to Yosef "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Will we come, I, your mother, and your brothers to prostrate ourselves to you to the ground?" (*Bereishit* 37:10) It isn't a far stretch for Yosef to think his father ordered his brothers to get rid of him.

Yehuda's speech does not contain anything revolutionary to someone who already knows the story line, but to Yosef it was eye-opening. Yehuda reveals to Yosef that Yaakov believed that Yosef was killed by a wild animal, and was extremely saddened by these events. It was this fact that caused Yosef to become extremely emotional, and to feel compelled to reveal himself to his brothers. Within minutes of hearing Yehuda's monologue, Yosef dismisses the Egyptian guards so that he could finally reveal himself to his brothers and order them to bring their father Yaakov down to Mitzrayim immediately.

- Rabbi David Schlusberg — HS, Judaic Faculty

Answers to questions on page 1

- (1) Yehuda
- (2) Is my father still alive
- (3) Wagons
- (4) 70
- (5) 2 years

Shabbat Shalom from

JKHA/RKYHS!