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פרשת ויגש
Parshat Vayigash

Ashreinu אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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The following is an abbreviated version of a development I first heard from Rabbi Menachem Liebtag, who learned the ideas from Rav Yoel bin Nun.

Why doesn't Yosef write home to his father Yaakov?! He had plenty of opportunities. Yosef doesn't send a note home care of the original traders who brought him to Egypt; he does not use his position in Potiphar's house to send a message to Canaan; and once he becomes Tzafnat Paneach, the viceroy, he still does not send a message to his beloved father. Why not?

When you study the families of Avraham and Yitzchak, you notice that they each had a "*nidcheh*" (rejected) son and a "*nivchar*" (chosen) son. Yishmael and Esav were not the ones who ultimately carried the bracha of Avraham, the special blessing of eretz (land) and *zera* (offspring). It was only through Yitzchak and then Yaakov that the bracha of creating a people in the national homeland of Canaan/Israel would take place. Yosef had every reason to believe that what was normal was that at least one son would become *nidcheh* and, considering the rivalry between the offspring of Leah and the offspring of Rachel, he had reason to assume that the children of the first wife would inherit the father and the children of the other wives, even the boys from the beloved wife, would not be 'in line' to receive Birkat Avraham.

Furthermore, why did this father send the Dreamer on a solo reconnaissance mission to check on the brothers? In retrospect, Yosef may have suspected that his father was in on the plot! The unusual mission to check on the older brothers while they did their shepherding near Shechem was nothing other than Yaakov's contribution to disposing of the meddlesome and annoying brother who thought that one day the others would bow down to him.

It is for these reasons that Yosef ultimately seeks to detain Binyamin so that he could test the children of Leah to see if they were still of a mindset to reject the son of Rachel, or if they would protect Binyamin as one of their own. Yehuda's protestation at the opening of the parsha is part of why Yosef ends up in tears -- maybe he has been wrong all of these years, and maybe there was no plot to make him the *nidcheh* after all. Look! A son of Leah is willing to become a slave and save the life of a son of Rachel. What happened to Yosef was not part of a family plot. The establishment of Bnei Yisrael in these last parshiyot of Sefer Bereishit coincides with the end of the *nidcheh*/*nivchar* cycle. Yosef, through his two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, is repatriated back into the family of Avraham and back under the banner of the brachot of eretz and zera.

It is also important to note that each of Yishmael and Esav had twelve sons. Coincidence?! Hardly. One possible understanding of this phenomenon is that Yishmael and Eisav had the potential within them and each could have been the chosen branch. The branch of chosenness results not from brilliance, superior strength, or smashing good looks, but rather chosenness results in awesome obligation and majestic responsibility to fulfill the will of the Borei Olam through living the life of the *Am HaNivchar* in *Eretz HaNivcheret*.

If initially we judged Yosef as too proud to write to his father, we should humbly study the story from his point of view and understand the perspective that informed his decision making. In fact, this may be one of the essential lessons to draw from the three parshiyot in which Yosef does not write home. We must play the game of life by dropping our own preconceived notions of why the other players play as they do, and get into their mindset, really get into their mindset, by seeing the board from their perspective. Not only will the exercise enable us to maneuver effectively across the board, but it should make us sensitive to the values, vision, and perspectives of our fellow travelers. If we could see life through their eyes and understand the world through others' vantage points, how would it affect how we judge them? How would it affect the moves we choose to make?

Finally, even the ones who were 'rejected' have within them the potential to be chosen. Everyone who chooses an alternate pathway still has the potential to elect chosenness. That potential is there, no matter from which branch of the family you descend.

Enjoy a Shabbat Shalom, and don't forget to Wish/Text/Call your parents with a Shabbat Shalom!

Survival

Atara Keehn ('23)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayigash, Yaakov goes down to Mitzrayim with his sons during the times of exile. Through every exile that the Jewish people have experienced, it is our responsibility to look towards our ancestors to seek wisdom and advice on how to deal with the situation that we are in.

When Yaakov went down to Mitzrayim, he sent Yehuda before him to set up a yeshiva, to ensure they had a place where they could learn Torah. We see something very powerful in Yehuda's name. In Hebrew, Yehuda's name includes a *yud*, a *hey*, a *vuv*, and another *hey*, which is the name of Hashem. In Yehudah's name, there is a "daled" right in the middle of the four letters of Hashem's name. The Hebrew word *dal*, weakness, comes from the word *daled*. This teaches us that during the weakest of times, such as when we are in exile, it is most important for us to set up a place and time to learn Torah, either alone or with a partner, because through Torah learning we most deeply stay connected to God and His mitzvot. The Torah says that Yehuda was sent "Goshna", to a place called Goshen, to set up a place of learning. "Goshna" is spelled with the letters *gimmel*, *shin*, *nun*, and *hey*. These letters can stand for two things. They either stand for all the body parts that make up a Jewish person: *guf* -- the body, *sechel* -- the mind, *neshama* -- the soul, and *hakoach bakol* -- the all-inclusive force. This means to say that all of these things make up a Jewish person. Jewish people should be protected through Torah.

The second thing these letters stand for are the dreidel that we just spun on Chanukah: *gimmel*, *shin*, *nun*, and *hey*. When we spin the dreidel, we are reminded of our connection to Hashem. We feel the little bolt of extra light He is giving us to sustain

us through this exile.

Highest Honor

Elisha Marcus ('23)

Parshat Vayigash starts with Yehuda approaching Yosef in order to protect his younger brother, Binyamin. Yosef tells Yehuda to go home but Yehuda tells Yosef that:

וְעַתָּה כְּבֹאִי אֶל עַבְדְּךָ אָבִי וְהַנַּעַר אֵינֶנּוּ אִתָּנוּ וְנַפְשׁוֹ

"And now, if I come to your servant, my father, and the youth is not with us — since his soul is so bound with his soul" (Bereishit 43:30).

The gemara (Sotah 13b) points out that Yosef was referred to as "bones" even while alive because he remained silent when Yehudah said עַבְדְּךָ אָבִי -- " your servant my father". Additionally, Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 39) points out that Yosef lost ten years of his life for the ten times Yosef heard his brothers refer to his father as "your servant" and he did not protest.

My question is, why did Yosef get punished for remaining silent, since if he would have spoken he would have revealed his identity? One possibility is that Yosef could have spoken up and said that a person from another country is not his servant without revealing his identity. I think there's an alternative answer as well. Yosef should have said something because of kibud av v'em, even if it risked revealing his true identity to his brothers. It's crucial to do this even at the most challenging of times! Even when someone has something super important to do, they should still put their parents first and do what they can to help! Have a great shabbos!

Inner Cry

Bella Srugo ('24)

King Shlomo said there is a time to cry, which means there are times when it is inappropriate to cry. He also says there's a time to laugh, which means there are times when it is inappropriate to laugh. This means that there can not just be laughing and crying in the world, but other responses are needed.

This week's parsha, Vayigash, talks about Yosef's emotional reunion with his brothers and all the powerful feelings that came along with it. Even though Yosef was emotional for each of his brothers, he was the most emotional for Binyamin. This was his full brother, from whom he was separated at an extremely young age. Binyamin was also the only one who had not plotted with the other brothers against Yosef.

וַיִּפֹּל עַל צַוְּארֵי בִנְיָמִן אָחִיו וַיֵּבְךְּ וּבִנְיָמִן בָּכָה עַל צַוָּארָיו

"And he (Yosef) fell on his brother Binyamin's neck and cried, and Binyamin cried on his neck" (Bereishit 45:14).

Rashi explains that their cries are beyond emotion, and even prophetic. Yosef was crying over the Beit Hamikdash in the portion of Binyamin that was going to be destroyed in the future. Binyamin cried over the Mishkan in Shilo, in Yosef's land, that would be destroyed. But why do they cry over each other's destruction? Why not over their own?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe says that we can try to help other people with their problems, but we can't solve them. We can only offer assistance, advice, and support and even then they may not succeed. A person only holds the key to their own survival. So beyond that, all we can do is cry for them. We can pray and sympathize with them. But we can't do much beyond that. However, when it comes to our own problems, we cannot just cry and then settle—that would be giving up. If it is our own problem, we need to stand up and fix it. For others we cry and show our support, but for ourselves we must take action. And this is why Yosef and Binyamin only cried for each other's *churban*, and not their own.

My Master In Me

Benny Jaimovich ('24)

This week's parsha, Parshat Vayigash, starts off at the height of Yosef and his brothers' dramatic adventure. Yosef decides to frame his brother, Binyamin, in order to detain him as a slave. When Yehuda, who is responsible for Binyamin, tries to talk to Yosef, it leads to Yosef revealing himself to his brothers.

The Sfat Emet (Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, the spiritual leader of the Gerrer Chassidic dynasty, 19th century) explains this in a different light. Although we only understand scriptures in their ordinary meaning, there are many different levels of mean-

ing in the Torah. The Torah is like an iceberg with the plain text on the top and so much more meaning hidden under the water. He states that everything in this world contains a level of holiness, which is the divine life-force which supports it. Nothing is void of this deep internal point of devotion. The goal is to find it and join it. How do we do it? We see the way through Yehuda's approach to Yosef.

Yehudah talked to Yosef and said,
בִּי אֲדֹנִי יְדַבֶּר נָא עַבְדְּךָ דָבָר בְּאָזְנֵי אֲדֹנִי -- "Please, my master, let your servant speak a word in the ears of my master…" (Bereishit 44:18).
"Please my master" is the translation of the Hebrew words pronounced בִּי אֲדֹנִי . The words literally mean, "my master is in me", but it is a phrase commonly used as an expression of request. According to the interpretation of the Sfat Emet, it should be understood plainly, "my master is in me". Everyone has holiness from The Creator in them. Finding it depends on the amount of effort one is prepared to spend in finding it. Yehuda and his brothers were ready to take Binyamin home at any cost. It was do or die at this point. They knew they were going to take him.
At that moment, nothing else mattered more than getting back Binyamin, and the brothers were willing to give everything for it. Then Yosef revealed himself to them. At that point Yosef, who was seen as a stranger and a threat, is now seen as a brother.
When we take the perspective of Yehuda and his brothers and we abandon ourselves to finding our true selves (represented by Yosef) with determination, then it reveals itself to us, just as Yosef did to his brothers.
Our collective goal in life is to acknowledge the reality that, "my master is in me". We only see the "clothing" of the soul of the universe. The more we internalize the view, the closer we become with that reality.

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