

PARSHAS VAYIGASH

תשפ"א

One of the most difficult aspects of these last parshiyos in Sefer Bereishis is also the one most relevant to our lives. It is the interaction between Yosef and his brothers.

Yosef's behavior is very puzzling. Yosef has been running Egypt for 9 years – knowing the entire time that his father Yaakov is in deep pain and mourning over the loss of his son. Yet Yosef – such a devoted son – makes no attempt to make contact with his father and relieve him of his unnecessary suffering all these years. This requires explanation.

Yosef confronts his brothers – after withstanding unbelievable nisyonos and remaining Yosef hatzaddik. Yet he perpetrates unbelievable cruelty to his brothers – where is Yosef's tzidkus?

We saw last week that the brothers deeply believed in hashgocho protis and attributed their suffering at the hands of Yosef to their own shortcomings. It was not that they regretted condemning Yosef as a usurper or selling him to slavery. No! Nine of the brothers are still convinced that their negative assessment of Yosef was absolutely correct. They can only bring themselves to admit that they were callous and lacked compassion in dealing with Yosef as they carried out their righteous judgment against him. Reuvain says the mistake was making the decision to kill Yosef.

Yosef hears all of this and holds back any reaction. He imprisons Shimon and sends the brothers to bring Binyomin down to Egypt. He knows this will cause even more anguish to his father Yaakov.

Finally, the key point in Parshas Vayigash is when Yehudoh finishes his whole speech and pleads, "How can I go up to my father without Binyomin and see him tortured so?"

At this point, Yosef could not hold back from everything that was bearing down on him. One would say he couldn't hold back his powerful, pent-up emotions. But Rashi says differently. He explains that Yosef could not bear rebuking his brothers and risk embarrassing them in front of the Egyptians. So he has to first tell the Egyptians to leave. This is very strange. Yosef had been torturing and persecuting his brothers all this time and suddenly he is so sensitive and concerned about embarrassing them?!

To understand all this strange behavior of Yosef we have to remember the conflict that is going on between Yehudoh and Yosef regarding who is fit to be the melech.

A few parshiyos back, we read that Yehudoh was about to condemn Tomor to be burnt to death for her alleged infidelity. All Tomor says in her defense is to ask Yehudoh to recognize the items that he left with her as collateral. She doesn't just come out and say, "You are the father of this unborn child that you are killing me for!" She refuses to humiliate Yehudoh in public and leaves it completely in Yehudoh's hands to decide if he will own up to his mistake. We learn a halochoh from Tomor. It is better not to publically embarrass someone than to be thrown into a fire!

Now Yehudoh is given a choice, to admit the unborn child is from him or just ignore it and go through with the execution. For him to publically admit his mistake would mean absolute humiliation. But he doesn't care. He acknowledges he is the father and a bas kol comes out and says Yehudoh is worthy of malchus. He faces the uncomfortable truth and takes responsibility.

The brothers believed they were acting completely l'shem shomayim.

Chazal tell us they were only nine and decided to add Hashem Himself to the beis din to condemn Yosef to death! They were absolutely convinced they were right. But the posuk says they were motivated by jealousy. What is really happening?

Yosef first tells the Egyptians to leave the room before he reveals himself to his brothers. He tells them "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" This is strange. The whole time the brothers interacted with Yosef, they have been constantly referring to their father Yaakov in Canaan! Why is he asking if Yaakov is still alive?

Chazal explain that these words of tochocho by Yosef are akin to the tochocho that Hashem will give each one of us on the yom hadin. The posuk says the brothers were dumbfounded – silenced by embarrassment. What were they embarrassed about?

The Beis Halevi explains that the biggest kibbud av that Yosef could do for his father would be to inspire the brothers to do teshuvoh for selling him. He needed to bring them back to a level where they could remain the shivtei koh. He had to arrange an entire charade and pretend he was this sadistic tyrant and torture them and their father in order to bring them to do teshuvoh.

When a person gets a din in Heaven, he is judged on two levels; one is for the actions he actually did directly, and second, for all the future ramifications of that action. The posuk says that when Kayin killed Hevel, the voice of the bloods of Hevel cried out from the earth. Why 'bloods' in plural form? It is because Kayin not only killed Hevel as an individual. He also prevented all of Hevel's potential future descendants from coming into existence.

This means that the din in Heaven is ongoing – even after a person dies. Because anything that happens later which can be traced back to you did during your lifetime will keep going on your cheshbon – the good things and the bad things. This is the idea behind saying kaddish for a deceased relative. The Kiddush Hashem that a relative makes by saying kaddish is a zechus for the one who brought him into this world or deeply impacted him. This is the idea behind children fasting or making a siyum on a yahrtzeit of a parent – to bring a kapporoh for the neshomo who made an ongoing impact in their lives.

So, the greatest kibbud av that Yosef could do was to get the brothers to do teshuvoh. From the minute he became the ruler over Egypt, he realized the brothers would eventually come down and he prepared a process of teshuvoh for them. So the suffering of Yaakov was necessary for the brothers to be inspired to do teshuvoh. Through Yosef's manipulations, Yaakov made the brothers acutely aware that if he lost Binyomin as well, he would die. The brothers have to realize what they did to their father, and take responsibility for the damage they caused by selling his favorite son Yosef all those years ago.

Yehudoh pleaded with Yosef that he had put his entire olom hazeh and olom haboh on the line in his commitment to bring Binyomin back. This was in addition to the pain he couldn't bear to see Yaakov endure if he failed. He was now personally invested in Binyomin's welfare as well. Yehudoh professed to have a deep care and concern for Yaakov's well-being. Yosef told him that he was a faker. You can't claim you really care about Yaakov. After all, 22 years ago you sold me. You didn't care about its impact on Yaakov. Yaakov is still alive. So don't tell me you care about Yaakov. You only care about your own vested interests.

The brothers couldn't respond. They were completely exposed. At that

moment, they realized they have been living a lie all this time. They thought they were right. They made a beis din together with Hashem! But the truth finally came out. They were living under a false illusion of their own righteousness for 22 years. Really at the core, it was just jealousy and self-interest as the Torah testifies.

There is a yom hadin din for the aveiroh itself and there is a yom hatochocho when Hashem will listen to all our excuses and reasons why we felt we were correct and then show us how it was all a lie and a fake. So the midrash says if the brothers couldn't answer Yosef, how can we answer Hashem when we are faced with the truth?

People have great powers of rationalization. We are capable of justifying anything we do. All our aveiros are really mitzvos. We are making a Kiddush Hashem, etc. The human mind is very flexible.

Yosef got what he was after. After Yosef forced them to stand up for Binyomin for their father's sake, the brothers realized the lie they have been living for 22 years.

The story is very powerful because it tells us a lot about ourselves. There are two kinds of emes and sheker and they run in parallel to one another. If someone is brutally honest with himself, he will be brutally honest to other people. If you are capable of deceiving yourself, you will also be dishonest with other people.

We see the greatest of human beings can sometimes fall into a situation of justifying horrible behavior because they think they are acting l'shem shomayim. It is similar to the story of Chanoh and Peninoh. Peninoh had seven children and Chanoh was childless. Peninoh used to taunt Chanoh about the fact that she had so many children while Chanoh had none. She told herself that it was in order to inspire Chanoh to daven harder for children. Chazal tell us that Peninoh told herself that she was doing it l'shem shomayim. But what happened to Peninoh in the end? Every time Chanoh had another child, that same day, one of Peninoh's children died! Hashem was telling her that her l'shem shomayim calculations were all wrong.

Absolute self-honesty is very difficult to achieve. You have to be very careful. It has to go all the way down – to search the core of your motivations and find the deepest hidden agendas. It requires honesty with other people as well. Honesty is a middoh. It infiltrates every part of your being.

We learn two tremendous lessons from this story. One, you are ruining your middas ho'emes with every excuse and every fake rationalization you make. You are being dishonest with yourself.

Another lesson we learn is the biggest form of kibbud av is by growing in Torah and yiras shomayim.

If you lie to yourself, you are lying to Hashem. It is all one lie. There are different ways of living your life – honestly with yourself and other people, or sheker.

The Torah is Toras emes. It requires honesty. You will get married one day. You need to get used to having an honest relationship. Honesty is necessary to build a Jewish life together with another person and raise a family.

A person who spends his life devoted to Torah appreciates a life of emes. You can't have a portion in Torah unless you are committed to truth and stop the bluff.

Yosef put the brothers through all this torture and put Yaakov through nine years of thinking he was lost, and an extra torture of almost losing Binyomin. All of this psychological torture – why? It was for one reason. The brothers had to confront the truth and face the fact that they were living a lie. They couldn't be the shivtei koh if they didn't realize they were living a lie.

This is the biggest lesson from the parsha and the biggest lesson you will ever learn. Without the middoh of emes, you won't have normal constructive relationships with people. You won't have a healthy marriage and you won't be an effective parent. You won't have a life.