

*“I am Yosef
Is my father
still alive?”*

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Vayigash

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Binyamin’s Pain Over Yosef’s Whereabouts

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When Yosef Should Not Have Remained Silent

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Why Yaakov Was Unconsolable

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Yaakov Only Transmitted Torah of Shem V’Aver to Rochel’s Sons

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How Yosef Was Rational When Seeing His Brothers

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The Ultimate Display of Statesmanship

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1. Binyamin is accused of stealing the silver goblet of the viceroy.
2. Yehuda's response: Whoever took the goblet shall die.
3. How could he say that?
4. Lavan accused Yaakov of taking his fetishes, said whoever took the fetishes should die, understanding it was an impossibility.
5. Yaakov raised his family with exceptional level of integrity and holiness; that would be impossible.
6. Rachel took the fetishes to separate her father from idolatry.
7. Rachel, our Matriarch, passed away due to Yaakov's statement.
8. Yehuda, and his brothers, being raised by them, knew that this could not be.
9. Torah: "Yaakov was left all by himself."
10. Midrash: As it says, "G-d is exalted unto Himself," Yaakov is also unto himself.
11. Yehuda to the viceroy: "He (Binyamin) is left by himself to his mother."
12. Binyamin was the antagonist of Edom because he was the son of Rachel.

Dissipating The Trauma To Perpetuate A People

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1. Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and they were overwhelmed with shame.
2. He consoled them to not be saddened as G-d had sent him as their provider.
3. Yosef as Viceroy provided food for Egypt and all of the surrounding countries.
4. Yosef knew he was sold specifically for this purpose and prepared his family for the Egyptian exile.
5. Yosef names his first-born Menashe. G-d caused him to forget his family and strife he experienced.
6. The trauma and suffering his brothers caused was beyond repair and forgiveness.
7. If so emotionally scarred, it would have been impossible for Yosef to be a proper provider.
8. He wouldn't be selflessly dedicated without a trace of negativity towards them.
9. Yosef realized a miraculous transition began to occur: memories of his brothers' abuse faded as if it never happened.
10. To commemorate this miracle, Yosef named his son Menashe.
11. This was the basis for Yosef knowing beyond any doubt that he was sent to Egypt for this mission.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vayigash



Insensitivity in Essence is Synonymous with Cruelty

Torah: "Yosef said to them (his brothers) on the third day, '....let one of your brothers be imprisoned in your place of confinement...Then bring your youngest brother to me so your words will be verified...'" Yosef, the Viceroy of Egypt, imprisoned one of his brothers while the others went back to *Canaan* and return with *Binyamin*. At that moment, they reflected upon their tenuous predicament and said, "Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother (Yosef) inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has come upon us."

Sforno: Yosef's brothers realized at that moment that their insensitivity towards their brother's heartfelt supplications was in essence was cruelty. Although they believed that they had rendered a proper judgment concerning their brother, that he was a pursuer (*rodeif*) and deserved to be killed. He would ultimately cause

their demise through his tale bearing to their father *Yaakov*. Nevertheless, they should have had mercy on him when he pleaded not to be sold into slavery.

Because the brothers had acted cruelly towards Yosef, G-d (measure for measure) brought upon them in kind a heathen who was acting cruelly towards them by accusing them of being spies and demanding that they must bring before him *Binyamin*. If in fact their evaluation of their brother's behavior was correct and indeed he was a pursuer and consequently putting their lives in jeopardy, why are they considered to be cruel. They did not see sufficient reason to heed his supplications?

The brothers' understanding of Yosef as a "pursuer" was not that he would actually attempt to physically bring harm upon them. But rather, they were concerned that his negative tale bearing would discredit them to their father *Yaakov*, who would ultimately curse them, which is the equivalent of death. However, if they had shown mercy to their brother Yosef and had been sensitive to

his pleas, they would have merited Divine Protection that their father should always see them for what they truly were.

Rambam in Laws of Teshuvah: “If one approaches you for forgiveness with heartfelt remorse, you should forgive him. One should not be cruel towards his fellow and should be easily appeased to forgive. When one asks for forgiveness you should forgive him wholeheartedly and willingly, even if you were pained and victimized by him many times. You should not seek revenge or harbor ill feelings against him. Because this is the way of the children of Israel. One should not be cruel, but rather forgiving. However, the gentiles who are referred to by the verse as having a covering over their hearts (*arlei leiv*) they do not act in this manner. Their claim and anger remains forever...Because they are not willing to forgive, their seed is not permitted to intermingle with that of the Jew.”

Rambam in Laws of Fasting: “When one cries out to G-d for the sake of repentance and the *shofar* is blown, it will cause His Mercy to come upon the Jew and remove him from his state of difficulty and suffering. However, if one does not cry out to G-d and believes that his predicament is due to happenstance, then he is considered to be cruel. Because the individual does not have the sensitivity to understand that his suffering is from G-d, he is classified as ‘cruel.’ He will continue to do evil deeds which will bring upon him further suffering because he is unable to repent.”

Midrash: There is no nation in the world that has been able to withstand G-d’s punishments and not be destroyed, other than the Jewish people. Despite the degree of punishment and suffering the Jewish people have remained intact. This is because when G-d’s wrath comes upon the nations of the world, rather than recognize that their punishment is a consequence of their failings and evil ways, they choose to defy and rebel against Him rather than submitting to His Will. They are therefore destroyed.

In contrast, when the Jewish people are faced with suffering, they become introspective and recognize that the cause of their predicament is due to their own failing. They are thus motivated to repent and correct their ways. This is because the Jew possesses the characteristic of not being cruel and hard-hearted. Yosef’s brothers understood that they were being treated in an unreasonable and cruel manner because

they had acted similarly towards their brother Yosef. Had they shown him mercy by heeding his heartfelt pleas they would have not fallen into the clutches of the Viceroy. Thus, the issue of needing to bring their youngest brother *Binyamin* before the Viceroy would not have come about.

Meriting the Key Element for Leadership

Torah: Yosef had instructed his servant to fill his brothers’ saddlebags with grain and provisions for their return to *Canaan*. However, Yosef instructed that his personal silver goblet should be hidden within the sack of *Binyamin*. After they had departed from Egypt, Yosef had them pursued. He had accused them of stealing his goblet. After their belongings were searched, Yosef’s goblet was found in the saddlebag of *Binyamin*. The *Torah* states regarding Yosef’s brothers, “They rent their garments. Each one reloaded his donkey and they returned to the city.” Renting one’s garment is an expression of deep grieving and mourning. Why did Yosef’s brothers rent their garments? What was the source of their grieving?

Midrash: When they had rent their garments they had done so because of the fate of *Binyamin*. They believed that since the goblet was discovered in his sack, he would not be returned to their father. The irretrievable loss of *Binyamin* would destroy their father *Yaakov*, as he had said, “It is as if I lost all three on one day.”

Midrash: “After they had rent their garments, G-d had said, ‘Initially when you had sold your brother Yosef into slavery and brought your father his blood-soaked tunic you caused *Yaakov* to rent his clothing unnecessarily (because Yosef was alive), identically you shall rent your garments without proper cause (because their predicament was only a charade that was staged by Yosef). *Rav Yitzchak* says, because the brothers rent their garments for the sake of *Binyamin*, *Mordechai* will rent his garments (in the future) for the sake of the Jewish people. As it states, ‘When he became aware of the decree (to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child), he rent his garments and wore sackcloth and ash.’”

Why did *Binyamin* merit a descendant who would demonstrate his grief on behalf of the Jewish people, when it was actually the brothers who had rent their garments? *Yaakov* had been bereaved by the loss

of Yosef for many years. When his sons returned from Egypt and explained that they needed to bring *Binyamin* before the Viceroy in order to prove that they were not spies, Yaakov had said to them, "May Almighty G-d grant you mercy...that he (the Viceroy) may release to you your brother as well as *Binyamin*. As for me, as I have been bereaved so I am bereaved."

It was imperative that Yosef's brothers return with *Binyamin* safely. However, after the goblet had been discovered in his sack, they had believed that they would not be able to bring about the safe return of *Binyamin*. The pain that was going to come upon their father Yaakov was something that he would not be able to survive. When Yaakov's children rent their garments because of *Binyamin*'s predicament, it was the first time that they had truly internalized the grief and suffering of their father that he had endured during all the years of Yosef's absence. Since *Binyamin* was the catalyst through which Yosef's brothers were able to have a sense of their father's pain, his descendant *Mordechai* would have the sensitivity to internalize the calamity that had befallen the Jewish people. What was the value of being granted the ability to fully grasp and internalize the predicament of the Jewish people?

Mordechai was the leading *Torah* sage of the generation who had galvanized the Jewish people and united them in repentance. It was because of the depth of his understanding of the events that he was able to overturn the decree through his leadership and prevent the annihilation of his people and he brought about the destruction of their enemy, *Amalek*. Had *Mordechai* not been able to internalize the severity of their situation, he would have not been as effective to impact upon the masses as he had done.

Megillas Esther: *Mordechai* sat at the gate of the king wearing sackcloth and ash when he became aware of the decree to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child. Although it was inappropriate to present oneself in this state at the gate of the palace, because *Mordechai* so consumed with the impending tragedy he was oblivious to this. His only focus at that moment was the future existence of the Jewish people. Just as Yosef's brothers fully internalized the meaning of *Binyamin* not returning to their father Yaakov and thus experiencing their father's all-consuming pain, *Mordechai*, the grandson of *Binyamin* merited a similar capacity.

To Be Worthy of A Miracle

During the holiday of *Chanukah* there is a special insertion (*al haneesim*) in the *Amidah* (silent prayer). This paragraph delineates the miracles that G-d had performed on behalf of the Jewish people. The text of *al haneesim* reads, "...You (G-d) in Your great mercy stood up for them (the Jewish people) in the time of their distress...You judged their judgment...You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the wanton into the hands of the diligent students of Your *Torah*...."

Maharal of Prague in *Neir Mitzvah*: Why is the miracle of the lights of *Chanukah* not mentioned in the *al haneesim*? It seems that the focal point of *Chanukah* is the miracle of the lights as is demonstrated through the kindling of an additional light for each of the eight-days of the holiday. Yet it is only the victory over the Greeks that is mentioned in the *al haneesim* and not the miracle of the oil.

Maharal: The primary miracle of *Chanukah* was the victory over the Greeks as mentioned in the *al haneesim*. However, in order for us to appreciate that the victory was only due to Divine Intervention and not through the military prowess of the family of the *Chashmonaim* (*Yehudah HaMaccabee* and his brothers), G-d needed to bring about a the miracle of the oil, which can only be understood within the context of miracle, in order to reveal that the victory itself was also the Hand of G-d.

It is understood regarding the victory of the Jewish people over the Greeks that is mentioned in the *al haneesim* that the miracle itself was "the strong into the hands of the weak" and "the many into the hands of the few." This is because the numbers of those engaged in battle and their physical strength usually determine victory. What relevance does "the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous etc..." have to the miracle of *Chanukah*?

In order for G-d to bring about the miracle of delivering the "strong into the hands of the weak" and the "many into the hands of the few" the Jewish people needed to be worthy. He did not just bring about the victory over the Greeks because of His relationship with the Jewish people. The war was initiated by the *Chashmonaim* in order to bring about G-d's Glory. A

significant portion of the Jewish people Hellenized and assimilated into the Greek culture; however, the family of priests could not tolerate this behavior. They were thus willing to sacrifice themselves in order to put an end to the spiritual destruction of the Jewish people. It was because of the sacrifice of the pure and those involved in the study of *Torah* that G-d delivered the many into the hands of the few and the strong into the hands of the weak. It was because of the purity of the Jews who engaged in this battle that G-d delivered the enemy into their hands. Thus the *al haneesim* not only relates the miracle that had transpired on *Chanukah* it also reveals to us the basis for the miracle.

Al haneesim: “For Yourself You made a great and holy Name in Your world, and for Your people Israel you worked a great victory...” The primary value of the miraculous victory over the Greeks was the sanctification of G-d’s Name (*Kiddush Hashem*) that came about through their defeat. The Jewish people, being able to regain their sovereignty and live within the context of G-d’s *Torah*, was only a consequence of the *Kiddush Hashem*. G-d, through the victory, demonstrated the objective of existence. It is for the sake of good dominating evil, which was manifested by the pure being victorious over the impure. Those who adhere to His *Torah* will not fall into the hands of the wanton.

Throughout history it was only because of those who were willing to sacrifice for His Name that the Jewish people were allowed to survive and thrive as His people. There were times during which it was nearly impossible for a family to financially survive without the desecration of the *Shabbos*. Despite, the overwhelming difficulties and hardships, there were those who refused to succumb and desecrate the *Shabbos*. It was in the merit of their sacrifice that they merited to have descendants who are truly committed to *Torah* and its values. They have become disseminators of His Holy Word.

Weeping, an Outgrowth of Realization

Torah: After Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers they were overwhelmed.

Midrash: “When Yosef saw that they were greatly embarrassed, he said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me...’ and they came close.’ Each of his brothers then kissed Yosef and cried upon him. Just as Yosef’s brothers were appeased through weeping, so too G-d

will ultimately redeem the Jewish people when they will be in a state of crying. As the verse states, ‘They will come with tears and with great beseeching I (G-d) will lead them...’” Just as Yosef’s brothers were appeased through weeping so too will the Jewish people be ultimately redeemed in a state of crying.

Torah in Bereishis: “And the Spirit of G-d hovered upon the surface of the waters...”

Midrash: “What is the Spirit of G-d? It is the spirit of *Moshiach*. *Moshiach* will come when the Jewish people are in a state of repentance. As the verse states, ‘Your hearts will gush forth with water...’” Why is repentance synonymous with weeping? After Yosef had revealed himself to his brothers, they were overwhelmed with shame and embarrassment. They realized and understood that their hatred for him was unjust. His dreams were truly prophetic and they had seen with their own eyes that they had come to fruition. They were especially embarrassed and pained by the untold suffering that they had brought upon their brother when they had sold him into slavery. As a result of being confronted with the truth, they did not have the emotional capacity to deal with the issue at hand. They thus began to weep.

When one is overwhelmed beyond his capacity (in the positive or in the negative) it expresses itself through crying. At the end of time when truth will become obvious, the Jewish people will become overwhelmed with shame. Understanding, in retrospect, how many of their perspectives and beliefs were distortions of truth, due to their own conflicts of interest, they will be brought to a state of weeping. In addition, realizing that their behavior had been inappropriate will also cause them to cry. The state of crying will be a confirmation that the Jewish people have come upon the profundity of truth; thus realizing their failing. That realization will cause them to repent. In fact, this is foretold by the opening verses in the *Torah*, when it is stated, “And the Spirit of G-d hovered upon the surface of the waters...”

Torah, the Ultimate Elucidator

Torah: “He (*Yaakov*) sent *Yehudah* ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in *Goshen*...”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: *Yaakov* had sent *Yehudah* ahead of him to Egypt to establish a location of *Torah* study in order to prepare the way for him.

Midrash: "Reb Shimon Bar Yochai said, 'G-d said to the Jewish people, 'It is important for you to give honor to the mitzvos because the mitzvos themselves are the equivalent of My agents. And there is a principle that one's agent is the equivalent to himself. If you honor the mitzvos it is considered as if you honor Me. If you disgrace the mitzvos then it is as if you are disgracing My Honor.' There was no person who ever honored mitzvos and kept the Torah more than Yaakov. As it is stated, 'Yaakov is the perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).'"

We see from the verse cited by the *Midrash* that *Yaakov* is quantified as the man of *Torah* because he devoted his entire life to its study. However, how do we see that he gave special honor to the *mitzvos*? Simply, one could say that if an individual is willing to selflessly dedicate his entire life to *Torah* study then it is a confirmation that he reveres and esteems G-d's Will. Since *Yaakov* sacrificed and devoted his life solely to *Torah*, he must have had a special reverence for G-d.

Torah in *Vayeitzei* regarding *Yaakov*: "He encountered the place and spent the night there...and lay down in that place."

Chazal: It is inferred from this verse that it was not until then that *Yaakov*, our Patriarch had lied down to sleep. Until that moment, his level of immersion in *Torah* study was to the degree that he did not allow himself to lie down to sleep. It is because of his selfless level of dedication to the study of *Torah* that the *Midrash* states that there was no one who honored the *mitzvos* and the *Torah* more than *Yaakov*, our Patriarch. What relevance does one's dedication to *Torah* study have to do with the honoring of *mitzvos*?

Gemara in Tractate *Kiddushin*: "Great is the value of *Torah* study because it brings to action (actualization of *mitzvos*)." When one studies *Torah* properly it will motivate him to perform the *mitzvos* because there is something innate within the study of *Torah* that affects the Jew and compels him to take action. When one studies *Torah* one gains a clarity and appreciation

for His Will/*mitzvos*. Therefore, since *Yaakov* was the Patriarch who embodied and personified *Torah*, he was unique regarding esteeming and revering His *mitzvos*. It is not enough to simply engage in *Torah* study in order to gain this appreciation, one must internalize it and allow it to permeate his entire being.

Torah: The Holy Ark in the *Mishkan* was cast in pure gold both on the inside and the outside.

Gemara in Tractate *Yomah*: From this we learn that a true *Torah* Sage must be pure on his inside as well as the outside. Meaning, a *Torah* Sage's external presence must be a reflection of his internal purity and knowledge of *Torah*. The *Torah* Sage is not merely a repository of *Torah* knowledge but rather he internalizes to the core of his being and lives every moment through the application of his *Torah* wisdom. This was *Yaakov*, our Patriarch.

It is interesting to note that the holy Patriarchs observed the entire *Torah* even before it was commanded at Sinai. Why would they observe the *Torah* if it was not given to them as an obligation? Since the *Torah* is factually the Will of G-d, the Patriarchs wanted to bring Glory to G-d by adhering to His Will. It was through their adherence to the *mitzvos*, despite the fact that they were not commanded to do so, that they honored Him.

Midrash: The *mitzvos* are considered to be the agents of G-d. When one honors an agent it is the equivalent of honoring the one who created the agency. There is a classification of *mitzvos* referred to as "*Mishpatim* (laws)." These are rational laws that one could have come upon himself without being commanded by G-d. In order to form a civilized society, man could have come upon the laws prohibiting murder and stealing etc. However, if one observes these laws simply because they are rational "humanitarian" laws and not because they are the Will of G-d as communicated by Him, then one is not honoring G-d or His *Mitzvos*. It is only when one observes a *mitzvah* because it is His Will does he truly honor and esteem the Creator.



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