

PARSHAS VAYIGASH

by Shlomo Katz

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz

Vayigash
Volume 24, No. 11
9 Tevet 5770
December 26, 2009

Sponsored by
the Rutstein family
in memory of father and grandfather
Nachman ben Asher Halevi a"h (Nathan Rutstein)

Today's Learning:
Nach: Yeshayah 7-8
Taharot 3:8-4:1
O.C. 382:6-8
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 127
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Horiot 15

The Midrash Rabbah comments on the verse (45:28), "Yisrael said, 'How great! My son Yosef still lives!' -- Yaakov said, "How great is the strength of my son Yosef! How many troubles caught-up with him, yet he remained righteous, unlike me who sinned by saying (in the words of Yeshayah 40:27), 'My way is hidden from G-d' . I am certain I will share in the reward about which it says (Tehilim 31:20), 'How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You!'"

How did Yaakov know that Yosef had remained strong in his faith during all of his years in Egypt? Also, why did Yaakov expect to be rewarded for Yosef's faith? R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (Yerushalayim; 1843-1917) explains:

Commentaries ask: Why didn't Yosef write to his father during the 22 years that Yosef was in Egypt and let Yaakov know that he was alive? The answer is that Yosef did not write because he understood that what was happening to him was part of a bigger plan. He may not have understood the exact meaning of events, but he recognized that he would be interfering with history by

contacting Yaakov. Yaakov now understood Yosef's thinking and recognized that Yosef's decision required tremendous faith and a strong belief that Hashem is directing history. According to the midrash, Yaakov's own faith had not remained as strong.

In Olam Haba, a person can receive reward two ways, R' Yadler writes- -either for his own meritorious actions, or for those of his children and students. This latter form of reward is what the verse refers to when it says, "How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You!" Unlike the reward for a person's own deeds, which is finite (because he stops earning reward when he dies), the reward that a person earns for being a positive influence on others is infinite (and therefore "hidden"), for he continues to earn it as long as his positive influence continues to bear fruit. (Tiferet Zion)

"Vayigash / Yehuda approached him . . ." (44:18)

According to one interpretation in the Midrash Rabbah, "him" (or "Him") refers to Hashem. The verse is stating that Yehuda approached G-d in prayer before he confronted Yosef.

R' Elazar of Worms z"l (1160-1238) writes: When one wants to pray, he should take three steps forward, since we find the word "vayigash" / "he approached" used three times as an introduction to a prayer--once involving Avraham (Bereishit 18:23), once involving Yehuda (our verse), and once involving Eliyahu Hanavi (Melachim I 18:36).

Another reason for taking three steps forward before praying is that angels are described with the words (Yechezkel 1:7), "Their legs are a straight leg." "Legs" (i.e., 2) plus "leg" (i.e., 1) equals three. Also, the word "straight" (in Hebrew "yesharah") has the same Hebrew letters as "shirah" / "song" or "prayer." (Rokeach: Hil. Tefilah 322)

If the pasuk is informing us that us that Yehuda prayed, why does it use a pronoun ("Yehuda approached him") whose antecedent appears to be Yosef?

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (Yerushalayim; 1843-1917) explains that Yehuda approached Yosef in order to pray because prayer is more efficacious if the person praying is standing close to the person or thing about whom or which he is praying. (Tiferet Zion)

"Yisrael said, 'How great! My son Yosef still lives! I shall go and see him before I die!'" (45:28)

We say in the Pesach Haggadah that Yaakov descended to Egypt, "Anus al pi ha'dibbur" / "Coerced by the word ." R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) explains that Yaakov did not want to leave Eretz Yisrael, but he was coerced by the circumstances, since he had a burning desire to see Yosef again.

Why is this significant? R' Soloveitchik explains: Had Yaakov and his family left Eretz Yisrael voluntarily, one might have argued that they had forfeited their claim to the Land that originated from Hashem's promises made to the Patriarchs. However, generally speaking, the halachah is that an act done under coercion neither cancels nor generates obligations.

R' Soloveitchik observes that when Yaakov left Eretz Canaan for Charan, Hashem expressly promised him (28:13), "The ground upon which you are lying, I will give it to you and to your descendants." In contrast, Hashem made no such promise when Yaakov left Eretz Canaan to go to Egypt. Apparently, such a promise was not necessary, since Yaakov's trip to Egypt was involuntary. (Haggadah Shel Pesach: An Exalted Evening p.62)

"They took their livestock and their wealth which they had amassed in the land of Canaan and they came to Egypt . . ." (46:6)

Rashi z"l comments: But all that Yaakov had gotten in Padan Aram he gave to Esav as payment for Esav's share in the Me'arat Ha'machpelah. He said, "The possessions I obtained outside Eretz Yisrael are of no value to me."

The midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zuta (ch.19) relates that Yaakov and Esav divided the worlds between them--Esav took this world, and Yaakov took the World-to-Come. Later, when Esav saw that Yaakov had amassed a fortune while living with Lavan, Esav asked Yaakov, "What right do you have to enjoy this world?" Yaakov's answer (found in the midrash) has been given several interpretations. According to some, Yaakov answered that his fortune was a reward for his mitzvah observance and was not covered by their deal. Others explain that Yaakov answered that their deal permitted him to have what he needed to live. In any event, Rashi teaches that Yaakov then turned over those possessions to Esav as payment for Esav's share in the Me'arat Ha'machpelah.

R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes: However Yaakov's answer is interpreted, that "excuse" is necessary only regarding belongings from outside of Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael is Hashem's portion, and we are His flock, so Yaakov was entitled to the wealth of Eretz Yisrael. This is why Yaakov divested himself of all the belongings he had amassed in Lavan's house and turned them over to Esav. He kept for himself only those belongings he had amassed in Eretz Yisrael. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Pninei Rav Chaim Palagi p.381)

"Binyamin's sons Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Na'aman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Chuppim, and Ard." (46:21)

The Gemara (Sotah 36b) relates that each of Binyamin's ten sons was named for some aspect of the loss of Binyamin's brother, Yosef. According to the Gemara, the names "Muppim" and "Chuppim" mean: "He did not see my wedding, and I did not see his."

R' Aharon David Goldberg shlita (Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland) writes in the name of R' Chaim Shmuelevitz z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai and Yerushalayim): We learn from here that Binyamin's disappointment at not having Yosef at his wedding was as great as his disappointment at not being at Yosef's wedding. This demonstrates a very high level of empathy. Many people are capable of making another's pain their own (i.e., "I am suffering with Yosef because he suffered a tragedy and was unable to share in my simcha"). However, not so many people are capable of making another's simcha their own ("I would have been as happy to have been at Yosef's wedding as he himself was at his own wedding").

R' Goldberg continues: R' Moshe Cordevero z"l (1522-1570) writes in Tomer Devorah that one of Hashem's Attributes of Mercy is that He relates to us as if we are His relatives. We are obligated to emulate Him and to share in the suffering and the joy of others as if it was our own family suffering (G-d forbid) or rejoicing. (Ve'halachta B'drachav pp. 49-50)

Shabbat

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) writes: It is written in the Torah, "Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it. For six days you shall work . . . for in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth . . ." This informs us that Shabbat is at the foundation of our faith, because it teaches us that the world was created . Furthermore, because He created it, He is its master and we are His servants; therefore, we must obey His Will and serve Him with all our bodies, souls and property, for everything is His. The Torah warned us regarding Shabbat twelve times . Our Sages taught, "If one keeps Shabbat, it is equivalent to keeping the entire Torah, and if one desecrates Shabbat, it is equivalent to denying the entire Torah." The reason for this is as we just said, for Shabbat is at the foundation of our faith.

The Chafetz Chaim continues: One should know that the 248 positive commandments parallel the 248 major limbs and organs of the human body. Some of these limbs and organs are essential to life, while others can be damaged or missing, and a person can still live. When a person performs a mitzvah, he gives life to the corresponding body part. Some mitzvot parallel those limbs or organs that are not essential for continued life (although their loss is, of course, tragic). A person who is lacking those mitzvot will not necessarily experience spiritual death. Other mitzvot, however-- Shabbat among them--parallel the head, the heart, and other essential limbs and organs. A person who lacks Shabbat is lacking the essential force that gives life to his holy soul. (Mishnah Berurah: Intro. to Vol.3)

We recite in one of the Shabbat zemirot, "Whoever sanctifies Shabbat as befits it, whoever safeguards Shabbat properly from desecrating it, his reward is exceedingly great in accordance with his deed." R' Mattisyahu Solomon shlita (mashgiach ruchani of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, N.J.) observes that there are two types of Shabbat observance mentioned here. One is not

desecrating Shabbat. This is itself a great accomplishment considering the number and complexity of the laws of Shabbat. But that is only the beginning. Above that is one who sanctifies Shabbat as befits it. Each person will be rewarded in accordance with his deed. (Matnat Chaim)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is \$36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.