

GUARANTORS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayigash

Guarantors

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King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (6:1-3), "My child, if you have been a guarantor for your friend, if you have given your handshake to a stranger, you have been trapped by the words of your mouth, snared by the words of your mouth--do this, therefore, my child, and be rescued, for you have come into your fellow's hand: Go humble yourself [before him] and let your fellow be your superior." R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv (Spain; early 14th century) writes that these verses, like much of the book of Mishlei, can be interpreted on multiple levels.

On the simplest level, these verses teach that a person should be careful with his words in order that he not get himself into unpleasant situations. If he has gotten himself into a difficult predicament, he should do his best to extricate himself. Being a guarantor is an example of a situation to be avoided, writes R' ibn Shuiv.

He continues: Yaakov's son, Yehuda, was not careful with his words and became a guarantor for his brother Binyamin. Thus we read at the beginning of our parashah how Yehuda tried to extricate himself from his predicament. As King Shlomo suggests, Yehuda humbled himself before the Egyptian viceroy, who, unbeknownst to Yehuda, was Yosef. However, our Sages say that Yehuda's words had a double meaning and also contained veiled threats to Yosef.

On a deeper level, writes R' ibn Shuiv, the "friend" of our verse is the yetzer ha'tov and the "stranger" of our verse is the yetzer hara. Each person is a guarantor for his yetzer ha'tov, i.e., we are supposed to ensure that our yetzer ha'tov is able to fulfill the mitzvot as is its desire. Too often, however, we give a handshake to the yetzer hara and we then must extricate ourselves. (Derashot R' Y. ibn Shuiv)

"Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him because they were alarmed by his presence." (45:3)

Midrash Rabbah states: Rabbi Abba Kohen Bardela says, "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment! Woe to us from the Day of Rebuke! Yosef was the youngest of the tribes [involved in the dispute], yet his brothers could not reply to him. When Hashem rebukes each of us, how much more so [will we be left speechless]?"

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (Yeshivat Kol Torah in Yerushalayim) asks: What is "rebuke" versus "judgment"? He explains that even more than one must fear being judged by the Heavenly Court for his misdeeds, one should fear the shame, the disappointment in himself, that he will feel when he realizes how misguided his words and deeds were. These pangs of conscience will cause man far more suffering than the actual punishment that G-d will mete out.

R' Borodiansky continues: This is what we mean when we say in the Pesach haggadah: "With great fear - this refers to the revelation of the Shechinah." When Hashem revealed His Shechinah to the Egyptians and they realized the error of their ways, this was far more fearsome than any of the Ten Plagues. (Siach Yitzchak: Geulat Mitzrayim & Shmot p.46)

"Now, do not be saddened, nor be angry, for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you." (45:5)

Commentaries ask: Yosef's words are inherently contradictory, for "sadness" is a trait of humble people, while "anger" is a trait of haughty people!

R' Shlomo Flam z"l (1740-1813; early chassidic leader, popularly known as R' Shlomo Lutzker) explains that Yosef's words were addressed to different people. To Shimon and Levi, who originally hatched the plan to kill him (see Rashi to 42:24), he said, "Do not be saddened." On the other hand, to Reuven, who had previously castigated the brothers for not accepting his advice to spare Yosef (see 42:22) and might do so again, he said, "Nor be angry." [Why? "For it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you." It was all part of His plan.] (Dibrat Shlomo)

"Therefore, tell my father of all my glory in Egypt and all that you saw." (45:13)

What did Yosef mean? Once his brothers told Yaakov of Yosef's glory in Egypt, what else was left to tell? R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (1853-1911; rabbi of Khust, Hungary) explains:

The Gemara (Megillah 29a) teaches that wherever the Jewish people were exiled, the Shechinah

went with them. Says R' Gruenwald: Even when Yosef alone went down to Egypt, the Shechinah went with him, as we read (Bereishit 39:2), "Hashem was with Yosef." When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, they saw the Shechinah with him [in exile], and they realized that the exile was about to begin. (Previously, they had not looked closely at him, for one is forbidden to gaze upon a rasha, which they presumed him to be.) Therefore Yosef told his brothers, "Tell my father of all my glory, and also tell him that you saw the Shechinah in Egypt."

In this light, we may also understand Yosef's message to his father (45:9), "Come down to me; do not stand still." Yaakov undoubtedly was afraid that moving to a land of impurity such as Egypt would mean the end of his spiritual growth. Yet man is forbidden to stop growing, as our Sages teach, "Angels are called, 'Those who stand still.' Humans are called, 'Those who walk'." Angels are already perfect; they cannot grow. Man, on the other hand, must never stand still. "Do not be afraid," Yosef said to Yaakov. "The Shechinah is here, so you will not 'stand still' if you come here."

This may explain also why Yaakov was comforted when he saw the gift of wagons that Yosef had sent (see verse 27). Wagons would later be used by the Levi'im to carry the Tabernacle - G-d's "home" - through the dessert. The wagons that Yosef sent symbolized the fact that G-d goes into exile with His people. (Arugat Ha'bosem)

"Therefore, tell my father of all my glory in Egypt and all that you saw." (45:13)

Why would Yaakov care about Yosef's glory in Egypt? R' Yosef Shaul Nathanson z"l (19th century rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) explains:

Yaakov was understandably wary of descending to Egypt, for he realized that this marked the beginning of the exile that was foretold to Avraham. What effect would the exile have on his descendants? Yaakov wondered.

Throughout the Jewish People's history, our brethren have fallen by the spiritual wayside for one of two reasons; in some cases they suffered more than they could bear and in other cases they were seduced by the riches that they amassed. Said Yosef: We are taught that "Ma'aseh avot siman la'banim" / "What befell our forefathers is an omen for their children." I experienced both extremes--humiliating slavery and fabulous glory-and I have retained my spiritual standing. Please tell this to my father to alleviate his fears. (Divrei Shaul)

"He said, 'I am the Kel -- Elokim of your father. Have no fear of descending to Egypt . . .'" (46:3)

R' Yosef Gikitila z"l (1248-1310; Spain; author of the influential work of kabbalah, Sha'arei Orah) writes: From the fact that Hashem told Yaakov not to fear, we know that he was afraid. Of what was Yaakov

afraid?

R' Giktila explains: Yaakov saw that G-d's Attribute of Strict Justice was "outstretched" opposite Yaakov's descendants when they went down to Egypt, and he saw that they would never merit leaving there by natural means. Therefore, he was terrified, and G-d had to promise him (verse 4): "I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up."

This, concludes R' Giktila, is why we say in the haggadah, "We were slaves in Egypt . . . and He took us out with a strong hand [and if He had not taken us out, we and our descendants would still be slaves to Pharaoh]." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tzofnat Paneach p.18)

"Yosef harnessed his chariot and went up to meet Yisrael his father in Goshen. He appeared before him, fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck excessively." (46:29)

Rashi z"l writes: Yaakov did not fall upon Yosef's neck, nor did he kiss him. Our Sages say that the reason was that he (Yaakov) was reciting the Shema.

R' Yerucham Halevi Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani in the Mir Yeshiva in Poland; died 1936) observes: One must be amazed at Yaakov's concentration! At this moment, he was being reunited with his long-lost son, who was now crying on his shoulder, and Yaakov was still able to focus on the words of Kriyat Shema!

R' Levovitz continues: Commentaries ask why Yosef was not reciting Kriat Shema at this moment as well, and they give various answers. The underlying assumption of their question is that, had Yosef wanted to say Kriat Shema now, he too could have put all other thoughts out of his mind and concentrated on his prayers. (Da'at Torah)

Letters from Our Sages

The letter below was written by R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (1895-1974). Reb Chatzkel, as he is popularly known, was mashgiach ruchani of the Mir yeshiva in pre-war Poland and in Shanghai, China during World War II. After the Holocaust, he lived briefly in New York and then settled in Yerushalayim. In later years, he served as mashgiach ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. This letter appears to have been written in Elul 5715 [1955] and is printed in Ohr Yechezkel - Michtavim, no. 202. We present it here in connection with our parashah's description of how Yaakov's family left Eretz Canaan, and Hashem's promise that they eventually would return.

Blessings and peace etc.; After wishing you well, and with great honor:

. . . I wanted to write to your honor [without further delay] regarding your statement that you see

danger hovering over our Holy Land, G-d forbid. Your honor should know that the people of Eretz Yisrael do not think this way, for this is our home. Why should the "maidservant" be more secure than the "mistress"? [i.e., since Eretz Yisrael is G-d's "favorite" land and the source of all blessing, it is like a noblewoman compared to all other lands, which are merely "maidservants."] I would like to write to your honor that I consider this [apparently he means the state of tension and fear in Eretz Yisrael] to be a good thing. You know the words of Ramban z"l [1194-1270]: "A person has no share in the Torah unless he believes that everything that happens to us is a miracle; nothing is nature or 'the way of the world'." [Thus, we must recognize that the events which we fear are the hand of Hashem.] When I see our holy land's population increasing and [cities] expanding every day, with more new buildings than we could have imagined, it is nearly impossible to see this and not believe [in Ramban's words]. Regarding this I say [quoting Tehilim 147:2], "The Builder of Yerushalayim is Hashem; He will gather the exiles of Yisrael." This is a source of great joy, for surely Hashem will soon have mercy on us and we will all merit seeing the salvation by Hashem speedily.

From the one who values you, Yechezkel Levenstein

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.

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