

THE PROFOUND STRUGGLE BETWEEN YEHUDAH AND YOSEF

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1013 – My Chumrah vs Your Hurt Feelings. Good Shabbos!

The beginning of Parshas Vayigash is one of the most dramatic scenes in the Torah. When everything seems lost, and the brothers seem like they are hopelessly trapped, Yehudah makes one final attempt, and tries to convince the Egyptian viceroy (who is really his brother Yosef) to let him remain as prisoner in lieu of his brother Binyomin, in whose saddlebag the viceroy's royal goblet was found.

I would like to take note of three observations regarding this opening episode of the parsha.

The first part of the parsha -- which runs until *sheni* -- is basically a "review lesson". We have heard all these arguments before in Parshas Miketz: "How can we go back to our father without Binyomin?" They had already made the offer to remain slaves in Egypt instead of Binyomin. Yet for some reason, the pasuk [verse] says that at this point, "Yosef could not endure in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, 'Remove everyone from before me!' Thus no one stood with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers." [Bereishis 45:1]. Yosef finally revealed himself to his brothers and admitted that he has been putting them through a false drama.

Several times over the years, we have discussed what happened at this point. There was no new compelling argument. Yehudah did not present a *chiddush*, and nonetheless, Yosef suddenly could no longer hold back. He simply could not take it any longer. What happened just then to cause this change?

A second point needs to be considered. When Yehudah was making his proposal to the viceroy (I will stay instead of Binyomin), Rashi elaborates on his argument: I am superior to him (Binyomin) in all matters. In other words, he told Yosef, "I am a much better hostage than my younger brother -- whether we are speaking about strength, about being able to do battle, or about being able to provide services (*l'Gevurah, u'l'Milchama, u'l'Shamesh*)." The Sifsei Chachomim wonders what the implication of "Gevurah" [strength] is. At first glance, this would appear to be redundant with the second quality Rashi enumerates -- *l'Milchama* [for doing battle].

A third observation is based on a Tosefta in Maseches Brochos. Four Tanaaim were sitting and

discussing why Yehudah deserved to be the King over the other tribes. (Yaakov blessed his fourth son, Yehudah, with the blessing of Kingship – the scepter shall not depart from Yehudah [Bereishis 49:10]). The Rabbis suggested different theories as to what merit brought Yehudah this privilege. One Tanna suggested it was because he admitted his guilt in the case of Tamar [Bereishis 38:26]. The Tosefta rejects this suggestion, as that was the only decent thing to do to avoid letting an innocent woman and her two children die. That alone should not qualify him for kingship. Another Tanna suggested that he was rewarded because it was he who suggested not killing Yosef, but rather selling him to the caravan of the Yishmaelites [Bereishis 37:26-27]. This too is rejected. Finally, the Tosefta concludes that Yehudah merited kingship because he was an "*anav*" [modest].

The Tolner Rebbe asks two questions on this Tosefta: First, where do we see that Yehudah was a modest person? Second, is humility in fact the primary criteria for a king?

To summarize, our questions are: (1) How did Yehudah's argument at the beginning of Vayigash change anything from the argument already presented at the end of Miketz? (2) What does it mean when Rashi quotes Yehudah as saying that he is superior to Binyomin L'Gevurah, u'l'Milchama, u'l'Shamesh? (3) What is the underlying message of the Tosefta, that Yehudah became the king because of his modesty?

To answer all three questions, the Tolner Rebbe invokes an interesting comment of the Sefas Emes in Parshas Vayeshev. The Sefas Emes [Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905)] cites an idea from his grandfather – the Chiddushei HaRim [Rav Yitzchak Meir Alter (1799-1866)]: What happened between the brothers and Yosef (and in particular what happened between Yehudah and Yosef) was not petty sibling rivalry. The hard feelings between them were not because the brothers thought Yosef was a tattle-tale. We are dealing here with fundamental issues about Judaism. There was a basic dispute between Yosef and his brothers as to which is the proper approach a Jew should adopt in his practice of *Yiddishkeit*.

Yosef's philosophy was to be holy and separated – only to G-d alone! (*bilti l'Hashem livado* [Shemos 22:19]). Yosef felt a person should be a loner and grow spiritually through inner contemplation, having as little interaction with the outside world as possible, because that just takes away from a person's personal growth. This is what the Torah means when it refers to Yosef as "*Nezir Echav*" [Bereishis 49:26] (which may be translated as 'the nazirite amongst his brothers'). A Nazir is really someone who is outside of society. He does not drink wine; he does not cut his hair; he does not go to funerals. He is separated. He is holy -- distinct from the rest of his peers. The philosophy of Yehudah (continues the Sefas Emes in the name of his grandfather) was to bring sanctity down to matters of this world. His philosophy was to be involved in this world, and to be involved with people. Yehuda's philosophy was encapsulated in Moshe's *bracha* to him: "To his nation You will bring him..." [Devorim 33:7] (*v'el amav tevi'enu*) – bring it to the people. This was the fundamental dispute between Yosef and Yehudah – which is the correct approach in Jewish life? Is it "Outreach" or is it "Inreach"?

In an interesting historical comment, the Sefas Emes writes that he heard from his grandfather that this very dispute between Yosef and Yehudah was an old disagreement amongst the pioneers of the Chassidic movement. Some of the founders of the movement felt that it should be an elitist movement – there should be a few dedicated Chassidim, who would be disciples of a Rebbe, extremely holy people (representing quality over quantity). Others felt that Chassidus should become a mass movement. They felt that the Rebbes should reach out and "spread the word" to attract as many people as possible to the insights of Chassidus, even though many of them would not really be holding on the spiritual level to which the Rebbes were aspiring.

The Tolner Rebbe spells out the historical details to which the Sefas Emes alludes. The dispute basically revolved around the competing philosophies of Kotzk and Ger. The Kotzker Rebbe did not want thousands of Chassidim. Kotzk was a Chassidus that was not for the faint-hearted. The Rebbe actually chased people away. When a *chossid* came to the Kotzker Rebbe and bemoaned the fact that his cow was not giving any milk (which was not an atypical problem that *Chassidim* in Eastern Europe would bring to their Rebbes) the Kotzker Rebbe replied, "Do not come to me with this problem. Go to a veterinarian. I cannot help you. I do not deal with cows." The Kotzker's clientele was not the masses -- it was limited to a very elite subset of humanity – *kedoshei elyon* [extremely holy individuals]. By the end, the Kotzker Rebbe had a very select group of disciples. Among them was the Chiddushei HaRim, who became the first Gerrer Rebbe.

Ger had thousands of Chassidim. This was a totally different approach to *Chassidus*. This dispute over which approach in spirituality to adopt is an old, old *machlokes* in Klal Yisrael. (We need not only look at Kotzk and Ger to find examples of this. There are many contemporary manifestations of this same dichotomy of approach.) It goes back to Yosef and Yehudah. Should a person be "*Nezir echav*" or should a person go with the philosophy of "*v'el amav tev'enu*."

If truth be told, the only way Yosef could have spiritually survived in Egypt was with his approach of "In-Reach". When someone is sitting in Egypt, and there is no family and no support system, he had better be able to grow spiritually within his own little cubicle. When a person is thrown into the dungeon with the dregs of society, the only way he can survive is by adopting the philosophy of "*Nezir Echav*."

This was the essence of the dispute between Yosef and his brothers, and particularly between Yosef and Yehudah. It was a philosophical battle. In this week's parsha, we are at the threshold of *Klal Yisrael's* coming down to Egypt, the threshold of the family of Yaakov Avinu becoming a nation. In order for this to happen, there must be a meeting of the minds. There must be recognition within the family that both approaches to *Yiddishkeit* are correct. Sometimes the proper approach is "*Nezir echav*" and sometimes the proper approach is "*v'el amav tevi'enu*."

A nation that is monolithic is not a great nation. When a billion Chinese held up Mao's Little Red Book and proclaimed, "This is the only way" -- that is not a nation! People are different. On the other

hand, a nation where everyone argues with everyone else, and each side insists that the other group does not know what they are talking about, is also not a nation -- certainly not a cohesive nation. In order for the Jewish people to "click" as a great nation, they had to reach a stage where each person could appreciate the philosophy and the vantage point of the other person. This is the only way *Klal Yisrael* could be created.

When did that happen? It happened when Yehudah said, "Yosef, I'm ready to be your slave." Yehudah told Yosef, "Under the circumstances, I am ready to give up my approach; I am ready to give up my philosophy of life." That is what swayed Yosef. His brother's willingness to throw in the towel and give up his own philosophy, for the sake of keeping his word to his father that Binyomin would return home safely, impressed Yosef and convinced him that the time had come to reveal himself.

This is what Rashi means by applying the term "*Gevurah*" [strength] to Yehudah. This "*Gevurah*" is not the strength of *u'l'Milchama* -- going out to battle. Rashi is referring to the *Gevurah* of "Who is the strong man (*Eizehu Gibor*)? The one who conquers his inner desires (*ha'kovesh es yitzro*) – the one who has the ability to say, "Fine, I will be the one to give in on this occasion."

The Gemara says [Yoma 69b] that after the Destruction of the first *Bais HaMikdash*, people wished to remove the words "*Ha'Kel HaGadol HaGibor v'ha'Norah*" -- which praises G-d's Awesome Might -- from the liturgy. They argued that the pagans have desecrated the *Bais HaMikdash* – where is His Strength? The *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* [Men of the Great Assembly] responded, "No. This is a manifestation of His Strength!" The fact that the Almighty can stand by, tolerate the desecration of His *Bais HaMikdash*, and not lash out at the desecrators, is the greatest manifestation of *Gevurah* [showing the Strength of His Self-Control].

This also explains what the Tosefta means when it says that Yehudah earned the role of King for his humility. To be able to "give up," a person needs to be an *anav*. A king or a leader must have that attribute – the ability to know when to compromise and give in, or even give up. He has to be able to forgo his ego, and to say that for the good of the people and for the good of the situation, I have to give in at this point. That is why Yehudah merited kingship.

When Yosef saw this expression on Yehudah's part – "Okay, right now your approach is the one we will adopt" – he was ready to reveal himself and ready to reconcile with his brothers. At this point, Yosef said, "He is right and I am right. Now we can become a unified nation." This is what changed.

If we needed further proof to this, listen to the opening words of this week's Haftorah: "Now you, son of man, take yourself one wooden tablet and write upon it, 'For Yehudah and the Children of Israel, his comrades,' and take another wooden tablet and write upon it, 'For Yosef, the wooden tablet of Ephraim, and all the Children of Israel, his comrades.' And bring close to yourself, one to the other, like a single wooden tablet, and they shall become one in your hand." [Yechezkel 37:16-17]

The prophet is describing exactly what happened over here in Parshas Vayigash. Yehudah agreed

to Yosef's approach, and Yosef acknowledged that there was a time and place for Yehudah's approach; therefore, the Children of Yaakov were able to merge into a unified people. A merging of differing philosophies creates a strong nation.

A shul should have twelve windows. Each window corresponds to one of the twelve tribes. There are twelve approaches in our nation. We are not a monolithic people. Our approaches can be merged and we can be mutually tolerant of other approaches that are found amongst our brethren. In this way, we can pray to the Almighty as a great and diversified nation. The genesis of this great nation takes place in the opening *pesukim* of Vayigash, where Yehudah yields to Yosef's approach and Yosef acknowledges the validity of the approach of his brethren.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayigash is provided below:

- # 036 - Taxing the Community
- # 078 - The Uses of Snow in Halacha
- # 127 - Baby Naming
- # 174 - Twins
- # 220 - Host Mothers in Halacha
- # 264 - The Bracha for Kings and Presidents
- # 310 - Honoring Elderly Parents
- # 354 - Honoring Grandparents
- # 398 - K'rias Shema: How Early, Interruptions, Misc.
- # 442 - The Umbrella on Shabbos
- # 486 - Grandchildren in Halacha
- # 530 - Performing a Mitzvah Personally
- # 574 - Being the Bearer of Bad Tidings
- # 618 - K'rias Shema: Fascinating Insights
- # 662 - Learning and Davening on the Road
- # 706 - Z'man K'rias Shema
- # 750 - Will I Make Z'man K'rias Shema?
- # 794 - Must I Always Stand For the Rov
- # 838 - Answering Kedusah in the Middle of K'rias Shema
- # 882 - Father or Grandfather - Whom Do You Honor?

- # 926 - It's The Thought That Counts
- # 969 - Burial In Eretz Yisroel II -- How Important Is It?
- #1013 - My Chumrah vs Your Hurt Feelings
- #1057 - Lashon Kodesh: The Uniqueness of the Hebrew Language
- #1100 - K'rias Shema: What Is The Proper Kavanah?
- #1143 - Oops! I Forgot today is a Fast Day after I Mad a Bracha on Food
- #1186 - Facts About K'rias Shema You May Not Know
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