A DIALOG THAT GOT TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayigash

> *These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 310 Honoring Elderly Parents. Good Shabbos!*

A Dialog That Got To The Heart of The Matter

"And Yehudah approached him..." [Bereishis 44:18]. Binyamin was about to become a hostage. Yehudah recognized the consequences of that eventuality, so he approached Yosef and presented what amounted to a familiar speech. The basic information relayed by Yehudah to Yosef in the opening pasukim [verses] of Parshas VaYigash is a summary of the events that transpired in Parshas Miketz.

The Medrash comments that this encounter between Yehudah and Yosef represents two Kings coming together. The two Kings were Yosef, who represented the Egyptian Monarchy, and Yehudah, who was eventually going to be the tribe of Monarchy within Israel.

Perhaps the Medrash is trying to answer the following question: what, in effect, has changed? There is nothing new in this dialog. It is not as if Yehudah suddenly presented a new argument, explaining to the Egyptian viceroy why he should not keep Binyamin as a hostage. Yosef had already heard the arguments about the old father and the stress that this would be causing him. The arguments apparently had not impressed him. What did Yehudah hope to gain by running through the same rhetoric one more time?

And yet, somehow Yehudah suddenly does "get through" to Yosef. How? What transpired over here? Rav Nissan Alpert, Zichrono Le'vracha, suggests the following insight: On all other occasions when Yehudah spoke to Yosef, the interpreter was between them. Yosef was still playing the game

that he was an Egyptian who did not understand Hebrew. Yehudah was trying to negotiate through middlemen -- like two labor negotiators representing workers and management trying to hammer out a contract agreement.

However, this time there was no negotiating. Yehudah went directly to Yosef and poured his heart out directly to him. That was the difference. On the other occasions, Yehduah spoke to Yosef like a politician or statesman. He maintained his 'cool'. He used diplomatic niceties. He said all the right things. They had "frank and candid discussions", as they media always tells us.

This time there was no intermediary. It was just Yehudah spilling his heart out to Yosef. That is what got through. When a person speaks from the heart and pours out his true feelings, it conveys a clearer message than any intermediary can possibly hope to convey.

There is a famous story that the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) once had to petition a government official on behalf of some communal need. The Chofetz Chaim was already an elderly man at the time. Since he did not speak Polish, he brought an interpreter and spoke in Yiddish. When the Chofetz Chaim finished his presentation, the interpreter was about to begin translating the Yiddish into Polish for the government official. However, the government official said, "You do not need to say anything. I understand what the man was saying and I grant his appeal."

There was no need for the government official to understand a word of Yiddish. He sensed the pain, the anguish, the sincerity, and the self- sacrifice (mesiras nefesh) that the Chofetz Chaim felt for the matter. Therefore he did not require an interpreter.

This is the difference between Yehudah's conversations with Yosef here in Parshas Vayigash and the previous conversations in Parshas Miketz. Previously, they approached it like politicians. The niceties of diplomacy and negotiating techniques did not penetrate Yosef. But now Yehudah uninhibitedly poured out his heart. Regarding this occasion, the Medrash comments that Yosef and Yehudah became like one. They became like brothers again. This time it was the real Yehudah talking and the real Yosef listening. Words that go out from the heart, enter into the heart.

Galus And Gehinnom

There is an interesting Baal HaTurim (1268-1340) in this week's Parsha. Yosef sent a message to Yaakov "G-d has made me the master of Egypt. Redah eilay [Come down to me], do not stay any longer" [Bereishis 45:9]. The Baal HaTurim says that there are only two times in the entire Tanach that the word 'Redah' [Come down] is used in this sense. The other occurrence is a reference to Nevuchadnezzar's descent to Gehinnom [Hell] [Yechezkel 32:19]. The Baal HaTurim comments that this teaches us that exile is on par with Gehinnom. Yosef's inviting Yaakov to leave Eretz Yisroel and to join him in Galus was equivalent to inviting him to Hell!

Rav Gifter (1916-2001) asked on this Ba'al HaTurim as follows. But, Yosef just finished saying that he was the ruler over all of Egypt. How could he call that the equivalent of Gehinnom? So it was exile -

but can exile get any better than that? Rav Gifter notes that from this we see that a person's attitude should be that even the best exile that could possibly exist on the planet, should be seen as Gehinnom. No matter how convenient and wonderful that Galus may be, a person must always maintain Yosef haTzadik's attitude regarding exile. If it is not Eretz Yisroel and it is Galus, then it is Gehinnom. Only if a person sincerely has such an attitude, wrote Rav Gifter, can he be enumerated amongst those who are considered "seeking anxiously the Redemption" [Shabbas 31a].

If this sounds like Zionist propaganda, I must point out another famous speech that Rav Gifter once gave. Rav Gifter said, "I am also a Zionist. I pray three times a day 'May our eyes see Your return to Zion with Mercy.'" Every Jew must be this kind of a Zionist. We are not talking a secular Zionism that is devoid of Torah and G-d. This is the true Zionism, which defines a person as one who anxiously waits the redemption. This form of Zionism is obligatory on every single Jew.

Every Jew must realize from the depths of his heart that our current existence is NOT the way it should be. Our current existence, as Yosef haTzadik calls it, is Gehinnom. The only place that a Jew can feel at home is in Eretz Yisroel. Every Jew must anxiously seek the redemption. With G-d's Help, we should see with our own eyes the speedy coming of Moshiach and the return of the Divine Presence to Zion with Mercy.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Yerushalayim.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayigash are provided below:

- Tape # 036 - Taxing the Community
- Tape # 078 - The Uses of Snow in Halacha
- Tape # 127 - Baby Naming
- Tape # 174 - Twins
- Tape # 220 - Host Mothers in Halacha
- Tape # 264 - The Bracha for Kings and Presidents
- Tape # 310 - Honoring Elderly Parents
- Tape # 354 - Honoring Grandparents
- Tape # 398 - K'rias Shma: How Early, Interruptions, Misc.
- Tape # 442 - The Umbrella on Shabbos
- Tape # 486 - Grandchildren in Halacha

- Tape # 530 - Performing a Mitzvah Personally
- Tape # 574 - Being the Bearer of Bad Tidings
- Tape # 618 - K'rias Shema: Fascinating Insights

New! Yad Yechiel Institute is on-line! Visit http://www.yadyechiel.org !For information via email, you may also write to tapes@yadyechiel.org.

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from:

Yad Yechiel Institute
PO Box 511
Owings Mills, MD 21117-0511
Call (410) 358-0416 for further information.

Also Available: Mesorah / Artscroll has published a collection of Rabbi Frand's essays. The book is entitled:

Rabbi Yissocher Frand: In Print

and is available through your local Hebrew book store or from Project Genesis, 1-410-654-1799.