

HAVING BEEN WRONG

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: Tape # 354 Honoring Grandparents. Good Shabbos!

The Great Chastisement Is Having Been Wrong

There is a Medrash in this week's parsha on the pasuk [verse] regarding Yosef breaking down and revealing his true identity to his brothers. The Torah relates that the brothers were so petrified by Yosef's 'admonishment' that they were left speechless. The Medrash comments, "woe to us from the day of judgement; woe to us from the day of chastisement." This is what it will be like for each of us on our own day of judgement. After 120 years, when we will give an accounting for our life on this earth -- this is what we will experience. We will be left speechless in the face of G-d's admonishment. The Medrash dramatically states that just as they could not answer their baby brother Yosef, we will certainly not be able to answer the admonishment of the Almighty.

The commentaries are bothered by this allusion to Yosef's admonishment of his brothers. A cursory glance at the pasuk ("I am Yosef, your brother. Is my father still alive?") does not seem to indicate a very harsh admonishment. Where is the chastisement?

I saw an interesting insight from Rav Pam (1913-2001) regarding this question. Rav Pam says that the chastisement is the words "I am Yosef." When the brothers heard the words "I am Yosef," they were taken aback. "You cannot be Yosef. Yosef was a wicked person. Yosef wanted to harm all of us. Yosef hates us. How could you be Yosef?"

They suddenly realized that if this person was Yosef, then they had it all wrong for all those years. They underestimated their brother. They did not understand who he was. They pegged him as a dreamer, a fantasizer, and a silly kid. They were totally taken aback by how wrong they were. He was not a dreamer -- he was a prophet! The brothers realized that they "blew it!" This is the biggest chastisement.

Rav Pam says that during the course of our lives we are always evaluating people. We may think that this person is "no good" and that the other person is "a nothing." When we will go up to the

World of Truth and will see the truth about all these people, we will be in for a shock. "We were all wrong. This guy is not a fool; this guy is not an evil person. This fellow is truly important - look where his seat is in Gan Eden!" This will be a great chastisement.

Rav Pam continues by explaining that on the Day of Judgement we will not only be shown who our friends really were and what our spouses and children really were, we will be shown how we were evaluated in Heaven as well. That, too, may turn out to be a great chastisement.

The Talmud [Pesachim 50a] says about the World of Truth "An upside down world, I saw. The ones who we thought were the 'big players' (elyonim) are actually 'low-lives' (tachtonim) and the people who we did not even bother giving a second look to in this world, they are the elevated ones in that world."

Heaven's Decrees Are Precise to the Second

Yosef instructed his brothers before they returned to Canaan: "Do not make strife on the road" [Bereishis 45:24]. Rashi comments on Yosef's instructions that this means "do not take big steps." What is the meaning of not taking big steps?

It is said in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe (1797-1859), of blessed memory, that Yosef was in effect telling his brothers not to "speed." Why would they want to exceed the speed limit? Obviously, because they were carrying the news back to Yaakov that Yosef was still alive. They could not call him or wire a message to him. So obviously they wanted to arrive home as soon as possible.

The Baal HaTurim cites a similar interpretation. The Baal HaTurim says that Yosef was telling them not to "walk through people's fields." They would be tempted to take shortcuts to get home quicker because they were in a rush.

Why was Yosef so insistent that they not speed or take shortcuts? The Kotzker explained that in Heaven it was decreed upon our patriarch Yaakov that he had to suffer from the terrible fate of not knowing what happened to his son for "X" amount of time. When punishment is decreed from Heaven, the punishment is not given in round numbers -- it is precise to the second.

Yaakov had to wait a specific amount of time before learning that his son was alive -- not a second more and not a second less. We are taught in Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer that when G-d decrees suffering upon a person, part of the decree is the exact moment when the suffering will begin and the exact moment when it will end. All the speeding, long strides, and running through people's fields would not help. Divine Providence would determine precisely when Yaakov would receive the good news; it would not happen a minute earlier.

Likewise, it is taught in Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer that it is decreed about every person when and where he is going to die. Many times people deal with older parents or with a sick person and must make difficult decisions regarding moving them here or there or seeking this treatment or another. [At the time when we are faced with such decisions, our involvement is proper hishtadlus, making our

effort.]

However, many times people are wracked by guilt and second-guessing afterwards -- when things do not work out as they wanted -- that they should have made another choice. Perhaps things would have worked out differently, they think.

This guilt and second-guessing is inappropriate. Every person has his time. Every person has his place. Suffering is destined to last for so long and then it is supposed to stop.

The meaning of the instruction not to take big steps is, do not meddle with Divine Providence. G-d wants things to happen in a certain way and we do not have the ability to tamper with G-d's plan. So many times we, with our limited vision, do not understand the plan. But is His Grand Plan.

When the assigned time arrived for Yaakov to find out the good news that Yosef was still alive and was ruling over the whole land of Egypt -- that was exactly when he found out, and not a second earlier.

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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:

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