

ALAS! THE THERAPEUTIC ANGUISH COULD NOT BE COMPLETED

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayigash

Alas! The Therapeutic Anguish Could Not Be Completed

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 530, Performing a Mitzvah Personally. Good Shabbos!

The narration in this week's parsha is one of the most compelling and dramatic chapters in all of Chumash. The verse says, "Now 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. He gave forth his voice in weeping. Egypt heard, and Pharaoh's household heard. And Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef, Is my father still alive?'" [Bereishis 45:1-3]

I had always gotten a sense of relief from this pasuk. "Baruch Hashem, the ordeal is over!" The drama has been going on for two weeks now. The brothers are pleading and all these traumas befell them. It is a charade. We know what is really happening and we can imagine the anguish of the brothers. They did not know why this was happening to them. The pathos stirs the heartstrings. And now, it is finally over! Baruch Hashem, Yosef could not take it any longer - neither could I! There was always the sense, that now at last the tension is broken.

The Sefas Emes has a different reaction. He understands the fact that "Yosef could not endure it any longer" as a tragedy in and of itself. If only Yosef had been able to hold out longer, the face of Jewish history would have been different. According to the Sefas Emes, we should groan a tremendous sigh when we read this pasuk "And Yosef could not endure any longer".

Why is this so? The Sefas Emes calls our attention to a pasuk just a few lines later: "Then (Yosef) fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. [Bereishis 45:14] Rashi explains why Yosef cried: He knew prophetically that the two Temples would be in the portion of the

Tribe of Binyamin in Eretz Yisrael. He cried over their (future) destruction.

Why did Yosef think about that now? What is the reason for this sudden preoccupation with tragedy, destruction, and churban? Why spoil this long-awaited reunion with his beloved full brother?

The Sefas Emes writes that Yosef thought about the churban now for a very good reason. This entire story of Yosef "toying" with his brothers and putting them through the whole charade and anguish was not out of sadism. It was not for revenge. Rather, Yosef realized that the brothers had to receive atonement (Kaparoh) for the selling of their brother. This entire two week narration was for the purpose of removing this terrible stain from the Divine Tribes. The goal of causing the personal anguish that his brothers were suffering was to save future generations of their descendants from much worse anguish as punishment for this very sin. Had he been able to hold out longer, to keep it going further, and put them through some more tragedy and suffering (as further Kaparah) - the future atonement demanded from Klal Yisrael would have been much less significant. Our "debt" for the sin of the sale of Yosef might have been totally expiated.

We read the story of the Ten Martyrs as part of our liturgy two times during the year: Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur. What is the connection? The destruction of the Temple and the exile from our Land is all because of the sin of the sale of Yosef. We are at the end of the book of Bereishis. As we have said many times, this book champions the idea of "The actions of the fathers foreshadow the actions of the children." Bereishis is the blueprint of history.

If we want to know why Jews can't get along with each other and why there is so much "hatred between brethren" it is because of the episode of the sale of Yosef. This incident had a significant impact on Jewish history. When Yosef saw his brother Binyamin and cried because of the future destructions, he was crying because he now felt that his plan for saving this fate was foiled. "I could not hold out as long as I wanted." He could not complete the prescription for therapeutic suffering that would have spared them from the later suffering. Therefore, the atonement was not complete. Therefore, future kaparah would yet come in the form of the destruction of the Temples.

The pasuk "Yosef could hold out no longer" must be a source of anguish for all of us as we read it.

The Shagas Aryeh Explains To His Congregants The Pharaoh-Yaakov Dialog

The end of the parsha, when Yosef brings his father Yaakov into Pharaoh, contains one of the strangest dialogues in all of the Torah [Bereishis 47:8-9]:

Pharaoh said to Yaakov, "How many are the days of the years of your life?"

Yaakov said to Pharaoh: "The days of the years of my sojourns have been a hundred and thirty years; few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the days of the years of the lives of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns."

Yaakov meets the most powerful man in the world and the King asks him "How old are you?" This is

a question that we stop asking when a person turns ten years old. This is usually seen as a rude question to ask an adult.

The answer is almost as strange. Yaakov does not simply state that he is 130 years old. He adds an unsolicited commentary: "few and bad have been the days of the years of my life..." Why did Yaakov say that?

I would like to relate a story in the name of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik.

The Shagas Aryeh became the Rav of the community of Metz. The Shagas Aryeh was an outstanding genius. He became the Rav when he was 70 years old. One can imagine the reaction of the community, the first time the Shagas Aryeh spoke and gave a Torah lesson: They were amazed.

On his way out, he overheard two of the community members talking. The first said to the second, "It is a shame. He is such a wonderful scholar, such a wonderful Rabbi, such a wonderful asset to our community. It is a shame - how long will he be able to be with us? (Life expectancy then was not what it was now and even today the life expectancy of a male is somewhere under 75 years old.) It is too bad that we could not have gotten him when he was 40 or 50!"

The Shagas Aryeh, upon hearing this comment quoted an insight from this week's parsha: He explained the dialog between Pharaoh and Yaakov. When Yaakov arrived in Egypt, even though they were in the midst of a famine, the famine stopped in his merit! Good times returned to Egypt. Pharaoh was thrilled with having Yaakov in Egypt. But he looked at him and saw that he was an old man.

The question "How old are you" was in effect a different question: "how many more years of boom can we expect?" Yaakov Avinu told Pharaoh not to worry: "I'm ONLY 130 years old. The reason why I look so old is because I had a difficult life, but, in fact, I am not nearly as old as the life expectancy in my family. My father and grandfather lived until way past 130!"

The Shagas Aryeh told his congregants: "I am 70 years old, but don't worry, I will be your Rabbi for the next 20 years." And so it was. He was Rabbi in Metz for 20 more years and died when he was 90 years old!

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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