

DON'T REHASH THE STORY OF MY SALE TO EGYPT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayigash

Don't Rehash The Story of My Sale To Egypt

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #574, Being the Bearer of Bad Tidings. Good Shabbos!

When Yosef sent his brothers back to Canaan to deliver the message to Yaakov that his long lost son was still alive and well in Egypt, Yosef instructed them: *"Do not quarrel on the road" (al tirgazu b'derech)* [Bereishis 45:24]. Rashi, quoting Chazal, interprets the words "al tirgazu b'derech" to mean: "do not engage in halachic discussion, so that the trip does not become a source of agitation for you."

This instruction, as interpreted by Chazal, would seem to contradict a well known and explicit Biblical pasuk referring to words of Torah: *"You shall teach them to your children and speak of them when you dwell at home and WHEN YOU WALK ON THE ROAD, when you retire and when you arise."* [From the first paragraph of Krias Shma - Devorim 6:7].

The simple and most likely correct resolution of this contradiction is that it all depends what type of learning one is engaged in. To listen to Torah tapes while traveling on the road is certainly permissible. However, getting involved in complex and demanding analysis of complicated Talmudic passages should be avoided lest one become distracted from his travels and have an accident.

However, I recently saw a homiletic interpretation in the sefer Pri Tevua:

There is never anything wrong with discussing Daf Yomi or the weekly Torah portion while traveling on the road. On the contrary, it is appropriate to have such discussions. However, in this case, Yosef was steering his brothers away from having discussion about one particular halacha. He did not want them to start re-analyzing the appropriateness of their actions regarding his sale.

When the brothers originally sold Yosef, they arrived at that course of action following extensive discussion and after having concluded that their actions were legally appropriate (halacha l'ma'aseh)! They convened a Beis Din [Jewish Court] and they ruled concerning Yosef that he had the status of a "pursuer" (rodef) who must be put away before he does them mortal harm.

The Torah teaches that following the incident where they threw Yosef into the pit, *"they sat and ate bread"* [Bereishis 37:25]. What is the import of this statement?

Our Sages tell us that when a Jewish Court deliberates on life or death matters, they must fast. They must remain fasting until they arrive at a final decision on the matter. The above referenced pasuk [verse] teaches that the brothers convened a Beis Din to decide Yosef's fate. They fasted all the while they were deliberating. It was only after they arrived at a conclusion and executed their judgment that they sat down to break their fast and have a meal of bread.

Now the brothers were reunited with Yosef in Egypt in one of the most dramatic and compelling scenes in the entire Torah when Yosef identified himself to his brothers. Yosef asked if his father is still alive. Yosef cried. The brothers cried. The brothers now saw that they were wrong. They saw that Yosef was not a rodef, but was interested in their well-being all along.

In such a situation, normal people -- 10 brothers who collectively made such a terrible mistake -- would likely start looking for scapegoats. Yosef could see all too well that as soon as they got on the road, the brothers would start pointing fingers at one another: "It was your fault!" "You're the one that said this!" "You're the one who said that!" He foresaw a great controversy amongst them all over again.

He therefore instructed them: "Don't get involved in matters of THIS halacha!" Don't review the whole matter of whether based on halacha you were right or you were wrong in throwing me into the pit or in selling me!

Yosef knew that Divine Providence (Hashgacha Pratis) directed the events as they unfolded. It would be fruitless for the brothers to try to assign blame to one another for merely being agents in carrying out the Divine Plan. Don't point fingers. It was nobody's fault here. The whole sequence of events is enveloped in mystery. Such mysteries are not to be understood by man. Don't dwell on this and do not even discuss it on the way back home!

The Beis Yisrael, the Gerer Rebbe, writes that this interpretation fits in well with Rashi's famous comment on the words *"And [Yaakov] saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived."* [Bereishis 45:27]. Rashi explains that the wagons (agalos) were a coded message to Yaakov that Yosef remembered that when they were last together, they studied the laws of the Decapitated Calf (Eglah Arufa).

What coded message Rashi is referring to? The essence of the chapter of Eglah Arufa is the unsolved mystery (lo noda). It is not known who is responsible for the murder victim found on the

road. The facts are simply not known. Yosef sent his father this very message: What happened to me is a mystery. That is why he instructed his brothers not to start arguing with one another about who was right and who was wrong. Lo Noda. The rationale remains unknown. For some reason, this is the way G-d wanted it to happen and this is how it did happen. The brothers should not feel responsible for what they did. Therefore, he told them: "don't rehash it and don't regurgitate it."

G-d Did Not Want Yaakov To Remain In Canaan

The Torah says: *"So Israel set out with all that he had and he came to Beer-Sheva where he slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak."*

"G-d spoke to Israel in night visions and He said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov' and he responded 'Here I am.' And He said 'I am the G-d - G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you there as a great nation.'" [Bereishis 46:1-3]

There is an interesting Medrash on this passage:

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: I have inquired of all the masters of Agadah in the south to explain this pasuk to me. "Why does the pasuk mention specifically that he is slaughtering sacrifices to the "G-d of his father Yitzchak" and not mention the "G-d of his father Avraham" or the "G-d of his fathers" in general?" No one could give me an answer. But when I came to the Rabbis of the Galilee and to Rabbi Yochanan in Teverya they answered me that a person must honor his father more than his grandfather.

The Medrash remains difficult. We understand that it would be inappropriate to bring a sacrifice only to the "G-d of his grandfather Avraham". But what would have been so wrong if it mentioned that he brought sacrifices to both the G-d of his father Yitzchak AND to the G-d of his grandfather, Avraham?

The following interpretation basically appears in the Sforno, but it is elaborated upon in the book Kometz HaMincha from Rav Chanoch Ehrentroy.

Yaakov Avinu is told that he should come down to Egypt because there was a famine in Canaan. Yaakov thinks to himself: This has happened in my family before. There was a famine previously in the days of my grandfather Avraham and he went down to Egypt. There was another famine in the days of my father Yitzchak and he did not go down to Egypt. He debated - what should I do? Should I do as my grandfather did and go down to Egypt or should I do as my father did and remain in Canaan?

He concluded that the best plan would be to go down to Beer Sheva where Yitzchak had built an altar. "I will go there and offer a sacrifice and try to be inspired to act as my father acted because I am more duty-bound to show honor and emulate the ways of my father than I am duty bound to show honor and emulate the ways of my grandfather."

That is why he brought a sacrifice to the "G-d of his father Yitzchak." This is what the Medrash means:

"a person is more obliged to honor his father than his grandfather."

It is in light of this interpretation that we can now fully understand the import of the third pasuk in the above quoted passage: "I am the G-d - G- d of your father." I am the One who told Yitzchak not to go down to Egypt. But to you I say: "Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

The Sforno explains the difference between why G-d did not want Yitzchak to go down to Egypt and why He wanted Yaakov to go down to Egypt: "If your children remain in Canaan, they will marry Canaanite daughters and become assimilated with them. In Egypt, this will not happen because the Egyptians detest the Hebrews -- they cannot even eat bread with them" (due to the fact that the gods of the Egyptians were sheep and the children of Yaakov were shepherds). Since the Egyptians would not break bread with them and would not socialize with them, they would not intermarry.

We see the extraordinary wisdom of Chazal from this idea. Our Sages prohibited Pas Akum [eating Gentile bread] lest it lead to intermarriage. Eating leads to socialization and socialization leads to intermarriage. If the eating is restricted, the socialization will be restricted and ultimately intermarriage and assimilation will be restricted as well.

In Egypt, where the Jews were an anathema to the population, they would not intermarry, but they would become a great nation. That is why, despite what G-d commanded Yaakov's father Yitzchak, G-d commanded Yaakov to go down to Egypt.

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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