

PARENTS LOVE CHILDREN MORE THAN CHILDREN LOVE PARENTS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayigash

Parents Love Children More Than Children Love Parents

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 750, Will I Make Z'man K'rias Shema? Good Shabbos!

The Shaloh Hakodesh writes a concept (which is also found in secular circles): One parent can take care of ten children but ten children cannot take care of one parent. The Chiddushei HaRim finds a source for this idea in this week's parsha. When Yehudah made his impassioned plea to the Viceroy in Egypt (who he did not yet realize was his brother Yosef) to release Binyamin, he made the argument -- "How can you not let him go? If his father finds out that he did not return, he will not be able to survive!" The Chiddushei HaRim points out that at that time, Binyamin had 10 children. Why did Yehudah not use the argument -- how can you not let Binyamin go, you will leave 10 orphans, they will not be able to survive without their father? Apparently, says Chiddushei HaRim, 10 children can somehow manage without a father, but a father cannot manage without one of 10 remaining sons.

This concept that a father's attachment to his children is stronger than the children's attachment to their father is the source for the Shaloh's comment and for the similar concept that circulates in the world at large.

This may be an upsetting idea to all of us who are parents, but that is the truth. Our children love us and respect us, etc., but it is not the same as our love for them. I once saw a very interesting explanation for this phenomenon. Every single human emotion that exists is something we received from Adam, the first human being. Adam had children and therefore he had in him the emotion of a parent's love for his children. However, Adam did not have a father. He is the only person in the history of the world who did not have parents. Consequently, the emotion of love of child for parent was something he did not possess. It was an acquired skill developed in later generations, but it never had the strong genetically passed down roots that existed in the emotion of love towards children, which is innate in our personalities.

For this reason, Yehudah recognized that the stronger argument for the release of Binyamin would be "his father can't survive his loss" rather than "his children will not be able to survive his loss."

The Shemen HaTov uses this concept to interpret a Rashi in our parsha. The last part of Pasuk 29 in Perek 46 is very ambiguous. The pasuk reads: "Yosef harnessed his chariot and went up to meet Yisrael his father to Goshen; and he appeared to him, fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck excessively." Who appeared to whom? Rashi says that Yosef is the subject and Yaakov is the object in this sentence. Yosef appeared to Yaakov. How does Rashi know this? Why was Rashi so sure that the interpretation is not that Yaakov appeared to Yosef?

The Shemen HaTov explains, based on the earlier stated concept, that the emotion of Yosef appearing to Yaakov was far more dramatic and powerful than the emotion of Yaakov appearing to Yosef. The love of parent to child is much deeper, much more profound, much more intense and innate than the reverse relationship. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes the more dramatic of the two relationships in this reunion: Yosef appeared to his father.

The Apparent Tangent Is Crucial To The Story

The end of the parsha contains the story of Klal Yisrael's descent to Egypt. "Yosef settled his father and his brothers in the land of Egypt, in the prime portion of Ramses, as Pharaoh had commanded. Yosef took care of them and provided for them... Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; they took holdings in it and they were fruitful and multiplied greatly." [Bereshis 47:11-12; 27] It is noteworthy that there is a 14 pasuk gap in the narrative of how the Children of Israel came down to Egypt and settled. We might have written the story exactly as quoted above, just without a break in the narrative.

The Torah describes the events of the first two pesukim, but then goes off on a tangent. The Torah says that the famine grew more intense. The people came to Yosef and asked them what they were going to eat. Yosef told them he would sell them food. They said that they had no money to pay for the food. Yosef told them he would take their cattle in payment. The following year they had neither food nor cattle to pay for food. Yosef took ownership of their land and in effect bought the entire country for the government. There remained no private property in Egypt. The government bought all land holdings, lock stock and barrel. Then, to demonstrate government ownership of the land, Yosef made everyone relocate. Yosef changed the whole country around. Those who had lived in Alexandria moved to Cairo, those who lived in Cairo moved to Alexandria, etc. The only exception to this rule was the Priests of Egypt. Pharaoh did not acquire their land; it remained their own. Yosef made one final decree. He instituted an across the board 20% income tax payable by the entire population, again, except the Priests who had a tax exemption.

Finally, the Torah concludes the earlier narrative and states "Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt in the Land of Goshen..."

There are several difficulties with this narrative. First, why is the Torah telling us the history of land

ownership and tax system in Egypt? Why is this germane? More to the point, why is this stuck into the middle of the story of the Jews' descent to Egypt and their settling there?

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky makes a fundamental comment here. Yosef haTzadik was a man of great vision. He understood what was coming and he knew what to do about it. He knew the real fear that a small minority in a large country might eventually assimilate, acculturate, and become like the rest of the population. Yosef asked himself, "What can I do to save my family? What am I going to do in order to preserve the family traditions in Egypt?" Yosef devised a brilliant plan.

When Jews came to America in the 1920s, the 1930, and the 1940s, they were called "greenhorns". They were refugees whose strongest desire was to become Americans. They wanted to become like everyone else. They hated being considered outsiders from the old country who did not know what to do in the new land. Yosef's plan was to see to it that there was no such thing as a "permanent citizen" (toshav) in Egypt. Everyone will be a foreigner and greenhorn. The entire population was stripped of their land and moved to "foreign cities". No one felt at home. There were no long-standing aristocrats for the Children of Israel to want to emulate. The entire population was "the new guy on the block".

Then, Yosef imposed a tax and codified in the bylaws of Egypt that clergy would be exempt from national taxes. Later on when the Egyptians decided to enslave the Jews, they appointed over them "tax collectors" (Sarei Misim) and imposed a labor tax. However, per the national precedent, they exempted the priestly tribe from taxes -- the Tribe of Levi.

Yosef created a precedent that resulted in one tribe that learned all day throughout the sojourn in Egypt. There was a portion of the nation that was guaranteed to be the "keepers of the faith" (Shomer Emunim). They would therefore never become acculturated and never become assimilated.

Now we understand why the Torah mentions this here and why the tangent is not such a tangent. Before the Torah tells us the story of the Jews in Egypt, before they could really settle down, Yosef had to make sure that the assimilation that would occur to so many Jews throughout the millennia would not happen to the Jews in Egypt. Yosef attempted to do that by (a) making everyone feel not at home and (b) by inventing the concept of the priestly exemption, so that there would always be a "Shevet Levi" amongst the Jewish people to provide them with the moral compass, pointing in the direction of what the Torah wants. This is what preserved Klal Yisrael in the Exile of Egypt. Then and only then can the Torah conclude the story and tell us: "Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen; they took holdings in it and they were fruitful and multiplied greatly."

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

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