

WHY THE SHIFT IN ATTITUDE?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayigash

Why The Shift In Attitude?

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #838, Answering Kedusha In The Middle of Kerias Shma. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Vayigash continues the story that unfolded in Parshas Miketz. Binyamin was finally brought down to Egypt, Yosef planted something in his bag, and sent his officers after the brothers. They searched all the luggage and the missing item was found in Binyamin's bag. The brothers knew they were in trouble.

At the end of last week's parsha, Yehudah contritely admits that the brothers are guilty as charged and volunteers the servitude of all the brothers to Yosef -- "also us and also the one in whose hand the goblet was found". He is almost servile in his attitude. Yosef, however, refuses to consider mass punishment and insists that he will only punish the brother in whose hand the goblet was found. "The rest of you can return in peace to your father."

This week's parsha begins with a totally different attitude on Yehudah's part. The Baal HaTurim cites textual proofs that the connotation of "Vayigash Elav Yehudah" (And Yehudah drew near) is that Yehudah approached Yosef to do battle. He was ready to fight. Not only was he ready to fight, but Chazal tell us that Yehudah was an extremely powerful person. The Medrash says he took a piece of iron and bit it in two! The Medrash also speaks about Yehudah asking Naftali to check out the defenses of Egypt to see what would be involved in "taking out" the populace, if necessary. Naftali reported that there were 12 units of the country that they would have to overpower. Yehudah pledged that he personally would take out three of the units and each of the remaining 9 brothers would each take out one unit.

We think of the holy Tribe founders as Rabbis with white long beards. That is only part of the story. They were powerful people. At least through the Help of G-d they were able to wipe out people

much more numerous than them. Given that, why was Yehudah so servile at the end of last week's parsha? "Behold we will be slaves to my master. Put us in prison. Do whatever you want to us. "What suddenly happens between the end of Miketz and the beginning of Vayigash that causes Yehudah to be ready to kill Yosef to rescue Binyomin?

The Medrash in fact states that Yosef took a tremendous chance when he sent all the Egyptians out of the room before revealing himself to the brothers. The Medrash notes that they could have killed Yosef on the spot! We are dealing here with people who had the physical prowess or at least the spirituality of such physical prowess to kill the second in command of Egypt. We have a major shift in attitude from the meek and contrite Yehudah to the powerful man willing to attempt to take out the whole country. How do we explain this shift?

Rav Elya Lopian suggests that a simple thing happened here. Every time the brothers ran into a problem, they kept coming back to the same conclusion: "We are guilty" (aval asheimim anachnu). Despite the fact that the sale of Yosef transpired 22 years earlier, this was constantly on their minds. They believed what they did was correct. They followed a judicial ruling (based on the court of justice they themselves convened) but there was a measure of guilt that they bore in that they ignored his pleas and did not have mercy upon him. In other words, "What we did was right, but we should have been more merciful."

Because they were walking around with this burden, therefore every time something happened they said "We are guilty! This is a punishment for what we did." Therefore, when they confronted this reality that Binyomin was caught they were mentally ready to say "behold we are servants to my master". They saw this as Divine Retribution. "We deserve it, it is part of our punishment."

This way of thinking was logical up until the last pasuk of Parshas Miketz. However, when Yosef insisted that only the person in whose hand the goblet was found that would be the slave and that the brothers could go back in peace to their father, there was no way they could interpret this as being part of their punishment for the sale of their brother. It was now Binyomin who was being punished and he had no part in the sale! This put matters in a new light.

If this has nothing to do with the sale of Yosef, then Yehudah goes from the meek "I will be your servant" Yehudah to the bold "I will take you on" Yehudah.

What is the lesson to take away from all this (the 'mussar haskel')? The lesson is that when trouble befalls someone, he should examine his ways. At such times one needs to introspect. It is certainly not for us to tell someone else "this happened to you because of such and such". That is not our place. But people must ask themselves, "Why is this happening to me?" This is one of the most difficult things to deal with in life.

From time to time, people who are having some kind of issue in their life come to me and ask "Why is this happening to me?" The unfortunate answer to that is "we don't know". That is part of the reason why we should all mourn the exile we are in. If we were not in exile and we had prophets,

one could go to a prophet and he would be able to tell us exactly what the problem is." However this does not mean that a person should not introspect on his own and determine if there is not something in his life that he needs to correct.

What is ironic about this insight from Rav Eliyahu Lopian is a story that comes along with his explanation of the pasuk. One day, Rav Eliyahu Lopian was walking up the stairs in the Yeshiva and he tripped and fell down the stairs. After he fell he sat on the stairs. The students rushed over and asked him if he was okay, if he hurt himself, and so forth. He answered that he was fine. They then asked, "So why are you still sitting on the steps? Why don't you get up?" He answered, "I am trying to figure out why I tripped."

This can be overdone. For example, if someone is about to pull into an available parking spot at the supermarket conveniently right near the door and someone else moves into that spot before him, a person might ponder and analyze "Why did this happen to me?" Sometimes things happen which they are not a punishment. The simple and perhaps only explanation may be that the other fellow got the parking spot because he got there a little earlier. People can drive themselves crazy trying to find out what they are being punished for when they are in fact not being punished at all.

On the other hand, to take a cavalier attitude towards life and always say "that's the way the ball bounces" with no introspection whatsoever when major things occur -- that is not right either.

This explains the change in attitude of Yehudah and his brothers. When they thought this was a punishment, they were prepared to accept it; when they realized it was not a punishment, they were determined to fight.

Emotions Were Kept In Check To Be Faithful To Halacha

At the beginning of Perek 45, the pasuk says: "Then Yosef could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried: 'Cause every man to go out from me.' And there stood no man with him, while Yosef made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud..."

Ironically, before Yosef "lost it" and started to cry he ordered that all (Egyptians) be removed from the room. Why? Rashi says because he did not want the brothers to be humiliated in front of the Egyptians. Yosef knew that his brothers would be tremendously embarrassed when he revealed himself to them as the ruling power of the most powerful nation in the world -- knowing that years earlier they had sold him into slavery. He did not want anyone in the room to see the embarrassment his brothers would be suffering.

Anyone who has been in a situation where they were so overcome with emotion that they broke down crying will realize the difficulty in this narrative. All of us have such moments in life. When we

break down crying it is not possible to say "wait a minute, before I break down, I have to check my e-mail." Emotions overcome a person. "Yosef could not hold himself back."

Somehow Yosef was able to hold it in long enough to give the order for the others to leave and long enough for all of them to file out in an orderly fashion. He knew that the halacha prohibits one from publicly embarrassing his fellow man. This is a classic example of human emotions clashing with a halacha. A person has to develop such control that he will not disregard the halacha despite his emotions.

Many times, we say to ourselves "I couldn't help myself. I couldn't stop." Therefore, we take liberties. Yosef did not take liberty. The halacha says you cannot embarrass your brothers. Despite the overwhelming emotions at play, Yosef controlled his emotions and acted according to halacha.

I saw a similar story involving Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. There was a student of the Mir Yeshiva who lived in America who had a child who was very sick. The student sent a friend of his to go ask Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz that he pray for the child. Rav Chaim took the name and said he would pray for him. Unfortunately, the next day the child took a turn for the worse, and this friend had to go back into Rav Chaim and tell him that the child passed away. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asked the friend to please extend blessings of condolences to the father of the child in America. The friend left the room and then Rav Chaim (who had been learning with a chavrusa who later told the story) burst out crying. He cried uncontrollably for several minutes. The chavrusa asked him why he did not start crying immediately. He explained, "I saw the friend of my student who delivered the news was already an emotional wreck. I did not want to add to his trauma by crying in front of him. I withheld myself until he left the room and then I let myself go."

This is a similar story to what occurred by Yosef. We need to have enough control over our emotions so that our outbreak does not negatively impact others in ways that the halacha would not want us to impact them.

Tenth of Teves: A Fast That Is Not Just For The Past

The Sefer Imrei Baruch quotes the following interesting thought from the commentary of the Chasam Sofer to the Selichos of the Fast of the Tenth of Teves. There is a very unique aspect to the Fast of the Tenth of Teves -- at least in theory. The Beis Yosef in Orach Chaim Perek 550 quotes in the name of Avudraham that if the Tenth of Teves would fall on Shabbos, we would need to fast even on Shabbos. Our calendar in fact is set up that the Tenth of Teves is never on Shabbos. However, in theory, if it were to come out on Shabbos (unlike Tzom Gedalya, Tamuz 17 or the 9th of Av which do at times fall on Shabbos and are "pushed forward"), we would need to fast on that day. The reason is that the pasuk in Yechezkel [24:2] declares in connection with the tenth of Teves "in the

essence of this very day" (b'etzem hayom hazeh) which is the same expression that the Torah uses by Yom Kippur [Vayikra 23:30]. Thus we derive -- just like Yom Kippur overrides the Shabbos, so too, the Tenth of Teves overrides Shabbos (in theory).

The Beis Yosef questions this Avudraham, but he does not totally discount it. The Chasam Sofer writes -- in explaining this idea -- that on the year the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed on the Ninth of Av, the Divine Psak [ruling] that the Beis HaMikdash would be destroyed that year was decreed on the preceding Tenth of Teves. The Chasam Sofer writes that in each subsequent year -- whether or not there will be a Fast on the Ninth of Av for that year is again determined on the preceding Tenth of Teves!

This, the Chasam Sofer says, explains the uniqueness of the 10th of Teves. On every other fast day we are fasting for that which happened in the past. A fast that commemorates what happens in the past does not override Shabbos. The only fast which one is allowed to fast on Shabbos (besides Yom Kippur) is a "Taanis Chalom" [after experiencing a frightening dream]. The fast forestalls anything that was alluded to by this bad dream. We see from this that a fast which is not for the past but rather is for the future can override Shabbos. Since the tenth of Teves determines what will happen in the future -- will there be a Tisha B'Av or not this coming year -- it too can (theoretically) take place on Shabbos.

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 this Parsha are provided below:

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