

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ויגש

ונאמר לא נוכל לרדת אם יש אחינו הקטן אתנו וירדנו כי לא נוכל לראות פני האיש
ואחינו הקטן איננו אתנו

“We said: We cannot go down; only if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down, for we cannot see the man’s face if our youngest brother is not with us” (44:26)

When Yaakov told his sons to go buy more food, they demurred because they had been told not to return without Binyamin. The Targum Yonasan translates their objection as “it is not possible for us” to do so. When a father asks a child to do something, the automatic answer should be yes. Their response that listening to Yaakov was impossible indicates that had it been possible, they would have certainly listened to their father. The only thing that stopped them from listening was the fact that, in reality, they were unable to carry out their father’s wishes. This is the attitude that a child should have to a parent’s word. If the request is able to be fulfilled, then it should be done. Only when it is truly impossible can one think about not complying. When we read the parsha, we should strive to glean lessons from the words of the Torah. A very important lesson about a child’s responsibility to parents is contained in this unassuming verse.

ויפל על צוארי בנימן אחיו ויבך ובנימן בכה על צואריו

“Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin’s neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck” (45:14)

Rashi explains that Yosef cried for Binyamin because the two Batei Mikdash built in his territory in Eretz Yisrael would be destroyed. Binyamin, in turn, cried for Yosef because the Mishkan in Shilo, part of Ephraim’s territory in Eretz Yisrael, would be destroyed. Why did they choose this moment to cry for the destroyed sanctuaries?

The answer is that the destructions happened because of sinas chinam, baseless hatred. It was the same lack of unity which had been displayed by the brothers that would lead to the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash in the

days of their descendants centuries later. They cried because they foresaw that this terrible infighting would still cause much damage in the future.

Why were they crying for the destruction that would take place in each other's territory rather than that of their own land? In response to the baseless hatred that would cause these horrible events, they displayed ahavas chinam, baseless love. Caring for others and being concerned about their feelings can rectify the sin of sinas chinam and can lead to the redemption. Yosef and Binyamin foresaw difficult times for their descendants, but they also showed how to overcome the sins that led to those downfalls.

ויגדו לו לאמר עוד יוסף חי וכי הוא משל בכל ארץ מצרים ויפג לבו כי לא האמין להם

“And they told him, saying: Yosef is still alive, and that he is ruler over all the land of Egypt; but his heart rejected it, for he could not believe them” (45:26)

The word “moshel,” “ruler,” has the same letters as “shalem,” “complete.” A person who wishes to lead others has to perfect himself first and make himself complete before doing so. Without working on oneself, there is no way that a person can guide others. “Moshel” also contains the same letters as “shalom,” “peace.” A true leader is someone who can create peace. A leader's focus, whether in the workplace, community or home, should be to foster a harmonious atmosphere among all those working together. This is their ultimate goal and they should never lose sight of this ideal.

כל הנפש הבאה ליעקב מצרימה יצאי ירכו מלבד נשי בני יעקב כל נפש וששים ושש

“All the persons coming with Yaakov to Egypt – his own descendants, aside from the wives of Yaakov's sons – sixty-six persons in all” (46:26)

The seventy people who came with Yaakov to Egypt are referred to as “nefesh,” one soul. Rashi says that they are considered one because they all worshipped the same G-d. The Sfas Emes elaborates and says that because we serve the same G-d, we are unified in our desire to serve Hashem and this gives the Jewish people the status of one individual.

The Kli Yakar says that by referring to Yaakov's family as a single entity, the Torah is stressing their newfound unity now that they were reconciled with Yosef. For the first time in many years, the whole family got along with each other and they were once again a single group.

ויאמרו אל פרעה לגור בארץ באנו כי אין מרעה לצאן אשר לעבדיך כי כבוד הרעב
בארץ כנען ועתה ישבו נא עבדיך בארץ גשן

“And they said to Pharaoh: We have come to sojourn in the land, since there is no grazing for your servants' flock, for the famine is sever in the land of Canaan; now, if you please, allow your servants to dwell in the region of Goshen” (47:4)

The brothers first told Pharaoh that they had come to sojourn and stay in Egypt temporarily. Then they concluded with a request to dwell in Goshen, seeming to indicate that they would take up long-term residence in the land. Aren't these two expressions contradictory?

Wherever we are in exile, even though we remain aware that we are not living in our true homeland, it is necessary to build the basic infrastructure of Jewish life. Yeshivos and shuls must be built so that people are able feel comfortable in their neighborhood and have their physical and spiritual needs met. This helps the community become stronger and enables it to flourish and grow. Having a sense of tranquility in one's current surroundings is healthy and important for peace of mind. At the same time, one should not lose sight of the fact that he is in exile. It is important not to overdo it and to be mindful of the fact that pursuing comfort for the sake of being comfortable is not always a Torah value.

The brothers were aware of this and they intended to set up a community in Egypt even though they only planned to stay for a short while. They understood that it was necessary to have structured community institutions in place for as long as they were living in Goshen.

ויאמר יעקב אל פרעה ימי שני מגורי שלשים ומאת שנה מעט ורעים היו ימי שני
חיי ולא השיגו את ימי שני חיי אבתי בימי מגוריהם

“Yaakov answered 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 life spans of my forefathers in the days of the sojourns” (47:9)

Why did Yaakov complain to Pharaoh about his difficult life? Ramban explains that Yaakov looked exceedingly old and Pharaoh had never seen anyone who looked so old before and he felt compelled to ask Yaakov’s age. Yaakov responded that he was not really as old as he seemed but, because he had experienced so much suffering in his life, his appearance made him seem much older than his true age. Thus, his words were an explanation rather than a complaint.

Why did Yaakov differentiate between the “days of my sojourning” and the “days of my life”? R’ Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that “sojourning” refers to a physical existence whereas “life” refers to a spiritual life, a life of accomplishing what a person was really put on this world to do. Pharaoh had asked how many the years of his life were. Yaakov clarified that what Pharaoh had really meant to ask was how many the years of his sojourning were, i.e. how old he was. The answer to that was 130. But if he wanted to know about the years of his life, his spiritual accomplishments, the answer was that they were few and filled with difficult circumstances. Because he had suffered so much, he had been unable to serve Hashem (in his humble opinion) at the same exalted level and for the same amount of time as Avraham and Yitzchak.

We can learn from this posuk that there is a difference between being physically alive and actually living a full life. It is our task to transform our sojourning in this world into years of life, life full of Torah and spiritual pursuits. Only then can we consider ourselves truly alive to the fullest degree.

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