

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ויגש

ויגש אליו יהודה ויאמר בי אדני ידבר נא עבדך דבר באזני אדני ואל יחר אפך בעבדך כי כמוך כפרעה

“Then Yehuda approached him and said: If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my lord's ears and may your anger not flare up at your servant - for you are like Pharaoh.” (44:18)

Why did Yehuda now believe that he could sway the viceroy of Egypt with his plea when, at the end of Parshas Mikeitz, he had said that there was nothing to say in protest? The Alshich writes that, up until this point, the brothers were under the impression that their troubles were punishment for having sold Yosef. That is why they were all being punished together. When they were accused of stealing the goblet, they thought that they would all be punished. However, once it became clear that Binyamin was the only one being punished, the situation changed. Only one brother was suffering this time and he was the one who had not been present when Yosef was sold. Now Yehuda understood that the troubles were of a different nature. He felt that this could be changed because it did not stem from something that they had done wrong. It was just the Egyptian ruler scheming against them. Therefore, he approached the Egyptian ruler, confident that his heartfelt plea could change the sentence.

ויהי כי עלינו אל עבדך אבי ונגד לו את דברי אדני

“And it was, when we went up to your servant my father, we told him to my lord's words” (44:24)

The Yalkut Shimoni writes that Yosef lost ten years of his life for the ten times that he heard his brothers refer to his father Yaakov as "your servant, our father." Upon hearing his father referred to in this degrading manner before him, he should have protested. However, we only find that the brothers used this expression five times? Why does the Yalkut Shimoni say that Yosef heard it ten times? The answer is that the brothers communicated with Yosef through a translator. Although Yosef understood the Hebrew that the brothers were speaking, he used an Egyptian translator so that the brothers would not realize this. Therefore, Yosef heard and understood the brothers when they referred to Yaakov as "your servant, our father" five times in addition to the five times that he heard the translator repeating their words to him. Therefore, Yosef lost ten years of his life.

We can see from this Yalkut Shimoni how particular Hashem is about respecting parents. Even if a person hears a disparaging word about his parents, he must defend them. Yosef was taken to task for not protesting the demeaning way that they described his parents. He was punished for each and every time that he heard his father described in an offensive way. Although Hashem is more stringent with righteous people, this is still a lesson to us to appreciate the importance of the mitzva to honor and respect our parents. The punishment that Yosef received illustrates that we must be very careful about this mitzva. However, if the punishment was this great, then certainly the reward for keeping the mitzva properly is exponentially greater.

כי איך אעלה אל אבי והנער איננו אתי פן אראה ברע אשר ימצא את אבי

“For how can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father” (44:34)

The Maayana Shel Torah says that Yehuda's plea can also be understood allegorically to refer to how a person must approach his youth. The posuk can be interpreted as, "How can I go to my Father, Hashem, after 120 years and the youth will not be with me, without having fully utilized the years of my youth?" This is a powerful message. It is imperative that a person make the most of his younger years to serve Hashem because they are the most vital years of a person's life. The Torah that one learns in his youth is extremely valuable and the character traits that one becomes accustomed to in his youth remain with him throughout his life.

There is a second allegorical reading of this posuk. The end of the posuk can also be understood as, "How can it be that the younger generation is not with us?" This is a call to the older generations to educate the younger generation in the teachings of their ancestors and ensure that the chain is not broken. The leaders of the older generation are responsible, not just for themselves, but also for the youth, to inspire them and to teach them to love their way of life and to carry on the tradition of their fathers.

ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו

“And Yosef said to his brothers: I am Yosef. Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him because they were left disconcerted before him” (45:3)

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, all of their questions about what had been occurring to them were answered. By his simple statement of "I am Yosef," many things that had happened to them in the past immediately became clear.

Similarly, writes the Chofetz Chaim, throughout history, people have lived through difficult times and have had questions about events and the reason why certain things have happened. But at the end of days, Hashem will reveal Himself to the whole world and say "I am Hashem." Just as with Yosef, this simple statement will clarify history and many questions that have been asked will be answered and will be understood.

ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו גשו נא אלי ויגשו ויאמר אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אותי מצרימה
“Then Yosef said to his brothers: Come close to me, if you please, and they came close. And he said: I am Yosef your brother - me, whom you sold to Egypt” (45:4)

The Kotzker Rebbe asks: Why did Yosef introduce himself to his brothers as the one whom they sold to Egypt? Why was it necessary to embarrass them by reminding them of what they had done wrong? The answer is that he wanted to convey an important message with this statement. He meant to inform them that despite being sold to Egypt, to a country of extreme moral deprivation, he was still the same Yosef that they sold to Egypt. He was still on the same spiritual level twenty-two years later even though he had been surrounded by the worst people for so long. He wanted to alleviate their concerns that they caused him to fall in spirituality because they sold him. He reassured them that he had withstood temptation throughout his years in the foreign land. He also wished to allay their fears that he was as cold-hearted and cruel as the demeanor which he had shown them in Egypt. He told them that he was not the person that he had been pretending to be. In truth, he was the same Yosef that they knew from the time when they sold him, the same righteous Yosef. This is why he referred to himself as the person that they sold to Egypt.

ועתה אל תיעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם כי מכרתם אתי הנה כי למחיה שלחני אלקים לפניכם
“And now, be not distressed, do not reproach yourselves having sold me here, for it was a supporter of life that Hashem sent me ahead of you” (45:5)

The first thing that Yosef told his brothers after he revealed his true identity was not to be upset. Rabbi Yisrael of Rizhin comments that depression is a very negative character trait. When a person becomes upset, it can affect everything and everyone around him and the depression can change his attitude and his actions. In fact, one may not be depressed because Hashem is surrounded by joy and happiness, as the posuk states (Divrei Hayamim I 16:27), "Might and joy are in His place." Because Hashem is surrounded by joy, the only way to become close to Hashem is by being in a state of happiness. The Rambam writes that a prophet cannot receive the word of Hashem in a state of depression. Torah can only be learned properly when a person is serene and happy. We can learn the importance of avoiding depression from Yosef's message to his brothers.

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