

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 כמון כפרעה

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

Yehuda pleads for Binyamin and asks that Yosef should not be angry at him for speaking out. Rashi comments that Yehuda's request shows that Yehuda spoke to Yosef in a harsh manner. It is not respectful to speak to a government official this way and he was afraid how Yosef would react. Therefore, he warned Yosef that he was going to talk strongly and asked that Yosef not be upset.

The Kli Yakar gives a different explanation for Yehuda's request. He writes that when a person is angry, he acts illogically and can easily make mistakes. Chazal explain that when a person becomes angry he becomes a different person. This is not just a reaction, it is a natural extension of anger. To ensure that his words would be heard, Yehuda knew that he would have to calm Yosef down first. He asked Yosef not to be angry so that he would hear what he had to say. Yehuda could have offered the most sensible argument in the world, but if Yosef was angry, it would go in one ear and out the other. This is one of the ways in which anger adversely affects a person.

וכלכלתי אתך שם כי עוד חמש שנים רעב פן תורש אתה וביתך וכל אשר לך
“And I will provide for you there - for there will be five more years of famine - lest you become destitute, you, your household, and all that is yours” (45:11)

The Ramban points out that Yosef spoke to his brothers differently from the way that he spoke to his father. He told his brothers that they should move to Mitzrayim "to insure your survival in the land" (45:7). He told them that they would die if they stayed in Eretz Canaan. However, he did not want to say this to his father because to speak of his father's death would be disrespectful. In his message to his father, he used a nicer language and said that they would "become destitute" if they remained in Eretz Canaan.

The way in which we talk to our siblings is not the way that we should talk to our parents. We should make a conscious effort to communicate with them differently, in a more respectful manner. Yosef's conduct teaches us the proper way to treat our parents.

Why did Yosef have to move his whole family to Mitzrayim? Why didn't he just send them a large supply of food to sustain them for the remaining years of the famine? The Ramban suggests that Yosef was unable to do so because the people would then suspect him of preparing to move back to his family and leave the country. Only if he brought his family down to Mitzrayim would Pharaoh allow Yosef to provide large quantities of food for them.

ובני שמעון ימואל וימין ואהד ויכין וצחר ושאל בן הכנענית
“Shimon's sons: Yemuel, Yamin, Ohad, Yachin, Tzochar, and Shaul, son of the Canaanite woman” (46:10)

Shaul, son of the Canaanite woman is unique among all the grandchildren of Yaakov in that his mother is mentioned. Why is this so? The Ibn Ezra comments that while the other brothers married Aramean, Egyptian and Midianite women, Shimon married a Canaanite woman.

This was a mistake on his part. The Torah explicitly makes mention of Shimon's error in order to teach us not to follow his example. In the same list of Yaakov's descendants, the deaths of Er and Onan are mentioned, even though they had died earlier and were not among those traveling to Mitzrayim. The point of listing them is to show that Yehuda also made a mistake by taking a Canaanite wife, who bore Er and Onan. The Torah states explicitly that the children of Yehuda's Canaanite wife died because it was a mistake for him to marry such a woman. One must be careful to marry a proper wife who provides a good influence on her husband and the rest of her family. Also, it is important to realize that character traits can be hereditary and it is more difficult for someone to overcome negative character traits that run in the family. One should pay attention to the character traits of a potential wife because they may be passed on to her children.

The Or HaChayim gives another reason for the mention of Er and Onan. One might wonder how Yehuda could be such a great tzadik if he had two sons who sinned and died because of their behavior. The Torah mentions specifically that Er and Onan died in Eretz Canaan. They died because they sinned as a result of the influence of their Canaanite neighbors. It was not because of a flaw in Yehuda, but because they learned from the people around them. The Torah mentions Er and Onan to exonerate Yehuda and emphasizes the place where they died to show that they sinned because they had been influenced by the society that they lived in. The Torah makes it a point to illustrate how the sons of Yehuda, such a great tzadik, fell into the trap of such aveiros. The lesson is that no matter who you are and where you come from, you can be influenced by those around you. Nobody is totally immune to the influences around them and we must all protect ourselves accordingly.

ואת יהודה שלח לפניו אל יוסף להורת לפניו גשנה ויבאו ארצה גשן

“He sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen; and they arrived in the region of Goshen” (46:28)

What was Yehuda to accomplish by arriving ahead of the others? Rashi says that he needed to find a place for the family to live and to prepare that location for when the rest of the family came. Rashi also cites a midrash which says that Yehuda went ahead to establish a house of study in which Yaakov and the family could learn Torah upon their arrival. The Sifsei Chachamim supports this midrash by pointing out that the word "lehoros" contains the same letters as the word "Torah."

Why did Yaakov send Yehuda ahead out of all his sons? According to the first explanation of his mission, Yehuda was the one who had to plan out their new dwelling place because he was the leader of the family. According to Rashi's second answer, Yaakov sent the most powerful son, the one with the most strength and leadership ability, to build their yeshiva. The yeshiva is of primary importance in every Jewish society and it can only be entrusted to the most qualified people. Strong leadership and the best minds should be dedicated to the education of our youth to ensure that the Torah will continue to flourish in future generations. This seems obvious but is not always the case today. The leadership of all Jewish communities must make education a top priority. We should direct our most qualified people into chinuch where their strengths will have the greatest impact.

ואת העם העביר אתו לערים מקצה גבול מצרים ועד קצהו

“As for the nation, he resettled it by cities, from one end of Egypt's borders to the other” (47:21)

When the Egyptians had no money left to buy food, Yosef purchased the people and their land on behalf of the government in exchange for food. Once the government owned all the people and the real estate, Yosef moved everyone out of their homes and into a different region

of Egypt. Why did Yosef resettle all the Egyptians? Rashi writes: "The Torah did not have to write this but to inform you of Yosef's praise that he intended to remove disgrace from upon his brothers so that the Egyptians should not call them exiles." It is interesting to note that Rashi's language resembles Rachel's exclamation upon Yosef's birth: "Hashem has removed my disgrace" (30:23). Perhaps we can say that it was in Yosef's nature to be sensitive to the shame of others and he had an appreciation for when people were spared embarrassment. He may have learned this sensitivity from his mother. Rachel experienced shame when she did not have children. When Yosef was born, her shame dissipated and she appreciated what Hashem had done for her through Yosef. Now, 39 years later, Yosef removes the shame of someone else once again when he spares his brothers the embarrassment of standing out as foreigners. Just as his mother was sensitive to shame and appreciated when it was lifted, Yosef understood how difficult it would be for his brothers and appreciated what it would mean to them to be rid of this shame.

Another lesson that can be learned from this is the meaning that is found in every posuk of the Torah. The Gemara in Chullin 60b cites this as an example of a posuk that seems unnecessary but which has an important lesson hidden beneath the surface. Every part of Torah, even the stories and other parts that seem extraneous, has a deeper meaning and can teach us valuable lessons.

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