



Wembley Synagogue

ויגש

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Vayigash

וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה - Then Yehudah approached him (44:18)

Ohr Hachayim understands וַיִּגַּשׁ "he approached" as follows: Yehudah now approached the king's viceroy (who, unknown to Yehudah, was actually his brother Yosef) by forcing *himself* to experience a change of heart towards the viceroy.

King Solomon said in Proverbs 27:19 "As water reflects a face back to a face, so one's heart is reflected to him by another." If someone feels love toward another person, the second person will sense that love and respond in kind; if someone feels hatred, the object of his hatred will sense it as well. Yehudah saw himself in a desperate situation. He had taken responsibility for his brother Binyamin, assuring his father Yaakov that he would bring him back home, safe and sound. Now, Binyamin had been accused of stealing the viceroy's silver goblet and had been sentenced to slavery in the king's palace. The *Ohr Hachayim* says that Yehudah hoped to effect a change in the viceroy's heart by changing his own feelings towards him. As difficult as it might be, Yehudah would strive to awaken within himself a feeling of kindness and understanding toward this man. Hopefully, the viceroy would sense Yehudah's newfound feelings towards him, and would respond with kindness towards Yehudah and his brothers. (Source: Living The Parshah)

וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה... כִּי קְמוּדָךְ כְּפַרְעֹה - And Yehudah approached him, (and said: 'Oh my lord please let your servant speak a word)... for you are as Pharaoh.' (44:18)

What did Yehudah tell Yosef?

According to the *Midrash Rabbah* (93:6), Yehudah argued on behalf of Binyamin: "In our laws it is written that a thief must pay full compensation.' If he does not have the means, he must be sold [as a slave to make restitution] for his theft (*Shemot* 22:2).'
However, Binyamin comes from a wealthy family and can pay.' "One may wonder, of what significance Yehudah thought the Torah laws would have for this Egyptian leader? Yehudah explained to Yosef, "Our Torah is Divine Knowledge. It appears strange that it would prescribe slavery for one who stole. Who would want to bring a thief into his home? Obviously, the Torah feels that when a person steals, it is necessary to know what caused him to do this. If he is merely a kleptomaniac, of course, he cannot be let loose in society. But if he steals out of need, society must help him 'get up on his feet' and rehabilitate him. Therefore, in the home of his master, where he will be treated properly, he will make amends and become an asset to humanity.

"Since Binyamin comes from a very wealthy family, there is no rationale to explain the alleged robbery, only the fact that he is mentally ill and a kleptomaniac. Therefore, it makes no sense that you should employ such a person." (Source: Vedibarta Bam quoting Pardes Yosef)

וַנֹּאמֶר אֶל אֲדֹנָי לֹא יִכַּל הַנְּעָר לְעֹזֵב אֶת אָבִיו וְעֹזֵב אֶת אָבִיו וְנָמַת - And we said to my lord, "The lad cannot leave his father, for should he leave his father then he would die." (44:22)

What was the point of all of this? Why tell the Egyptian viceroy how difficult it had been for Yaakov to part from Binyamin, and the agony that lay in store for him when his sons returned without Binyamin? What bearing had any of it on Binyamin's being guilty or innocent of the charge of stealing the viceroy's cup?

The Beit Halevi explains that when a thief is tried, convicted and punished, he is not the only one to suffer; his entire family suffers along with him. At first glance, this seems unjust in the extreme. After all, what did they do to deserve even indirect punishment such as this? In actuality, however, the family of a thief cannot claim absolute lack of blame. In *Devarim* 22:21, betrothed maiden found guilty of adultery is executed at the gates of her father's house and Rashi explains there that this is as if to say "Look at the fruits that you have grown here!"

Such responsibility, however, only rests with a father who neglected his child-rearing duties, who allowed his son to run wild and be exposed to all sorts of harmful influences. But Yaakov had done nothing of the sort. He had devoted unstinting energy to Binyamin's upbringing and always kept him under his wing. Under normal circumstances, he would never have become a thief. It was Yosef who had made it

possible, by prying him away from his father's home and influence. (Source: The Parsha Anthology)

וַיֹּסֵף אֶל אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הֲעוֹד אָבִי חַי - Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef; is my father still alive?' " (45:3)

The first time the brothers came to Egypt, Yosef asked them about their father. At their second arrival he again asked about their father. Why did he ask the question a third time?

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he knew that they would be reluctant to believe him. He therefore gave them certain signs to prove who he was.

This time Yosef was *not asking* his brothers, but saying in effect, "From my question you can realize that I am really your missing brother. Whenever we meet I only ask about my *father* and not about my mother, because I know that she died many years ago. If I were a stranger and pretending, I would ask about both my father and my mother." (Source: Vedibarta Bam quoting the Imrei Yehudah)

Why did Yosef ask "Is my father still alive" (v.3) when he had already been told that Yaakov lived (43:27-28)?

Ralbag says he thought they might have been lying to him as a ploy in order to get Binyamin back.

Abarbanel says that Yosef knew that his father was still alive. However, he thought that the brothers would be shocked when he revealed who he was, so he asked them "is my father still alive", in order to enter into a conversation. He was then planning to ask them, "How are your families?" but the conversation could not continue, since they "were unable to answer him because they were ashamed before him."

Pane'ach Ra'za says Yosef was not asking whether Yaakov was alive but rather, what the condition of his health was.

Maharik says he was asking about Yaakov's spiritual welfare. Yosef was saying "is my father's prophetic spirit still alive?" (Source: These commentators are quoted in the Gutnick Chumash)

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל יַעֲקֹב בְּמָה יָמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֶּיךָ - Pharaoh asked Yaakov, "How old are you?" (47:8)

The Sha'agas Aryeh (R' Aryeh Leib Ginsberg) was seventy years old when he was appointed Rav of Metz. Upon arriving in Metz, he heard that there were members of the community grumbling over the selection of such an elderly rabbi. "We should have appointed a younger Rabbi, one who will remain at the helm of our community for many years," they said. That Shabbat, the Sha'agas Aryeh gave his first drasha to the people. The Sidra that week was Vayigash and he quoted the verse above where Pharaoh asked Yaakov how old he was when he arrived in Egypt.

To this Yaakov answered, "The span of the years of my sojourning have been one hundred and thirty years, [but] the years of my lifetime have been short and harsh, and have not approached the years of my fathers lifetimes."

There are a few questions we may ask about this exchange. First, why did Pharaoh want to know how old Yaakov was? Second, why did Yaakov feel the need to add "the years of my lifetime have been short and harsh?" Pharaoh did not ask for a description of his lifetime; why did Yaakov deem it necessary to provide him with one?

The Sha'agas Aryeh offered the following answer. "Pharaoh saw that the land of Egypt was blessed and that the famine ended as soon as Yaakov arrived. He realised that the new prosperity was thanks to Yaakov's presence but he was concerned that it would not last, as Yaakov was apparently already old. This is why Pharaoh asked Yaakov, how old he was. Yaakov, however, understood why Pharaoh asked him that question, so he responded - 'the years of my lifetime have been short and harsh' - it may seem that I am very old and at the end of my life, but my years have actually been "short" compared to "my fathers lifetimes," as they lived for one hundred and eighty years.'

"So why do I look so old?" asked Yaakov rhetorically to Pharaoh. "It is due to the fact that 'the years of my lifetime have been short and harsh' - 'The stress of a difficult life,' said Yaakov, 'has made me appear older than I actually am.'

"The same applies to me," continued the Sha'agas Aryeh. "The reason I may look well on in years is actually only because of the hardship and persecution that I have faced throughout my life. But I assure you, he concluded, that with Hashem's help, I will serve as your Rabbi for more than twenty years." The words of this great sage were fulfilled, as the Sha'agas Aryeh served as the Rabbi of Metz for over twenty years! (Source: A Shabbos Vort)

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 3.44pm



Shabbat ends: 4.54pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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