

THE NEED FOR A PLACE OF TORAH STUDY WHEREVER WE GO

The Path To Follow VAYIGASH

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Guard Your Tongue!

The Fire of Strife

The fire of strife burned between Reuven and Shimon, and they were constantly disparaging one another without limit. Though certain that they were acting only for the sake of Heaven, they never asked a Rav to confirm, according to Halachah, that they indeed had the right to speak Lashon Harah about one another. If they were to have asked that question, they would have been surprised to hear that their Lashon Harah was not at all justified, and indeed was forbidden.

Joseph, a close friend of both Reuven and Shimon, often wanted to reconcile them. However to Joseph it was clear that anything he would say to them would be like throwing oil on the fire. He therefore kept quiet and refrained from getting involved in the conflict. All that was left for Joseph to do was to refrain from listening to Lashon Harah, and for that to happen he had to keep his distance from both of them until things calmed down and their conflict ended.

It is written, “He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen” (Genesis 46:28). Rashi gives two explanations for why Jacob sent Judah before him: (1) To clear a place for him and to show him how to settle in it; and (2) To establish for him a house of study, from which Torah teachings would emanate (Tanhuma Vayigash 11 and Bereshith Rabba 95:3). This is somewhat surprising. First of all, why did Jacob send Judah to prepare a place for him, since he could have assigned Joseph to do that for him? After all, Joseph was already living in Egypt, and it would certainly have been easier for him than for Judah, who lived in Canaan.

Secondly, why did Jacob want to prepare this place? Given that Joseph had already asked his father and the entire family to come to Egypt, it is obvious that he had already prepared a place for them. This included a place for study, since Joseph had sent his father agalot (wagons) to remind him that when they last saw one another, they were studying the passage on the eglah (heifer) that is beheaded (Bereshith Rabba 94:3; 95:3; Tanhuma Vayigash 11). Since Joseph governed the entire land of Egypt – the perversion of the whole earth – all while remaining connected to the Torah and mitzvot, and since he had not profaned the covenant of circumcision, why did Jacob not trust him enough to prepare a place where he could teach Torah? Why did he send Judah instead?

Jacob had heard of the greatness and righteousness of Joseph, and the Holy One, blessed be He, had even told him, “Joseph shall put his hand upon your eyes” (Genesis 46:4). Nevertheless, since it is written, “Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die” (Perkei Avoth 2:4), and since what can be discerned from a person’s reputation is not the same as seeing him in person, it seems to me that as long as Jacob had not personally witnessed Joseph in his righteousness, his conduct in the home, and the education of his children, he did not want to entrust him with preparing a place of Torah for him, nor a place for them to live according to his own principles. Even if Joseph was his favorite son, the principle characteristic of Jacob was truth.

True, Jacob could have waited until having met Joseph to see if he was still righteous, at which point he could have asked that he prepare a place for Torah and a dwelling place for them. Jacob did not want to do this, however, because his troubles with Joseph all began because he had wanted to settle down in peace and tranquilly (Bereshith Rabba 84:3). Thus Jacob did not want to wait in order to ask Joseph to prepare these places for him, lest in the meantime his sons and grandsons would want to live in peace and tranquilly under the protection of Joseph, the ruler of the land. Hence Jacob wanted to prevent a neglect in Torah study from occurring.

This is why Jacob guided his sons and grandsons in the concept that we must not live in peace in this world, but instead we must study Torah at each instant. He therefore immediately sent Judah to prepare a place for him before they

arrived in Egypt, in order for them to be ready upon arriving and begin studying without delay.

From personal experience, Jacob was familiar with Judah’s righteousness and greatness, and he trusted him to prepare a place for them to live and study Torah according to his own principles. This is why it is stated that he sent Judah “before him” (Genesis 46:28), for him to do everything according to his own principles. It would be a place to dwell where everyone could live together and be near Jacob, and where they would be united and could ensure that none of them mixed among the Egyptians. He also had to prepare a place for Torah that was near their dwellings, much in the same way that Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma stated, “I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah” (Perkei Avoth 6:9). That is, a place of Torah had to be close to where they lived. Nevertheless, Jacob could not trust Joseph in this matter. Although he prepared a place according to the principles that his father had instilled in him as a youth, Jacob could not trust him before having closely examined his spiritual state.

We may add that by sending Judah before him, Jacob was hinting to his sons and grandsons that before leaving the Holy Land to go into exile, a place of Torah had to be prepared first. This was to prevent them from thinking that they could go and rest easily under the protection of Joseph, the governor of Egypt. Rather, already in the middle of their journey and even before arriving in Egypt, Jacob sent Judah before him to prepare a place for Torah study in order that everything would be ready as soon as they arrived.

Jacob made them understand that they were not exchanging an ox for a donkey, meaning the Holy Land for such an impure land as Egypt. It was true that they were going down to Egypt, for there was a famine in the land of Canaan and it was Hashem’s will that they should descend into Egypt and that the exile begin. In any case, if they did not want to feel that they were in exile, they had to study Torah and prepare for themselves a place of Torah next to their dwellings upon their arrival, a place already established and set up.

Similarly, Jacob let his children know that his consolation over the grief of having to leave the Holy Land – the place where Hashem dwelled – was the yeshiva, a place of Torah that had been prepared before their arrival. It was only by toiling in the Torah in all places, despite their exile, that the Children of Israel could arise from the exile and become a people that differed from all the rest, “a people that dwells levadad [alone], and among the nations shall not be reckoned” (Numbers 23:9). The word levadad has a numerical value of 40, recalling the 40 days in which the Torah was given to Moses. When Jews study the Torah that was given in 40 days, they become “alone” in the sense that no other nation can harm them, and they do not mix among the nations. When Jews have no regard for the culture of the other nations, they suffer no harm, neither from their weapons nor from their influence. From here we learn that we must always prepare a place of Torah wherever we go, for it is our life preserver in every place and at all times.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Bring Me Over to The Next Street

It is written, *“He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen, and they came to the land of Goshen”* (Genesis 46:28).

Rashi states, “To establish for him a house of study, from which [Torah] teaching would emanate.” Jacob knew that he was preparing to descend into Egypt, and he was grieved at having to travel abroad. However he was obligated to do so by Hashem, for it was a decree from Heaven and he had to fulfill it. Yet before entering Egypt, he sent Judah to prepare a place for Torah, a place from which Torah teachings would emanate. He had to sanctify the place where he was going to live in order to prevent the forces of impurity (residing on the wicked deeds of those living in Egypt) from having any influence on him.

The Zohar recounts that some non-Jews once caught a Jew and was about to kill him. When they asked him what his last wish was, he begged them to bring him over to the next street. They agreed, and when they got there they suddenly let him go. They freed him without any apparent reason, though he had exerted no pressure on them whatsoever. The reason was that a certain spirit of impurity rested upon the first street because of the crimes that had been committed there. Therefore when they left that place, its force was annulled. Now such forces can act for the bad or the good. Concerning one great Torah figure, it is said that when he entered synagogue, he stood in a corner and felt that his prayer flowed easily and ascended straight to Heaven. When he was finished, he asked the synagogue regulars if they were aware of anything special about that corner. Nobody knew except for one elderly man, who said that the Vilna Gaon had prayed precisely in that spot. The influence of the Gaon’s prayer had remained there after many years, having an effect on the person who stood there.

Everyone is therefore obligated to sanctify the place where he finds himself, and at the very least his home. Concerning Rabbi Shemuel Luria Zatzal, it is said that in his old age he complained to his grandson, “Why does everyone come to see me for a blessing? What am I? Who am I? Before becoming old, I went to the tomb of the Arizal and the people for whom I prayed were helped by his merit. Yet now that I have become old and no longer have the strength to go to holy places and pray for them, what could I tell people who come to see me? That being the case, I made my table a holy place and my bed a holy place. I pray here in my home, and Hashem saves His people and sends them His blessings!” Everyone has the power to sanctify his home by hermetically sealing it against all kinds of things that render the mind impure and encourages it to revolt against the Creator. A person can also sanctify his home through Torah study and by speaking words of holiness. By this merit we can transform wherever we are into a place of holiness, one on which Hashem’s blessings rest.

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, *“Judah approached him and said, ‘If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my lord’s ears and let not your anger flare up at your servant, for you are like Pharaoh’ ”* (Genesis 44:18).

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita explains that by saying this, Judah was asking Joseph to free Benjamin after the cup was discovered in his sack. By saying, “Bi [If you please] my lord,” he meant: “We are not afraid of you, for Hashem protects the 12 [yud beit – the same letters as in the word bi] tribes. Even though Joseph was sold as a slave, we are certain that he remained righteous, for the Holy One, blessed be He, promised Jacob that all his children would be righteous. Although Joseph vanished among non-Jews, it is certain that the Holy One, blessed be He, also protected him so that he did not lose his way.”

It Was Simply a Plot

It is written, *“Judah approached him”* (Genesis 44:18).

We need to understand the meaning of Judah’s protest. Was it not Judah himself who declared, “Behold, we are ready to be slaves to my lord, both we and the one in whose hand the cup was found” (v.16)? Yet now, when Joseph

demonstrated greater leniency by saying, “The man in whose possession the cup was found, only he shall be my slave. As for you, return in peace to your father” (v.17), Judah suddenly protested against it!

The Alsheich explains that at first Judah believed that the time had now come for them to be punished for having sold Joseph, since they had sold him as a slave and were now being taken as such. However when Judah saw that all the brothers were to be freed but Benjamin imprisoned, he realized that this was not divine punishment, since Benjamin had not participated in Joseph’s sale. Hence it was simply a plot. Judah then addressed Joseph with his harsh remarks.

How Can I Return to My Father?

It is written, *“How can I return to my father if the lad is not with me?”* (Genesis 44:34).

When the tzaddik Rabbi Meir of Premishlan Zatzal came to this verse, he let out a sigh and cried. He said, “How can I return to my father? How can a Jew return to his Father in Heaven after living his entire life in this world without the lad, without having accepted the yoke of Torah and mitzvot in his youth?” The measure of success in each generation is gauged by whether it knows how to properly transmit the tradition of their fathers to the generation of their children.

– Parperaot LaTorah

A Scratch in the Jewel

It is written, *“And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you”* (Genesis 45:5). Also, *“G-d has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you...and now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d”* (vv.7-8).

We see an apparent redundancy in these verses: “G-d has sent me ahead of you” (v.5) and “G-d has sent me ahead of you...it was not you who sent me here, but G-d” (vv.7-8). Let us try to explain this with a parable.

A great minister had a precious jewel among his treasures that he greatly loved. As he was admiring this jewel one day, it fell from his hands and was damaged, with a scratch in a particularly visible area. Its beauty was thus ruined. Greatly distressed at this turn of events, the minister immediately called his counselors to ask them how to repair the jewel. They all replied that, however much anyone tried to fix it, the defect would remain. However a wise man advised the minister to engrave his name on the jewel with an elaborate design consisting of flowers and buds, and to begin at the point of the scratch. If the minister’s name were to be engraved on the jewel with decorative flowers, its value would greatly increase. Furthermore, the scratch itself would be the cause of the jewel’s splendid enhancement!

Similarly, Joseph consoled his brothers by saying: Hashem, Who is the cause of all things, made my sale occur through you in order to bring our father Jacob and his descendants to Egypt. If you are upset by thinking that you sold me here, then realize that Hashem arranged your actions and that it was not you who sent me here. That is, from the outset, deliverance emerged by your action, and from that action great good emerged. This is why the Torah once again underlines that from Joseph’s sale, good and deliverance emerged for all his brothers and family.

Wine and Oil

It is written, *“To his father he sent...the best of Egypt...and ten she-donkeys laden with grain, bread, and food for his father for the journey”* (Genesis 45:23).

The Mahari Assad Zatzal said that wood from every kind of tree can be used the altar’s fire, with the exception of the grapevine and the olive tree. Why can such wood not be used for the altar? The reason involves their products, namely wine and oil, for libations of wine were poured upon the altar, and sacrifices were offered with oil. Thus they saved their “ancestors” from being burned.

Jacob always thought that he would descend into Sheol for his son. Yet who told him that his son would be in Gehinnom?

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Thirty-Three Words

It is written, *“Pharaoh said to Jacob, ‘How old are you?’ Jacob answered Pharaoh, ‘The days of the years of my sojourns have been a 130 years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the days of the years of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns’”* (Genesis 47:8-9).

When Jacob replied, “Few and bad,” the Holy One, blessed be He, said: “I saved you from Esau and from Laban, and I returned both Dinah and Joseph to you. Yet you complain about the days of your life by saying that they were few and bad? By your life, I have counted your words from vayomer [and he said] until bimei migureihem [in the days of their sojourns]. That is what will be missing from your years, which will not reach those of your father Isaac!” There are 33 words in Jacob’s complaint, precisely the number in years that his lifespan fell short of his father’s, for Isaac lived to the age of 180, whereas Jacob lived to be 147 (Da’at Zekenim Miba’alei HaTosaphot citing the Midrash).

Nevertheless, were the days of Jacob’s life really few and bad? It is clear that Jacob was answering a question that was put to him by Pharaoh, who was curious about his age because he appeared extremely old and tormented. He therefore answered by saying that there was a reason for his appearance. That being the case, why was he punished?

We must say that at Jacob’s level, if he had detailed and expounded upon the kindnesses that Hashem had shown him in life (by having saved him and restored his children to him), then he would have had no reason to describe the days of his life as “few and bad.” It is true that his life seemed brief and tragic at the time. However now, after having been saved and his children restored to him, there was no longer any sign of evil.

This is why Pharaoh’s question also contained a criticism, for it was prompted by Jacob’s tormented appearance, for which he alone was responsible. In fact if Jacob had focused upon the bounties of Heaven according to his level, his appearance would have become youthful and uplifted. For example, King David said: “Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalms 23:4). On this Rav Shach Zatzal asked: We understand that a staff comforts, but a rod? A rod is used to strike people! How can this offer comfort? The answer is that if we focus on the One behind the rod – if we realize that it is the Holy One, blessed be He, and that He loves us – then we will be consoled.

The Sanzer Rebbe had a son who died before Shacharit, and he wanted to bury him before the prayer began. He explained that when somebody leaves home in the morning and receives a tap on the shoulder, he turns around and looks back. If the tap comes from a friend, he understands that it is a kindhearted gesture. Similarly, now that he left his home before Shacharit and received a strong tap on the shoulder, when he looked back and saw that it came from someone Who loves him – and no one loves him more than Hashem – he could now thank Him, for He is good.

The answer is that Jacob believed that Joseph, because he was handsome, would certainly sin. Therefore if he sinned – if he was a wicked son – Jacob would follow him into Gehinnom. Joseph therefore sent him wine and oil, alluding to the fact that the grapevine is not burned on the altar because it has a righteous son, namely wine.

The Doorway That Arose

It is written, *“Pharaoh said to Jacob, ‘How old are you?’”* (Genesis 47:8).

In the Egyptian royal palace, the custom was for visitors to enter the king’s room through a doorway with a low entrance. In this way, everyone who entered would have to bend down. When Abraham in his time presented himself before Pharaoh the king of Egypt, Hashem performed a miracle for him and the doorway arose. He therefore did not have to bend down, but entered before Pharaoh standing tall. When Jacob appeared before Pharaoh, the same miracle occurred. This is why Pharaoh was surprised, for he believed that the man standing before him was Abraham. He therefore asked him, “How old are you?”

I Still Have Some Years Left

It is written, *“How old are you?”* (Genesis 47:8).

Pharaoh was told that the Nile had risen to Jacob’s feet upon his arrival, and therefore he was very happy because he thought that as long as Jacob was alive, the Nile would rise to his feet and water the land. However when he saw Jacob and he appeared to be a gaunt old man, he imagined him to be extremely old and on the verge of death. That being the case, what reason could the Egyptians have for rejoicing? Pharaoh therefore asked Jacob for his age, to which he replied: “Few and bad have been the day of the years of my life” (v.9). In other words: I have aged prematurely due to the many hardships I have endured. However I still hope to reach the age of my father, who lived to be 180 years old.

– Kli Yakar

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha deals with the reunion of Jacob’s family when Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and brought his entire family to Egypt in order to ensure their sustenance.

Because of the plot surrounding Joseph’s cup, Judah recounted to his brother everything that had happened to them since they arrived in Egypt, including the suffering of their father on account of Benjamin’s absence. Joseph then revealed himself to his brothers, being incapable of restraining himself any longer. Joseph sent for his father, who wanted to see his son before dying, and thus all the house of Israel descended into Egypt. Jacob went to live in Goshen, for Joseph had given him the most fertile part of the land upon Pharaoh’s orders. Joseph then sustained his father’s household and the entire land.

EISHET CHAYIL

Working for Heaven

The wife of Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, Rebbetzin Michle, was standing by the door of the room behind their house and looking at all the food on the shelves. “This makes it all worth the effort,” she thought to herself. “The soap I make allows us to live. Baruch Hashem, He helps us! When the children arrive, I’ll send them to the yeshiva kitchen.”

Making soap requires a lot of work. It is not an easy job, nor does it end there. After being made it has to be sold, and care must be taken to ensure that it is made from the best ingredients. The Rebbetzin’s three children entered the room and one of them asked, “Did you sell the soap yet?” The Rebbetzin replied, “Yes, Baruch Hashem! Tomorrow I’m going to start the process all over again.”

“It doesn’t tire you out?” another child asked. “Yes, it’s really tiring, but the farmers pay us with food. Here in Smilovitch, there’s nobody around to support the yeshiva, and look at what I received for my soap. Now the boys in yeshiva can eat their fill, and Baruch Hashem we can also eat our fill.”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Moshe Biderman –The Lelover Rebbe

Rabbi Moshe Biderman was born in the Polish town of Lelov in 5535 to the saintly Rabbi David, may his merit protect us. His father was the founder of the outstanding Lelover dynasty and one of the greatest disciples of the Chozeh of Lublin. From his youth, Rabbi Moshe acquired Torah and Chassidut from his holy father, as well as from his father's Rav, the Chozeh of Lublin, who spoke enthusiastically of him.

After his marriage to the daughter of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak, the Yid Hakadosh (holy Jew) of Pshischa, Rabbi Moshe did not want to accept any official positions. Instead, he placed himself in the shadow of the other tzaddikim. When Rabbi Mordechai of Chernobyl learned of him, Rabbi Moshe did not want to remain living in Chernobyl. He therefore moved to Pshischa and placed himself in the shadow of his father-in-law. There in Pshischa he grew in Torah and Chassidut, in holiness and purity. Like his father, Rabbi Moshe was known for his great love of Jews. He was a hidden tzaddik, a man who did not want to officially become a Rebbe. Instead he went to acquire Torah and Chassidut among the tzaddikim of the generation. He was famous for his longing for Eretz Israel, which he loved with all his heart and soul. In fact it did not take him long for his love of the land to translate into action. Thus in the year 5610, Rabbi Moshe traveled to the Holy Land and settled in Jerusalem. When he left the Diaspora, those close to him wanted to know to whom he was leaving them. Rabbi Moshe answered that in Poland there remained the Rebbe of Radomsk, the Tiferet Shlomo. Unfortunately, Rabbi Moshe did not live long in Jerusalem, for within a year, on Tevet 11, 5611, he was summoned to Heaven. Rabbi Moshe Biderman is buried on the Mount of Olives. May his merit protect us all.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

In Their Midst

It is written, *“Then the nations will know that I am the L-RD Who sanctifies Israel, for My sanctuary will be in their midst forever”* (Ezekiel 37:28).

We may explain this passage according to the Alsheich's remarks on the verse, “They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell in their midst” (Exodus 25:8): It is not written “in its midst,” but “in their midst” – inside of each Jew. From here we learn that Hashem resides within each Jew and sanctifies him in this way.

Applying this to the Haftorah, we have: “Then the nations will know that I am the L-RD Who sanctifies Israel.” That is, Hashem sanctifies Israel, the proof being that “My sanctuary will be in their midst forever.” The Torah states “it their midst” (not “in its midst”), proof that Hashem resides in each Jew.

We may also explain it in another way: We know that what Hashem creates exists forever, since Hashem is eternal. Therefore when Hashem brings about our deliverance (may it come speedily and in our days), it will never be followed by servitude.

The passage states, “Then the nations will know that I am the L-RD Who sanctifies Israel,” highlighting the fact that “I am” – I and not a messenger. The verse continues: “For My sanctuary will be in their midst forever,” since when they see Hashem's Sanctuary (meaning the Third Temple), which will be in their midst and exist forever, then they will know that Hashem has brought about their final deliverance.

–Torat HaParasha

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

The Africans' Point of View

On the twenty-fourth of Nissan, farmers from Africa were removed from Judah and Jerusalem, and that day was made into a day of rejoicing. The story is as follows:

When the Africans came to plead against the Jews before Alexander of Macedon, they said, “Canaan belongs to us, as it is written: ‘The land of Canaan according to its borders’ [Numbers 34:2]. Now Canaan was our ancestor.” Thereupon Gebiha ben Pesisa said to the Sages, “Authorize me to go and plead against them before Alexander of Macedon. Should they defeat me, then say: ‘You have defeated but an ignorant man among us.’ However if I defeat them, then say to them: ‘The Law of Moses has defeated you.’” Thus they authorized him, and he went and pleaded against them.

“From where do you derive your proof?” he asked them. “From the Torah,” they replied. “I too,” he said, “will bring you proof only from the Torah, as it is written: ‘And he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers” ’ [Genesis 9:25]. Now if a slave acquires property, to whom does the slave belong, and to whom does the property belong? Moreover, it is now many years that you have not served us.” Alexander said to the Africans, “Answer him!” They pleaded, “Give us three days.” Therefore he gave them a respite. However as much as they tried, they could find no answer to give. Hence they immediately fled, leaving behind their sown fields and their planted vineyards. That year was a Sabbatical year.

– From Sanhedrin 91a

A TRUE STORY

Double Money and Two Loaves of Bread

It is written, *“The men took...double money”* (Genesis 43:15).

The salary of the gaon Rabbi David Zatzal, the Av Beit Din of Novardok, was three rubles per week. However it was not enough for the Rebbetzin to feed her children. Nevertheless, Rabbi David did not want to complain about his meager salary.

The Rebbetzin was speaking to her husband and said in jest, “It seems that all your knowledge of the Rambam still isn't enough for even two loaves of bread [lechem mishneh]. You should ask the leaders of the community to double your salary [kesef mishneh].” (Note: Lechem Mishneh and Kesef Mishneh are two commentaries on the Rambam.) Rabbi David kept quiet, and the Rebbetzin understood that he didn't mind if she took the initiative in this matter.

She therefore complained to leader of the community about the extreme poverty in which they lived, He in turn spoke to Rabbi David and asked him what his salary was. He replied, “When I'm paid, I receive three rubles a week.” The community leader began investigating the matter, and he discovered that the Shamash was paying the Rav only once every other week. The Shamash was therefore fired, and from then on the Rav received his entire salary. The Rav spoke to the Rebbetzin and said, “You see, you weren't correct. My knowledge of the Rambam is enough for two loaves of bread [lechem mishneh], and in fact I didn't need to ask for twice as much money [kesef mishneh].” Thus they ended up with double money!