

PARSHAS VAYIGASH

תשפ"ו

We have a very strange story.

Yosef has passed all his nisyonos and he is now the ruler of Egypt. Yosef knows how much his father has been suffering since his disappearance, but he keeps it going for another nine years – after he becomes the ruler of Egypt and can easily send a message to Yaakov.

The first time the brothers came to Egypt for food, he plays this game with them accusing them of being spies. He holds Shimon captive until they come back with Binyomin. He demands this – knowing what additional agony this would cause his father. This is very puzzling, since Yosef valued kibbud av, like we saw last week that he kept looking for his brothers with every excuse to turn back. Yosef kept getting lost in his attempts to find his brothers and he refuses to give up because of his tremendous dedication to kibbud av! But now Yosef is causing his father seemingly needless suffering!

At the end of the story, in Parshas Vayechi after Yaakov Ovinu dies, the brothers come pleading to Yosef for forgiveness. They think now, after their father died, Yosef will feel he is able to take revenge on them for how they treated him all those years ago. But Yosef says they completely misunderstood who he is. Yosef realized that Hashem wanted him to end up in Egypt one way or another. Yosef figured this is the way Hashem will fulfill his dreams of the brothers bowing before him. So Hashem used their bad middos to arrange this plan. He felt nothing personal against his brothers. Yosef was merely helping things along by making this whole fake drama and forcing Binyomin to come down to Egypt.

There is another problem with this story.

Yaakov was promised that he would be able to raise 12 sons who would become the shevotim who will found Klal Yisroel. But these great sons condemned one of their own to death! How could this be? Chazal explain that the brothers reasoned that Yosef had a din of moreid b'malchus. They were so convinced that they were right about Yosef's guilt that they counted Hashem as the last member of the Beis din!

Yet on the other hand, the pesukim tell us that the brothers were motivated by jealousy of Yosef for being their father's favorite son. They hated him. So what is really happening here?

The answer is very simple. There are different levels of honesty and dishonesty. One type of dishonesty is when you fool others. Another type of dishonesty is when you fool yourself. You manage to convince yourself you are doing something for one reason, when in reality you are doing it for a different reason.

So, deep down in the depths of their hearts, the brothers were jealous of Yosef's favored status. But they were such great tzaddikim that they couldn't bear to admit to themselves that they had any hatred for their own brother. So they covered it over with a more lofty, purely l'shem shomayim kind of motive. Yosef was moreid b'malchus.

One of the big social problems of our world today is that we live lives of sheker. We say we want one thing when we really want something else entirely.

As a consequence of their self-deception, they in turn are easily fooled by this ruler of Egypt who they imagine is a complete monster. They aren't capable of thinking it may be Yosef. And they start to regret how they treated Yosef. They say they should have treated him with less cruelty – even though they still think he deserved everything they did

to him.

Yosef demands Binyomin be brought down before him. In order to do that, the brothers have to get Yaakov to agree. Yaakov adamantly refuses. So in order to get Yaakov to agree, Yehudah has to put his entire future – his olom hazeh and his olom haboh on the line. Yehudah personally guarantees that he will bring Binyomin back to Yaakov and this gets Yaakov to agree.

So Yehudah is completely invested in Binyomin coming back after he is caught with Yosef's silver goblet. Yehudah steps forward and explains to Yosef how he can't conceivably go back to his father's house without Binyomin. He has made a personal guarantee with his own olom haboh! Take me as a slave instead!

Then Yehudah makes one final plea which Yosef will exploit: how can he go back and witness the deep pain and anguish that his father will endure when he sees us return and Binyomin is not with us? Yaakov will not be able to survive it!

At this point, Yosef cannot hold himself back. He exclaims: I am Yosef – is my father still alive?

The question is obvious – what kind of question is this? Of course Yaakov is still alive! They have been talking about Yaakov being alive the whole time.

And the midrash says the brothers couldn't answer Yosef because of the din and tochocho that Yosef – the youngest of the brothers – was giving them. How much more so will we not be able to answer Hashem when He judges us on the day of final judgement.

What does this midrash mean? How was Yosef giving the brothers such extreme tochocho by revealing himself and asking if his father was still alive? Why couldn't his brothers answer this obvious question?

The Beis Halevi answers all these problems with the following approach. Yosef wasn't just revealing himself. He was showing how the shevotim had been living a life of sheker all along. Now they claim that they care about their father's suffering – but what about 22 years ago when they sold Yosef? They knew just as well back then how much this would bring anguish and suffering to Yaakov, but they managed to do it anyways because of their righteous cause! So now you are hypocrites for asking me to overlook Binyomin's theft in order to spare Yaakov's suffering. Yehudah admits it's all about personal reasons – he just doesn't want to lose his olom haboh. What about your righteous cause now?

The answer is that you are all fakes. You didn't care about Yaakov's suffering because you were jealous of me and wanted to get rid of me. You knew that Yaakov was trying to have 12 sons who would become Klal Yisroel. Without Yosef, his whole life mission would be over. The Beis din and the righteous cause was just a cover-up for your true motives. And your pleading about Yaakov's suffering now is also just a cover to spare yourself from losing your olom haboh.

Yosef is revealing to them how they had been fooling themselves and living with a sheker for 22 years, convincing themselves that somehow, everything they put their father through was justified. It wasn't, and Yosef was proving it to them by how they are suddenly showing such deep concern for Yaakov when it came to losing Binyomin.

This is the kind of tochocho that we will all face when we go through the yom hadin. We will try to give all the excuses and reasons in the

world to justify why we couldn't help ourselves but do certain aveiros. And then Hashem will show us that at other times in our lives, when it came to something we really wanted, those excuses didn't stop us. We were fooling ourselves.

The brothers lied to themselves and convinced themselves they were doing everything l'shem shomayim when in reality they were jealous and hated him. And they carried on with this sheker for 22 years! And Yosef Hatzaddik does an essential service for Yaakov. The biggest favor he can do is force the brothers to confront their self-deception and do teshuvoh. But this was a painful process. Yosef needs to set up a whole charade and ruse to achieve this – extending Yaakov's suffering another 9 years.

Why? Because without this teshuvoh of confronting their hatred of Yosef and healing the rift among them, the brothers would not be worthy of becoming the Shivtei Koh and become the founders of Klal Yisroel. Yosef was helping fulfill Yaakov's life-long mission and all this suffering was absolutely necessary.

It is not just a story about Yosef and his brothers. It is about teaching us what it means to live an honest life. Being honest with one's self is one of the most important things you need to develop as a Jew. How much do you really value Torah and how much derech eretz do you give those who dedicate their lives to Torah?

Honesty, emes is a middoh. It is a part of a human personality. It is a basic mode of how you interact with people. Some people's basic

mode of interaction is with sheker – and it doesn't matter if it is with their children, their spouses or anyone that should be able to trust them. And some people naturally deal honestly and openly with people without any hidden agendas. Sometimes with brutal honesty.

The Beis Halevi was known as an Ish Emes. He had a very hard time being in the rabbonus in Slutsk and gave up the rabbonus. He moved to Warsaw but didn't do well in business because of his extreme honesty. But this is why he was zoche to everything he accomplished in Torah.

You have to understand in your own lives how important it is to cultivate this middoh.

Yosef's brothers were jealous of Yosef and it brought them to hatred. But they couldn't be honest with themselves about it. They came up with an excuse to get rid of Yosef. This caused Yaakov a tremendous amount of pain and the brothers couldn't become the Shivtei Koh unless they confronted the sheker and did teshuvoh.

Yaakov's middoh was emes and this brought him his wealth.

Emes is a middoh that needs to be developed because we live in a world of sheker where it is routine to live a life of sheker. In such a world, it is a big challenge to train yourself in the opposite direction. But those who are far from emes are far from Hashem.

This is one of the biggest lessons of Parshas Vayigash.