**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT VAYIGASH**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

Parashat Vayigash begins with Yehuda’s impassioned plea to the Egyptian vizier, who was actually Yosef, to permit Binyamin to return home to his father, despite the fact that the royal goblet was found in Binyamin’s sack. Yehuda offered to remain in Egypt as a slave in Binyamin’s place, expressing concern over his elderly father, who would die if Binyamin did not return.

The word “*avi*” – “my father” – appears seven times in Yehuda’s speech to Yosef, as he recounts Yaakov’s initial reluctance to allow Binyamin to go to Egypt, and the consequences of Binyamin’s not returning. This repeated emphasis on Yehuda’s relationship to Yaakov becomes significant in light of the fact that Yaakov, for his part, never used the word “*beni*” – “my son” – in reference to his children, except in reference to Yosef (37:33,35) and Binyamin (42:38). Moreover, in Yehuda’s plea, he recalls Yaakov saying to his sons, “You know that **my wife** bore me two sons; one of them [Yosef] left me…and I have not seen him until now. And if you will take this one [Binyamin] from me and catastrophe will befall him…” (44:29). Although we do not find Yaakov actually saying these words, they reveal that in Yehuda’s mind, Yaakov considered only Rachel as his real wife, and thus only Yosef and Binyamin were his real children. This undoubtedly aroused very hard feelings within Yehuda (and the other brothers), and yet, Yehuda now stood prepared to commit himself to a live of slavery on behalf of Binyamin, and in his plea repeatedly referred to Yaakov as “my father.” Although he did not feel that Yaakov regarded him as a son, Yehuda nevertheless maintained his commitment to respect Yaakov as a father. (This observation was made by [Rav Amnon Bazak](https://he-il.facebook.com/amnon.d.bazak/posts/550225168447343).)

There is much to learn from Yehuda’s conduct in this regard about the need to act properly even when we justifiably feel we have been wronged. *Chazal* noted Yaakov’s mistake in showing preferential treatment to Yosef (Shabbat 10b), but Yehuda, despite being directly affected by this mistake, and after making his own tragic mistake – that of *mekhirat Yosef* – eventually realized the need to overcome hard feelings and resentment, and to do the right thing even if the people around him hadn’t. Yehuda was mature enough to recognize that he must treat Yaakov as his father even if Yaakov did not, at least in his mind, treat him like a son. We should not make our treatment of others dependent upon what we feel they deserve or do not deserve. Instead, we must decide upon the wise and appropriate course of action, and leave the judgment to the one true Judge over the world.

Sunday

In his impassioned appeal to Yosef to allow Binyamin to return home to his father in Canaan, Yehuda poetically described the close bond between Binyamin and Yaakov: “*nafsho keshura ve-nafsho*” – “his soul is bound with his soul” (44:3). Because of this special bond, Yehuda argued, Yaakov would likely die if his sons returned home from Egypt without his most beloved son, Binyamin.

The *Ba’al Ha-turim* observes that the word “*keshura*” appears in only one other instance in the entire *Tanakh* – in Sefer Mishlei (22:15), where Shelomo warns of youthful recklessness: “*Ivelet keshura be-leiv na’ar*” – “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a youth.” Shelomo teaches us that “*ivelet*” (“foolishness”) is practically endemic to youthfulness. It is no coincidence, the *Ba’al Ha-turim* suggests, that there is only one other relationship that is described with the term “*keshura*” – the relationship between a parent and his child. In the *Ba’al Ha-turim*’s words, “Because his foolishness is bound in him, his soul must be bound with his father’s soul, so he can educate him.”

Beyond the clever attempt to connect two verses that share an unusual word but otherwise have little to do with one another, the *Ba’al Ha-turim* here alludes to a fundamental truism about education. Youngsters are naturally attracted to “*ivelet*” – wrong behavior and the wrong decisions – and often, the most effective means of negating this force is to strengthen the bonds between them and their parents. The more youngsters are “bound” to their parents with bonds of love, affection and respect, the less likely they are to be “bound’ to “*ivelet*,” to negative behaviors and tendencies. The *Ba’al Ha-turim* here teaches – and challenges – us to try to strengthen the bonds with our children, even if for no other reason than to loosen the “bonds” that pull them in the wrong direction.

(Based on a *sicha* by the Tolna Rebbe)

Monday

In the Gemara’s famous account of the Chanukah miracle (Shabbat 21b), it tells that after the Jews’ victory over the Greeks, the *Chashmonaim* “searched and found only a single cruse of oil placed with the seal of the *kohen gadol*.” The conventional understanding of this description is that the *kohen gadol*’s seal was necessary to verify the oil’s status of purity, that it was suitable for the kindling of the *menorah*. Some writers, however, questioned this reading, noting that there does not appear to be any halakhic reason for such a seal. It seems unlikely that all the materials offered in the Temple had to be kept in special seals that attested to their status of purity. The question thus arises as to the significance of the *kohen gadol*’s seal on the single cruse of oil found by the *Chashmonaim*.

Rav Aryeh Leib Breslau, in his [*Penei Aryeh* (40)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=1526&st=&pgnum=96&hilite=), cites a creative approach to explaining this account in the name of Rav Avraham Lifshitz, which was shown to him when he became rabbi of Rotterdam. Rav Lifshitz understood that the phrase “the seal of the *kohen gadol*” as suggesting that the oil was associated specifically with the *kohen gadol*; meaning, this was his personal oil. He explains that the *kohen gadol* was required to offer each day a special meal offering – the *minchat chavitin* – which was to be fried in oil (Vayikra 6:12-16). Possibly, then, the oil which the *Chashmonaim* found upon searching through the *Beit Ha-mikdash* was the oil which the *kohen gadol*had prepared for his daily *mincha* offering.

The question, then, becomes why the *kohen gadol* placed his seal on the cruse containing his oil. Additionally, we need to understand why the *Chashmonaim* assumed that this oil was suitable for the *menorah*. The Mishna in Masekhet Menachot (86a) establishes that only the highest quality oil may be used for the kindling of the *menorah*, whereas the oil used for the *mincha* sacrifices did not have to be of such pristine quality. Why, then, did the *Chashmonaim* use the *kohen gadol*’s oil, which was earmarked for his daily *mincha*, for the kindling of the *menorah*?

Rav Lifshitz explained that the *kohen gadol* at the time took it upon himself to use only the highest quality oil for his daily *minchat chavitin*. The Gemara (Menachot 86b) comments that the reason for the difference between the required standards for the *menorah* and the *mincha* offerings is “*ha-Torah chasa al mammonan shel Yisrael*” – the Torah’s laws must not result in the nation’s impoverishment. The daily kindling of the *menorah* did not require a large amount of oil, and thus it was not unreasonable for the Torah to demand only the highest quality oil for this *mitzva*. Demanding this standard every time a *mincha* offering was brought, however, would be financially burdensome, if not crippling. Rav Lifshitz deduced from this line of reasoning that there was value in an individual choosing to adhere to the highest standards when offering his *mincha*. It appears from the Gemara that as a matter of regular policy, it was impractical to demand the highest quality oil for *menachot*, but in principle, this standard is appropriate for the *menachot*, albeit not strictly required as it is for the *menorah*. Accordingly, it is possible that the *kohen gadol* at the time of the Chanukah miracle strove to perform his obligation of *minchat chavitin* at the highest standard, ensuring to use the same quality oil as is required for the *menorah*. To that end, he kept his oil in special sealed jars, designating it especially for his *mitzva*.

It has been suggested that this approach might explain the reason for the different standards that *Chazal* assigned to the *mitzva* of the Chanukah lighting. Although the basic obligation requires just a single candle each night, the universally accepted custom is to adhere to the “*mehadrin min ha-mehadrin*” standard, whereby we add a candle each night of Chanukah. The miracle of the oil was made possible by the fact that a *kohen gadol* strove to adhere to the highest possible standards of *mitzva* observance. It was because a supply of highest quality oil was designated for the *minchat chavitin* that the *Chashmonaim* were able to light the candles which then miraculously burned for eight nights. We commemorate this aspect of the miracle by fulfilling the *mitzva* of Chanukah candle lighting at the highest possible standard, rather than feel content by satisfying the basic requirement.

Tuesday

We read in Parashat Vayigash that after Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he sent them back to Canaan and instructed them to bring their father to live in Egypt so he can escape the famine that ravaged his homeland. Before his brothers left Egypt, Yosef warned them, “*Al tirgezu ba-darekh*” (45:24). Rashi, citing the Gemara (Ta’anit 10b), explains this to mean, “*Al tit’aseku bi-dvar halakha*” – “Do not engage in halakhic matters.” According to the Gemara, Yosef urged his brothers not to delve into complex halakhic material as they journeyed, as this could cause them to lose their way.

The *Panim Yafot* explains the Gemara’s comment in light of another passage in the Talmud, in Masekhet Kiddushin (30b): “Even a father and son…who are involved in Torah in the same gate become enemies of one another, but they do not leave from there until they [once again] love each other.” The Gemara here notes that the nature of intensive Torah study is such that even close family members, who genuinely love one another, become “enemies” in the course of debating the material they study together. This acrimony is only temporary, as the Gemara emphasizes, for in the end the father and son truly love one another, but while they study, the discourse and debate can be tense and fierce. The Gemara finds an allusion to this phenomenon in a verse in Tehillim (127:5): “..they shall not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.” The “enemies” spoke of here, the Gemara suggests, are close family members, or friends, engaged in the fierce “battle” of Torah study. The *Panim Yafot* (referring to his remarks in his *Sefer Ha-makneh* commentary to Masechet Kiddushin) notes that this applies only “in the gate” – in the comfort of the students’ familiar surroundings and regular place of study. Once they leave the security of their familiar environment, the *Panim Yafot* writes, it is inappropriate for them to become “enemies” in the course of study. The confrontational style of discourse is appropriate and beneficial in “the gate,” when the students enjoy the comfort of their regular place of study, but not beyond their familiar framework. The *Panim Yafot* does not elaborate, but the likely reason for this distinction is that people are often tense and anxious when they leave their familiar surroundings, and under such circumstances, otherwise healthy debate and argumentation could evolve into personal attacks and outright hostility.

According to the *Panim Yafot*, this was Yosef’s advice to his brothers. He was not telling them to suspend all study during travel, but rather urged them to refrain from intensive argumentation as they journeyed.

Difference of opinion and even heated debate are vital elements of the Torah process, but only under the right circumstances and in the right settings. Only in frameworks where the brotherly love between the students is firmly established and secure is it appropriate for them to engage in heated debate and discourse. In times and situations of tension and uneasiness, it is far preferable to engage in Torah discourse gently and pleasantly, with special sensitivity and respect, in order to ensure that the intellectual disagreement does not evolve into personal strife and acrimony.

Wednesday

The Torah in Parashat Vayigash lists the names of Yaakov’s children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who relocated with him from Canaan to Egypt. These included the only son of Dan, Chushim (46:23). Curiously, in mentioning Chushim, the Torah speaks in the plural form, of Dan’s “children”: “*U-****vnei*** *Dan Chushim*” (“And Dan’s **children** were Chushim”). Ibn Ezra (and Chizkuni) suggests that the plural form is used because Dan actually had two sons, one of whom died and is thus not mentioned by name. The Torah therefore speaks of Dan’s “sons” but lists by name only Chushim.

Rav Hillel Posek, in his [*Hillel Omer* (Y.D. 58)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=773&pgnum=252), understood Ibn Ezra as interpreting the verse to mean that both of Dan’s sons were named Chushim. He thus contends that this verse serves as a source for allowing calling two children by the same name, which is the subject of some controversy. Rav Eliezer Waldenberg, however, in his [*Tzitz Eliezer* (11:56)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=14510&st=%D7%90%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%A2&pgnum=151&hilite=), dismissed this proof, noting that Ibn Ezra makes no mention at all of Dan’s two sons having the same name. Ibn Ezra simply states that Dan had a son besides Chushim, and this is why the Torah uses the plural term “*u-vnei*.” Therefore, there is no proof from this verse to the permissibility of calling children the same name.

It should be noted, however, that Rav Posek brings a second proof, as well – from Sefer Divrei Hayamim I (3:6,8), where the verses list the name of David’s sons who were born after he settled in Jerusalem, and mention two names twice – Elishama and Elifelet. Rashi explains David has sons with these two names who died, and he named two later sons by these names. This would certainly appear to prove that a child may be given the same name that had been given to an older sibling.

Practically speaking, Rav Posek concludes that as common practice is not to give the same name to two children, this should be avoided, though it is acceptable to give them names which are even slightly different from one another, such as Elazar and Eliezer. This is Rav Waldenberg’s conclusion, as well, though he adds that one should not give two children similar names if the intent is to name them after the same deceased relative. He notes the comments of Rav Malkiel Tannenbaum of Lomza, in *Divrei Malkiel* (3:75), who writes that it would be disrespectful to one’s parent to name two of his children after that parent, as this gives the impression that he actually had more than one parent. Therefore, even if there is some slight difference between the names, one should not, according to Rav Waldenberg, name two children after the same person.

Thursday

The Torah notes in Parashat Vayigash that the total number of members of Yaakov’s family who moved to Egypt from Canaan was seventy (46:27). Already the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 94) noted that when the Torah lists the names of those who accompanied Yaakov in his move to Egypt, it lists only sixty-nine individuals, not seventy. One of the answers given in the Midrash is “*Chushim ben Dan hishlim et ha-minyan*” – Dan’s lone son, Chushim, brought the number to seventy. The commentators to the Midrash struggled to explain this answer, as Chushim’s name appears in the Torah’s list, and is thus included in the sixty-nine family members. How does Chushim bring the total to seventy?

The *Matenot Kehuna* commentary explains that Chushim had an unusually large number of descendants, as the population of Dan in the wilderness (64,400 – Bamidbar 26:43) ranked among the largest among all the tribes, despite his being Dan’s only son. For this reason, the Torah speaks of Dan’s offspring in the plural form – “*U-vnei Dan Chushim*” (“Dan’s sons were Chushim’), as an allusion to Chushim’s especially large number of descendants.Accordingly, the Midrash points to Chushim’s exceptional future propagation as the reason why the sixty-nine family members were counted as seventy, insofar as Chushim in a sense counted as two people.

Rav Simcha Reuven Adelman, in his [*Ha-tirosh* commentary to the Midrash](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=37916&st=&pgnum=214&hilite), cites a different version of the text of this Midrashic passage, whereby the word “Chushim” is omitted. According to this version, the Midrash asserts that “Dan’s son” brought the total to seventy. Rav Adelman explains the Midrash as presenting the view stated explicitly by Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni (which we discussed yesterday), that Dan had two sons, one of which died before the family arrived in Egypt. This is the reason, according to these commentators, that the Torah speaks of “Dan’s sons” even though it names only one. Rav Adelman claims that this is the Midrash’s intent in explaining why the Torah gives a total of seventy people. This total took into account Dan’s son who left Canaan with the family but tragically died before the family’s arrival in Egypt.

Interestingly, the Midrash proceeds to cite the view of Rabbi Meir, who wrote in his Torah scroll the word “***u-ven*** *dan Chushim*” – mentioning Dan’s “son” in the singular form, rather than using the plural term “*u-vnei*.” It seems that the Midrash noted Rabbi Meir’s view because he disagreed with the theory that Dan’s offspring somehow brought the total number of family members to seventy. Rabbi Meir did not see anything unusual about Dan’s offspring – as evidenced by his tradition, advocating for the singular form “*u-ven*” – that would warrant adding one to the total sum of family members. As such, Rabbi Meir must have had some other solution to explain why the Torah presents a total of seventy.

The likely explanation, as suggested by Rav Yechiel Shelomo Mintzberg, in his [*Mishbetzei Shelomo*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=41806&st=&pgnum=221&hilite), is that in Rabbi Meir’s view, the Torah rounded off the number of Yaakov’s family to seventy, and there is thus no reason to be troubled by the discrepancy. In fact, the Rosh (end of Masekhet Pesachim) points to this verse as proof to the fact that the Torah occasionally rounds off numbers. On this basis, the Rosh explains why we count only forty-nine days of the *omer*, while the Torah explicitly commands, “you shall count fifty days” (Vayikra 23:16). This may very well have been the view of Rabbi Meir, who seems not to have been troubled by the Torah’s mention of Yaakov’s seventy family members.

Rav Mintzberg notes in this context the debate in the Mishna (Makkot 22a) as to the number of lashes administered by *Beit Din* to a convicted offender. The Torah in Sefer Devarim (25:3) requires administering forty lashes, but the first view cited in the Mishna interprets this figure to mean thirty-nine. Rabbi Yehuda disagrees, and requires forty lashes, following the literal reading of the Biblical command. It stands to reason that Rabbi Yehuda maintained that numerical figures in the Torah are precise, whereas the first *Tanna* mentioned in the Mishna felt that figures are sometimes rounded off. Generally, when Rabbi Yehuda disputes a ruling, his disputant is Rabbi Meir. Quite possibly, then, the first view recorded in the Mishna is that of Rabbi Meir, who, as noted earlier, works off the premise that the Torah rounds off totals, and thus in his view, the command to administer forty lashes actually refers to thirty-nine lashes.

Friday

After Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers, he explains to them that God sent him to Egypt “because there have now been two years of famine throughout the land, and there will be another five years without plowing or harvesting” (45:6). He proceeds to instruct them to bring Yaakov and their families to live in Egypt where he would support them, “for there are another five years of famine” (45:11). As Yosef had prophetically foreseen seven years of famine, and only two years had passed, he summoned his family to live in Egypt so he could provide for them during the remaining five years.

The Tosefta (Sota 10), as cited by Rashi (to 47:19), notes that in the final section of Parashat Vayigash, where the Torah tells of Yosef’s management of Egypt during the famine, we read that Yosef distributed seed for sowing after two years of famine. Whereas Yosef had predicted that no food would be produced for another five years, the Torah explicitly states that Yosef gave the citizens seeds with which to plant and produce food, a percentage of which they gave to Pharaoh. The Tosefta thus concludes that when Yaakov arrived in Egypt after the second year of famine, the harsh conditions ended in his merit, and agricultural activity resumed in the country. And thus although Yosef predicted five more years without food production, in truth the conditions improved as soon as Yaakov arrived.

Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, in [*Va-yavinu Ba-mikra*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=46214&st=&pgnum=196&hilite=), elaborates on this point, that Yosef erred in his prediction. Yosef had assumed that his father and brothers would depend on him for their sustenance, but in truth it was just the opposite – Yaakov brought the blessing of sustenance upon Yosef and the rest of Egypt. Rav Karp adds that this might be the Gemara’s intent in Masekhet Sota (13b), where it posits that Yosef was punished for listening to Yehuda refer to Yaakov as “*avdekha avinu*” – “your servant, our father” – without protesting. The reason why Yosef did not protest, Rav Karp suggests, is because he indeed saw himself as Yaakov’s “master” in the sense that he assumed he was needed to support him. In the end, Yosef was proven wrong, as Yaakov actually restored the prosperity of Egypt.

This insight reflects the fine line that exists between a sense of mission and responsibility, on the one hand, and hubris, on the other. Certainly, we are encouraged to identify needs that we feel we can fill, and problems which we feel we can solve. However, in this ambitious quest, we run the risk of overestimating our importance and the extent to which we are truly needed. We need to try to find ways to contribute without falling into the trap of believing we are more important than we really are. Yosef was undoubtedly correct that God sent him to Egypt to complete an important mission, but it appears that he went a bit too far in assessing this mission. This should serve as a warning to us all that while we, like Yosef, should recognize and embrace the roles that Providence has assigned to us, we must, at the same, maintain a humble awareness of our limited importance in the grand scheme of things.

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