

Brothers

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

This week, in Parshas Vayigash, Yosef breaks down and ends the charade he had been maintaining with his brothers. Each time they came to Mitzrayim seeking food for their families, Yosef found ways to torment them. In last week's parsha, we learned how he forced them to bring their youngest brother, Binyomin, and then threatened to imprison him along with Shimon.

Though the brothers had accepted his strange conditions until now, Yehudah let him know that they were not going to accede to his latest demand. For the first time, Yehudah spoke back strongly to Yosef. While the brothers had gone along with Yosef's terms regarding the other matters, they could not jeopardize Binyomin's freedom. All along, their need for food forced them to play along with the viceroy's strange behavior and demands, though they were totally out of line and not sensible. As the leader of the brothers, Yehudah took upon himself the task of spokesman.

Yosef was overcome when he saw how much his brothers cared for each other. Furthermore, Yosef had overheard their discussions during their earlier trip to Mitzrayim, when they expressed regret over selling him and acknowledged that they had not properly understood the pain they caused him (Bereishis 42:21-22). Although they had initially reasoned that Yosef deserved to be sold, they began to feel that they had made a mistake and repented.

With their brotherly feelings toward Yosef restored, and their concern for Binyomin clearly evident, Yosef realized that his objective had been achieved. There was no longer a need to torment his brothers. The brotherly love and unity had been revived, and now the shevotim could move forward in fulfilling Hashem's plan for the formation of Am Yisroel.

As for the way they had treated him, Yosef let them know that as a person who had bitachon in Hashem, he knew that the brothers were only pawns in Hashem's plan. Thus, after revealing himself to them, he said (45:8) "It wasn't you who sent me here. It was Hashem, Who placed me in the position of an assistant to Paroh and a ruler of the country."

Yosef didn't bear a grudge against his brothers, because he understood that they were Hashem's messengers, who were like actors reading lines that were written for them and taking part in a plan designed for a higher purpose. A person with bitachon doesn't carry around resentment against other people. What they did to him was not their fault, and it was done for a good reason, which will be revealed in the future. Yosef had already seen some of the reasons that Hashem had caused his brothers to hate him and sell him into slavery.

[Besides, harboring resentment is never beneficial. It leads to bitterness, negativity, and anger—none of which are helpful or productive, and they certainly won't help you achieve anything.]

Yosef and Binyomin embraced each other and wept. Chazal teach that their tears were not for the pain of separation or the joy of reunion, nor were they mourning their mother, whose tears would later define a nation. Rather, they wept over the future destruction of Mishkan Shiloh, which would be located in the portion of Yosef in Eretz Yisroel, and the two Botei Mikdosh that would be built in the portion of Binyomin.

These tears were not just for the tragedies of their time, but for events that would unfold in the distant future. They cried for the suffering of their descendants, future generations of Jews, through times of great destruction. Just as their mother, Rochel, would weep for her children, so did they weep for the Jewish people throughout the ages. They put aside their personal emotions and became consumed with concern for their brethren. This selflessness is at the heart of what it means to be a Jew.

The Chashmonaim demonstrated this same spirit. When they saw how Am Yisroel was being threatened by the Yevonim, they fought back, despite the great peril to themselves. With millions of Jews at risk of assimilation, they didn't think about their own welfare, but instead took up arms, fortified with faith that Hashem would grant them victory. They understood that when a brother is in danger, we must do whatever we can to protect him.

The lights of Chanukah, which brought joy and hope to our homes, communicated this very message for eight days. The menorah's light energized us to face our struggles throughout the year. Yet, even as the glow of the menorah fades, we must hold on to its light during the inevitable dark days that follow.

One of the many lessons we learn from examining the actions of our forefathers in the parshiyos of Sefer Bereishis is that they viewed their experiences not as isolated events, but as part of a greater Divine plan leading to the ultimate redemption. There are challenges along the way, as well as moments of great joy. Our task is to remember that whatever course we are on was charted by Hashem for a purpose larger than ourselves and our immediate circumstances.

When Avrohom Avinu was on his way to the Akeidah, he saw Har Hamoriah in the distance (Bereishis 22:4). He envisioned the future, the eternal nature of the korbanos that would be brought there, and the glory that would emanate from that holy site. He asked his companions if they could see what he saw, and when they replied that they could not, he told them, "Stay here with the donkey, while I go up with Yitzchok to the mountain you cannot see." Avrohom compared his companions to the donkey, because those who could not see the future were like an animal driven only by instinct, with no deeper vision of what lay ahead.

In Parshas Vayigash, we read of the emotional reunion between Yaakov and Yosef, a reconnection that came after many years of separation and suffering (46:29). Yet, instead of

merely rejoicing in their reunion or catching up on lost time, Yaakov Avinu's response, as Rashi explains, was to recite Krias Shema. Yaakov understood that the reunion of his family signified something much greater. When he saw the unity between his sons, he recognized that the formation of the shevotim was on track and that Hashem's plan for the establishment of Am Yisroel was unfolding. He knew that although they were beginning another exile, it was all part of Hashem's greater plan for the Jewish people.

At that moment, Yaakov was overwhelmed with the realization of Hashem's greatness, and Krias Shema expressed his recognition of the Divine hand in the unfolding story.

By adopting the perspective of the avos, we can rise above the challenges and negativity that often surround us. We can take inspiration from Rabi Akiva, who, despite seeing the destruction of the Bais Hamikdosh, was able to smile because he understood that this was a step in the direction of the eventual redemption.

So too, in our personal lives, we face many challenges. Things don't always go as planned. Relationships falter, children may struggle, jobs don't materialize, and financial pressures mount. But Yosef's message to his brothers (45:4-11) speaks to us in these moments. He told them not to despair over what they had done, selling him into slavery, because it was all part of Hashem's plan. His suffering in Mitzrayim allowed him to prepare a refuge for them during the famine.

We should learn from Yosef's example and let go of past grievances, understanding that everything that happens is part of a higher plan for the greater good. We should not become angry or upset when things don't go our way. Instead, we must trust that Hashem has a purpose behind every challenge, leading us to eventual goodness for ourselves and our loved ones.

Despite all the suffering Yosef endured, his primary concern upon revealing himself to his brothers was their well-being. He cautioned them not to feel guilty for what they had done, as it had been part of Hashem's plan. Yosef's concern was not for himself, but for his father and his brothers.

A Jew's primary concern should always be the welfare of his fellow Jew. We are all brothers, and our responsibility to one another is at the core of who we are as a people.

Our brethren in Israel are under attack and have been fighting wars for their survival for over a year. Young Jewish men are killed almost daily, and many more suffer life-altering injuries. The economy is not doing well, and people there are starving and lacking what we consider basics. We need to feel their pain and do what we can to help them.

The least we can do is daven for them, daven that peace be restored, and daven that they don't have to get up in the middle of the night and run for safety to a shelter. We should daven that they can return to their homes, to their jobs, and to their schools. Daven that tourists can return and pump money into the economy and into the hands of poor families, yeshivos, and kollelim.

We need to view everyone there as our brothers and sisters, doing for them what we would do for a brother and sister, because that is what they are.

When we deal with fellow Yidden, we need to do so with kindness and grace, treating every person as a brother or sister, because they really are. This applies not only to matters involving basic manners, such as giving the right of way when we drive, but the way we talk to people and the way we write to them and about them. There is never any reason for nastiness, arrogance, or acting as if you are better, holier, or superior to the person you are addressing.

Parshas Vayigash was not given to us and transmitted through the generations to entertain us with the very moving story about a family that was torn apart, separated, divided, and then, through a confluence of random events, brought back together.

The story is often retold of the time the old Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon Rokeach, and the Gerrer Rebbe, the Bais Yisroel, met in Tel Aviv after being saved from the ashes of the Holocaust. They both lost most of their communities, followers, and families. Though they both had good reason to be broken, they were both determined to rebuild in the Holy Land what had been laid waste in the old country.

The urge was to speak of destruction and loss, but the Belzer Rebbe wouldn't allow that to happen. He opened the conversation and asked the Gerrer Rebbe why, when Yosef and Binyomin finally met and the years of tragedy had separated the two children of Rochel, they cried upon each other's shoulder. Binyomin cried over Mishkan Shiloh in Yosef's portion, and Yosef cried over the Botei Mikdosh in the portion of Binyomin. Why did they not cry over the churban that would take place in their own portion of Eretz Yisroel?

He answered that we don't cry over our own churban, over what we suffered. Nothing is served by mourning over what happened in our past. We pick ourselves up and begin working to put the pieces back together. But we do cry over what happened to other people. We mourn their losses and attempt to comfort them.

This is because we always seek to help our brothers. We do not mourn our own losses. We accept them as the will and act of Hashem. But when another person suffers and is in pain, we do what we can to assuage that pain.

Yosef and Binyomin were brothers. All Jews are brothers, and we should always do what we can to help one another. Sermonizing is not in place when someone is suffering. There is a time to castigate a brother, but it must be done with love and at the proper time, in the proper way. When the timing is right, we seek ways to grow and to build and plan for the future. But there is a time of eitzos – dispensing advice – and a time for dispensing help, and a brother knows when to do what.

Parshas Vayigash is meant to teach us deep lessons of bitachon, kibbud av, living in golus, geulah, unity, brotherly love, the need to care for each other, and the necessity to work as a community, each person thinking about the others and not only what is good for him. As individuals, we may have our strengths and resources, but together, we are far stronger. Acting as a community allows us to pool our collective talents, wisdom, and resources to overcome challenges that no single person could face alone. When we unite, we amplify our ability to help one another, whether it's through emotional support, financial assistance, or shared knowledge.

When we act b'achdus, we accomplish far more, protecting what is dear to us and providing support and strength in ways that go beyond what we can achieve alone or when focused solely on ourselves. Caring about the greater good and each other is what makes us worthy heirs to the avos and shevotim. Recognizing that we are all connected as children of one father, and that the wellbeing of one affects the wellbeing of all, is a predicate for fostering good and ridding our community of evil, misguided individuals, and rectifying the problems that affect us. Whatever the problem is, people working and acting in unison is the solution.

May we merit to learn the lessons in this week's parsha and conduct ourselves in ways that will help each other and hasten the coming of Moshiach speedily in our day.