

# TIMELESS TORAH

## PARSHAT VAYIGASH - The Magnificence of a Moment

### Split-Second of Clarity

One of the most dramatic scenes of Parshat Vayigash is the moment when Yosef, unable to hold himself back any longer, finally reveals his identity to his brothers. The verses vividly describe the brothers' reaction to Yosef's few words of revelation. Yosef makes a simple statement: 'I am Yosef — is my father still alive?' and the brothers are plunged into shock and cannot reply. Without waiting for them to gather their senses, Yosef repeats, 'I am Yosef your brother,' and goes on to assure them of his good intentions. What is going on here? Why did Yosef identify himself twice? And why did he have to inquire about his father if it was obvious from the whole context of the story thus far that his father was indeed alive?

One approach is that Yosef was using this moment to subtly rebuke his brothers. The Seforno explains that the inquiry about his father was a veiled reprimand for having caused their father so much grief. He was really asking them, 'How is it possible that my father is still alive? Has he not passed away from pain and heartbreak over my loss?' The Kli Yakar, in a similar interpretation, highlights Yosef's use of the singular possessive pronoun: 'Is my father still alive?' Yosef was hinting to his brothers that they had not been sufficiently sensitive to their father. Indeed, Rashi explains that the brothers' shocked silence was born of shame for their actions rather than surprise over finding out the identity of the Egyptian ruler.

Yosef is using what he knows to be a fleeting moment to drive home the message to his brothers that they had acted inappropriately.

Despite longing to reunite with his family, Yosef knows that he will never again be able to teach his brothers this lesson and he seizes the opportunity to do so now.

### A Time for Gratitude

Yosef's emotional reunion with his father is described by the Torah in a mere two verses. In the first verse (Bereishit 46:29), we are told that Yosef, upon hearing of his father's impending arrival, harnessed his chariot and rode towards him. When they finally met, Yosef fell on his father's neck and wept copiously — 'vayipol al tzavarav vavevk od'. Curiously, Yaakov is conspicuously passive in this verse. It is only in verse 30 that Yaakov expresses his gratification over seeing his beloved son. The Midrash, sensitive to this anomaly, explains that Yaakov was reciting the Shema and could not therefore respond to his son's embrace.

The interpretation of the Maharal of Prague (d. 1609) of this Midrash is inspiring. When Yaakov saw Yosef, he immediately translated his love for his son into love for Hashem.

Yaakov's recital of Kriat Shema, which is essentially an expression of faith in Hashem and His omnipotence, was a demonstration of his gratitude to Hashem. This attitude, maintains the Maharal, is a trait that is found among pious people.



## Contemporary Perspectives on the Weekly Parsha with Rabbi Dr Yoni Birnbaum

Wednesdays - 8.00-8.45pm | In-person at Kinloss

When good befalls them, they channel their emotions in appreciation of Hashem's kindness. In this manner, Yaakov utilises these few seconds of overpowering joy and dedicates them for a higher purpose.

### Antidote to Jealousy

There is one more place in the parshah where we find a lesson being taught where we might not expect it. Yosef prepares his brothers for the journey back to their family, whom he hopes will eventually join him in Egypt. Aside for providing necessary transport and provisions for the way, he also gives them suits of clothing as gifts. Incredibly, he gives Binyamin not one suit, as he gave to the other ten brothers, but five suits and an additional monetary gift of three hundred silver shekels. The Gemara (Megillah 16a) is bothered by this. The difficulties with Yosef began with jealousy over Yaakov's favouritism of Yosef; how could Yosef now make the same mistake by providing Binyamin with more gifts than everyone else! The Gemara's answer hardly seems to resolve the issue. Rav Binyamin bar Yefet says that the five suits of clothing were an allusion to Binyamin's descendant, Mordechai, who would one day leave Achashveirosh's palace dressed in five types of royal garments.

Rabbi Mordchai Miller zt"l gives an ingenious explanation to this cryptic Gemara. According to Talmudic law (Gittin 44a), if one sells his servant to a non-Jewish slave master, he must pay him up to three hundred silver shekels to ransom his freedom.

Being that Yosef's ten older brothers had sold him into slavery, Yosef had the right to claim thirty shekels from each of them, which would equal three hundred silver shekels in total. Of course, Yosef did not claim this money, but he did give the equivalent amount to Binyamin.

Thus, Rabbi Miller suggests, this gift would not have aroused jealousy. It would have been well understood that it was only fair that Binyamin should gain this extra money because the other brothers had also gained the same amount by not paying it as compensation to Yosef!

When Mordechai left the palace in Shushan in all his splendour, no one was jealous of him. Clearly, Mordechai had been given these opportunities because he was prepared to use them in the right way. With his gifts to Binyamin, Yosef was conveying to his brothers that their resentment of him because of the attention showed towards him by Yaakov was mistaken. There can be no justification for jealousy when gifts legitimately received in life are being utilised in the right way. Jealousy is a result of a subjective feeling of injustice; when people are big enough to see the big picture, the negative feelings tend to dissipate.

Next Week:  
Parashat Vayechi  
Hallmarks of Hope: Yaakov's  
Eternal Final Words