



A Taste of Torah Beyond my Understanding

By Rabbi Shachne Sommers

Parshas Vayigash begins with the dramatic scene of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers. The brothers are speechless, shocked, and confused. Seemingly, the thought had not occurred to them that this enigmatic Egyptian ruler was their long-lost brother.

But upon careful analysis of the story, it emerges that this shock is hardly understandable. Granted, Joseph was only 17 when they had last seen him and he had not yet grown a full beard. But how different could he have looked? And even if they initially did not notice the resemblance, when this Egyptian ruler began making unreasonable accusations and demands regarding their family members, shouldn't they have taken a better look at this strange person and seen their brother's face behind the beard? And if that's not enough, when this ruler seemed to know the relative ages of the 10 brothers, shouldn't that have been the final straw, forcing them to recognize that this "Egyptian" was a member of their family? And yet, the brothers suspected nothing, and indeed were shocked by Joseph's revelation. How can we understand this lack of understanding?

The Midrash answers this perplexing question. The brothers lack of inability to recognize the obvious was actually an intervention by Hashem to serve as a lesson to the brothers in humility. The brothers had hated Joseph and sold him based on their perception that he was an evil person, planning on destroying them. The lesson they needed to learn was the lesson of humility. Don't be so sure that the perception that you

have is correct. The person whom you thought is the sinister Egyptian ruler, is actually your loving brother. You may have thought that you had clear proof of someone's evil motives, but the reality may be very different. The truth may be staring you in the face, but you may simply miss it, and perceive the situation as being the opposite.

It is very appropriate that the parshios that tell this story coincide with Chanukah. Humility regarding one's own perception is actually one of the defining differences between the Jewish approach to wisdom and the Greek approach. The Greek approach puts human reason on a pedestal. As Ramban observes, Aristotle and his disciples believed that nothing existed outside of their own perception. On the other hand, the Torah approach to human reason is quite different. Torah teaches us that human reason, though an indispensable tool that Hashem has given us to understand the world, is anything but infallible. A true Torah scholar is called a "talmid chacham" a "student of wisdom", because he knows that he always has more to learn; his knowledge is incomplete. The humility which comes with Torah wisdom is what gives us the ability to know things that are far beyond the capacity of unaided human reason. By accepting Hashem's Word, not our own intellect, as the ultimate reliable source for understanding the world and our place in it, we are able to access the Infinite Source of wisdom that is the Torah. This is the lesson we take with us from the Parsha and from Chanukah: the lesson of using our minds with humility.

Stories For The Soul

Reunited at Last

Yaakov and Yosef were separated for 22 long, hard, sad, and lonely years until they were finally reunited. Sometimes a father and son can be "reunited" even after death, as the following true story illustrates:

A Rabbi in Long Island was once approached by a young man to have kaddish recited for his recently departed father (Kaddish is a memorial prayer that brings merit to a departed soul. It is recited every day for a year after a person's death, usually by a family member). The young man made it clear that he would not be saying the kaddish himself but would pay for the Rabbi to arrange for someone else to say the kaddish on his deceased father's behalf.

Some time passed and the young man suddenly began showing up in shul and reciting kaddish himself. The Rabbi asked the young fellow what had changed, and he told him the following:

When I was growing up, my father never showed any warmth or affection. He was always cold and uninvolved. One incident that always epitomized this for me was when I was in 5th grade. We had a paper airplane contest in school. I worked real hard to make a great airplane. When it was finished I wrote DAD on it with a bold blue marker. The plane won 1st Prize. When I came home I was so excited, I ran over to my dad, gave him the plane and told him that I had won. He showed no reaction. He didn't say a thing, he just took the plane and shoved it away somewhere. Not one kind word or even a smile. That incident told me that my father didn't care a bit about me. I knew he didn't love me.

When he passed away, I realized my kaddish obligation, but I just could not say kaddish for such a man. I came

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Kollel Happenings

FATHERS-AND-SONS PROGRAM SUN., DEC. 12 AT EDOS

The next Fathers-and-Sons learning program will be held on Dec. 12 at EDOS. Breakfast begins at 9 a.m. with learning following. For information, contact Rabbi Yehuda Amsel at 303-820-2855 or email rya@denverkollel.org



JEWISH CHILDREN'S EXTRAVAGANZA TO BE HELD ON DEC. 24

This year, the Kollel's annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza will be held on Fri., Dec. 24 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m at Funtastic Fun, 3085 S. Broadway. Cost: Children \$9, adults \$2. Admission includes unlimited rides. Kosher hot dog lunches will be sold for \$5. For free tickets, visit www.mazeltot.org. For early bird and group specials, visit www.denverkollel.org.



LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING ON FRI. DEC. 24

The next legal holiday learning program will take place on Friday, Dec. 24 at Zera Avraham. The program is for men only and will start with Shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and a class from 9-10. \$125 sponsorship is still available. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email rye@denverkollel.org.

Interpersonal Issues Make No Mistake

It is forbidden to keep merchandise or money that was given in error. One who does so transgresses three Torah commandments, two commandments of returning a lost object and one commandment of stealing.

For example, if a cashier mistakenly gave a customer too much change, the customer is obligated to return the extra

change. Similarly, if the customer gave too much money, the storekeeper is required to return the extra money that was received.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Today I am a Man

Sharon from Chickasha, Oklahoma wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My son and I are trying to research the Biblical age of accountability and the Bar Mitzvah. We would appreciate any help. Thank You.

Dear Sharon,

The age of thirteen for a boy is derived from a verse about Yaakov's son Levi. Referring to Shimon and Levi, the Torah says "each man took his sword" At that time Levi was thirteen years old. He is thus the youngest person

the Torah calls a "man." The Torah specifically referred to him as a "man" in order to imply that thirteen is the age of male adulthood.

By age thirteen, it can be assumed that a boy has reached physical and mental maturity and is therefore responsible for his actions. For a girl this is at age 12. By Torah law, a 12-year-old girl or a 13-year-old boy can enter into legal contracts, incur legal obligations, and must observe all the commandments, like keeping kosher and observing Shabbos.

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Stories for the Soul

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to you to arrange for the kaddish to be said by someone else. This way my obligation would be taken fulfilled, but I wouldn't have to say it personally.

Yesterday I went downtown to his office to clean out his desk. His secretary let me into the room and I got to work. When I went through his top drawer I found the paper airplane that I made in fifth grade. I picked it up and held it. I stared at it. When I eyed the word DAD written in blue, a lump formed in my throat. At that moment, his secretary walked into the room and said to me, "Your father used to stare intently at that

plane with the exact same misty-eyed look you have now. I always wondered what was so special about that plane." I wanted to answer her but I couldn't speak.

I realized that my dad cared about me all along. He just wasn't a man of many words. He didn't show his emotions, and I didn't know how to see them, but now I understand that they were always there. He did love me. Today I came to say kaddish for that wonderful man - my staunchest admirer, my hero, my dad.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman