

# Bais Yaacov Bnos Malka Newsletter

לעילוי נשמת יצחק עקיבא בן אהרן ז"ל

December 2023

Parshas Vayigash

פרשת ויגש

טבת תשפ"ד



## אני יוסף – העוד אבי חי?

The *parsha* begins with Yehuda approaching the Prime Minister of Mitzrayim to plead with him to return Binyamin. This Prime Minister happens to be Yosef HaTzaddik, but Yehuda does not know that. The gist of Yehuda's presentation is, "Please! You must give us back Binyamin! We have an old father at home and he loves this young boy. If this young boy is not returned, his old father may die of anguish." At that point, the Torah records, Yosef can no longer contain himself, and he finally reveals his identity to his brothers: "אני יוסף - העוד אבי חי?" "I am Yosef – is my father still alive?" (*Bereishis* 45:3).

This opening question of Yosef is quite difficult to understand. How could Yosef possibly ask whether Yaakov was alive? He knew that Yaakov is alive! That was the whole point of Yehuda's speech – that if Binyamin was not returned, his father might die. Hadn't Yosef been listening to Yehuda's speech?! How could he ask this question?

There are several approaches to answer this question. The simplest answer is that of the Kli Yakar and others, who write that Yosef was concerned that Yehuda was lying. Maybe Yaakov had actually died a long time ago and Yehuda was trying to convince the Prime Minister to give back Binyamin out of mercy by falsely claiming that Yaakov was still alive. According to this approach, Yosef was saying, "I am Yosef – is my father **really** alive?"

Another possibility is that Yosef knew that his father was still alive; he was asking, "Is my father still strong and vigorous?" The word חי refers to more than living. It describes someone who is healthy and functioning well. Similarly, the Netziv explains that this is the meaning of the word חי in the *pasuk*, "ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה," "Yaakov lived in Egypt for seventeen years" (*Bereishis* 47:28). We already know that Yaakov was 130 years-old when he came down to Mitzrayim (47:9), and we know that he died when he was 147 (47:28). Why do we need a *pasuk* to tell us that he lived in Mitzrayim for seventeen years? We can do the math ourselves! The Netziv explains that the *pasuk* is telling us that Yaakov was truly "alive" during those years, unlike the earlier part of his life, which was full of trials and tribulations.

Another *pshat* in Yosef's question is suggested by the Beis HaLevi. The Beis HaLevi first presents another question. The *midrash* compares the brothers' reaction to Yosef's announcement to the reaction of the *neshama* to *Hashem's* accusations on the *yom hadin*. Just like the brothers could not respond to Yosef because they were so stunned by his comments, a person will similarly have a hard time answering *Hashem* on the *yom hadin*. What is the connection between what Yosef says to his brothers and the *yom hadin*? Apparently, this *midrash* is assuming that Yosef was giving his brothers *mussar*, rebuke, and this rebuke is somehow similar to the rebuke from *Hashem* on the *yom hadin*. But where is the rebuke in Yosef's question? Where is this *mussar* hinted to in the *pesukim*? All Yosef did was ask a straightforward question!

The Beis HaLevi explains that our two questions answer each other. Yosef indeed knew that Yaakov was still alive. He had heard and believed Yehuda's speech. Yosef was not asking a question in order to gain knowledge from Yehuda's response. Rather, Yosef was asking a **rhetorical** question, and that rhetorical question contained tremendous *mussar* and rebuke for Yehuda and the brothers. Yosef was pointing out an inconsistency in the words and actions of his brothers. Yosef was essentially saying,

“Yehuda, you are so concerned about the welfare of our father, that if Binyamin is not returned he might die from the anguish. Why? Because Binyamin is his most beloved son. Yehuda, everything that you said about Yaakov and Binyamin applied exactly the same way concerning our father and me 22 years ago. I was the most favored son; I was the son of his most beloved wife. If you are so concerned about the welfare of our father, then where were you 22 years ago, Yehuda?! ה'עוד אבי חי? Is my father still alive?”

Yosef was giving Yehuda tremendous *mussar* and he had no response. Yehuda could not answer because Yosef was using Yehuda's own words and actions against him. This is the most difficult rebuke that a person can receive. There is no answer.

A good practical example of this relates to *mezuzos*. A person buys a house that costs three quarters of a million dollars, or maybe even a million dollars. Then he decorates it beautifully with an expensive chandelier. Now it is time to buy *mezuzos*. Will he buy the cheap ones or the more *mehudar*, more expensive ones? If one can afford such an expensive home with expensive furnishings, he has to make sure to be consistent! He should invest in the better *mezuzos*.

The Beis HaLevi is not focusing on the level of *gashmiyus* in one's life. Many factors go into a person's choice of the degree of *gashmiyus* he lives. The Beis HaLevi's point is only that one must avoid inconsistency. If a person chooses a higher level of *gashmiyus* when it comes to his personal life but at the same time is a spendthrift when it comes to *tzedaka*, *mezuzos*, *tefillin*, or hiring a *gemara* tutor for his son, that is a problem.

This is the message of Yosef's question to Yehuda. Yosef was giving Yehuda and his brothers rebuke by pointing out the inconsistency of their words and actions. This is the meaning of the *midrash* drawing a connection between Yosef's response to his brothers and *Hashem's* rebuke on the *yom hadin*.

This is a challenge for all of us. We have to avoid any inconsistency in our lives, in our words, and in our actions.

Have a wonderful Shabbos!

Chana Ginsburg

The Dvar Torah has been adapted from the writings of Rav Ginsburg





Kita Gimmel are little scientists! They learned about magnets. Thank you Ahuva and Rachaeli for bringing in examples!



The girls have started a new program to encourage reading. Each girl will have a turn to address the class about a book they've read,





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