

# VAYIGASH, YEHUDA VEYOSEPH

- Nisson Shulman.

The change in Yehuda's attitude from supplicant to belligerent, last week's Sidra end, to this week's Sidra beginning. Why? Because he saw with Binyamin the innocent threatened with slavery and the guilty brothers going free, that Joseph was no longer acting MIDAH KENEGED MIDAH, so it was not a punishment from Hashem. Therefore he stepped up to do battle. The idea of MIDAH KENEGED MIDAH from the midrash of Yitro, Iyov and Bilaam before Pharaoh. The Bet Halevi's comment on OI LANU MIYON HADIN...

Vayigash: Yehudah V'Yosef

Rashi indicates that far from apologizing for the theft of Joseph's cup, Yehuda was actually reprimanding Joseph for the way with which they had been treated. The Midrash goes even further, saying Yehuda drew close for battle, in order to engage Joseph in confrontation.

This seems so remarkably different from the tone of Yehuda at the end of last week's parsha, where it is clearly a tone of desperation, apologetic, even confessional. VAYOMER YEHUDA, MA NOMAR LAADONI, MA NEDABER UMA NITZTADAK. VEHAELOKIM MATZA ET AVON AVADECHA; HINENU AVADIM LAADONI, GAM ANACHNU, GAM ASHER NIMTZA HAGAVIA BEYADO.

He is altogether willing to suffer the consequences for the stolen cup! And yet in this week's parsha, right at the beginning, Yehuda's tone changes entirely! Why?

Rav Eliyahu Lopian explains that the brothers perceived that the predicament, in which they found themselves, the entire dénouement, was a divine retribution for their sale of Joseph into slavery many years ago.

VAYOMRU ISH EL ACHIV, AVAL ASHEMIM ANACHNU, AL AHINU, ASHER RAINU TZARAS NAFSHO BEHITCHANENO ELEYNU VELO SHAMANU, AL KEN BAA ALEYNU HATZARA HAZOT.

It is noteworthy that their guilt was most strongly felt, not because of the sale of Joseph, but more for being insensitive to his cries for mercy. We as sons of Jacob, should not have been able to go ahead with the plan to sell him even were it to have been justified, when Joseph's plight was clearly demonstrated to us. How could we turn a deaf ear to our own flesh and blood brother when he was in this pitiful condition, and when he pleaded with us for his life?

And Reuven takes up the same note when he declares to his brothers, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy, and you did not listen and his blood is now being sought?" Reuven talks about Joseph as a YELED, a boy, someone young and defenseless, in keeping with the brothers' blaming themselves for their past insensitivity to Joseph.

There is a remarkable Midrash dealing with a similar theme. It tells us that Pharaoh convened a

special meeting with his three top counselors to discuss a so-called "Jewish problem". The men were put into forced labor, slave camps, and robbed of their basic freedom. The women bore children and had them snatched away and thrown into the walls there to be immured, or into the Nile. How did this plan evolve?

The Midrash tells us (in connection with the infant Moshe seizing the Jewelled crown from Pharaoh's head) there were three counselors who were sought after by Pharaoh for advice. Yitro saw that it was apparent that Pharaoh would proceed with his plan to destroy Moshe as well as the people. Nevertheless he protested, and Pharaoh sought to kill him, so he fled. The Midrash tells us that because he was ready to sacrifice his own life to save Moshe, he was rewarded to become the father-in-law of Moshe Rabenu himself. Yitro fled at a time when Pharaoh sought his counsel, demanding that he collaborate. He risked his own life in order that he would not in any way become a participant in the evil deeds.

Bilaam, Pharaoh's second advisor, actively supported Pharaoh's plan. He was therefore punished with death, and in fact at the hand of Moshe Rabenu himself whose life he had sought to take.

There was a third advisor, Job. Iyov saw what happened to Yitro and reasoned that nothing he could do or say would help Moshe. On the contrary. Protest would put his own life in danger. So he remained silent. His punishment was that he was given great physical affliction....

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l, explained that we understand the great reward Yitro merited for it was measure for measure according to his great deed. The death of Bilaam is also justified. It too is measure for measure, punishment for his intended crime. But how do we understand the nature of Iyov's punishment? How is this MIDA KENEGED MIDA?

The answer is that when Iyov heard the anguished cries of mothers and fathers and children, and saw the danger to Moshe, he decided to remain silent. He would not become a participant, but why should he endanger himself or flee when it would make no difference whatsoever in the outcome? Why should he risk his own life?

And so he was punished with physical affliction. It is as if the RIBONO SHEL OLAM said, "Iyov, you are crying out in pain. Why do you cry out? You know that your cries will do no good and cannot help you! So why do you cry out? Because you can't help it? It hurts!! If you really were affected by the affliction of the Jews, you couldn't help but cry out then either. If their pain really hurt you, your heartfelt compassion would not have allowed you to remain silent, no matter what the danger"....

Thus Yehuda realized that the brothers' predicament was the direct result of their being deaf to the misery of Joseph, and now their turn to cry out had come.

Yehuda offered that he would be a slave for all the brothers which would serve as a punishment for MECHIRAT YOSEPH, MIDA KENEGED MIDA. But Joseph in the last PASUK of the previous portion had said, "No, the one who stole the cup shall be my slave, and you go up in peace to your father."

Once Yehuda heard this, he realized that this could not have been part of G-d's punishment for MECHIRAT YOSEPH, since Benjamin was innocent, and here he is being threatened with slavery and the guilty brothers are going free!

Thus Yehuda rose from his passivity and said what he did.

Joseph was testing the brothers to see if the brothers would remain silent while Benjamin was falsely accused. Yehuda realizes his protest cannot accomplish much against the forces of Egypt, which Joseph commanded. But he could not help it. He could not remain silent, and thus he atoned for the sin of neglecting the cries of Joseph. And only then, was Joseph prepared to reveal his true identity to the brothers.

There is another message in this portion. ANI YOSEPH. HAOD AVI CHAI? VELO YACHLU LAANOS OSO, KI NIVHALU MIPANAV.

Strange. Why does Joseph ask "Is my father alive?" He had already asked them this... HAOD AVICHEM HAI? Why does he repeat this question? Since that time they had not been back to their father, and if something had happened to father, they would still not have been privy to that information!

The Midrash tells us OY LANU MIYOM HADIN, OY LANU MIYOM HATOCHECHA. KESHEYAVO HAKADOSH BARUICH HU VEYOCHIACH LEKAL ECHAD LEFI MA SHEHU, SHENEEMAR....

The Bet Halevi deals with this Midrash, and explains, that according to this Midrash, at this point Joseph was not yet conciliatory towards his brothers, but his words were subtly chosen to expose the contradiction in his brother's behavior. Of course Joseph had already asked about his father and whether he was alive. But Joseph was making a rhetorical statement. "After all the pain and grief that you have brought upon him, and after you say that Benjamin's absence will bring him down to the grave, you who have caused this separation, and encouraged him to think of me as dead, is he still alive?" It is a statement, not a question!

How do the brothers react? They are so overwhelmed with shame that they cannot answer him. Even the courage and daring of Yehuda suddenly melts away...

The Midrash compared the brothers' reaction to our own response when we will ultimately face our final trial and judgement. The Bet Halevi explains that very often we justify our actions with excuses. For example, the neglect of KEVIUT, regular time for learning, with the excuse of necessary activities in order to earn a livelihood. So, too, for our involvement in our children's CHINUCH, for which we again plead that we have no time... In the future day of Judgement, G-d will question this; "Then how come there is time for entertainment, hobbies, business..." It is the same with charity... If you really could not afford to give, as you should have, why did you have money for all the luxuries with which you have pampered yourself and your family?

The Tana Devey Eliyahu Zuta tells the story about an individual who was asked by Eliyahu Hanavi why he had not dedicated more time for learning. He answered, BINA VADAAS LO

NITNA LI MIN HASHAMAYIM.... He was then asked, How do you make a living? He answered "I am a fisherman, and these are my nets". "Who gave you the talent and know-how to make such nets and machinery?" He answered I was endowed with this intelligence to weave nets and where to fish... "Aha! You are endowed with intelligence by the Almighty! Why could you not spare some of your talents for learning?"

VELO YACHLU: Joseph showed them the inner contradiction and they had no answer for him....