

Vayigash: Ani Yosef. Haod Avi Chai?:

- Nisson Shulman. Why does Joseph ask "Haod Avi Chai" again? The subtle emphasis on the contradiction in the Brothers' behavior. The explanation of the Bet HaLevi. The reaction of the brothers is to be struck dumb with shame. The Tana Devei Eliyahu Midrash which indicates that we all make excuses...

VAYIGASH: 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!

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

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 the 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? So overwhelmed with shame, that they cannot answer him. The courage and daring of Yehuda suddenly melts away...

The Midrash compares the brothers' reaction to our own response when we will ultimately face our final trial and judgement. Bet Halevi explains that very often we justify our actions with excuses. For example, we neglect our regular time for learning, giving the need to earn a livelihood as our excuse. So too, we neglect our children, finding less time for them than we should give. The excuse is the same. As the future day of Judgment, God will question us: How come there is time for entertainment, hobbies, business?... The same is with charity and organizations serving our fellow Jews; where we make excuses to avoid participation and even giving, ... It is a question of priorities.

TANA DEVEY ELIYAHU ZUTA has a story about an individual who was asked by Eliyahu HaNavi: Why have you not given more time for learning? He answered, BINA VADAAS LO NITNA LI MIN HASHAMAYIM.... Eliyahu then asked him; What is your work? He answered, "I am a simple fisherman. These are my nets". Eliyahu replied, Apparently you were given the intelligence to weave nets, and discern where to fish... So you have enough understanding and wisdom to become a Talmid Chacham!

VELO YACHLU They couldn't reply to Joseph, because they became aware of the inner contradiction that removes every excuse from them.

Submitted by Nisson Shulman