

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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7 TEVET

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYIGASH

Things Aren't What They Seem to Be



So he sent his brothers away, and they departed; and he said to them, See that you fall not out by the way (45:24).

Before dispatching his brothers to their father in Eretz Yisroel, Yosef issued one final instruction to them; "Do not argue in any *halachic* matters lest you lose your way" (see *Taanis* 10b and Rashi ad loc). The Maharal in the *Gur Aryeh* on this *possuk* questions why Yosef felt that he needed to instruct the brothers if his father had not already previously done so. In other words; if Yaakov hadn't felt that this was an issue then why was Yosef concerned?

A prominent marriage counselor once proclaimed that out of the five hundred or so couples that had come to him to consult on *shalom bayit* issues, about sixty percent of the sessions started with one of the spouses complaining that the other spouse was either too religious or not religious enough. Within two sessions he would be able to get them to agree that their issues had nothing to do with religion. Invariably, the spouse with the complaint had a deeper rooted issue, whether it was a control issue or a resentment for some perceived mistreatment, religion was only a concrete way to express the deeper issue. In reality, religion was never the real issue. Once the couple realized that the religious disagreement was merely a symptom, it became possible to address and treat the core causative issue.

This is true in almost all relationship issues; for example, when there is sibling rivalry or jealousy, it will likely manifest

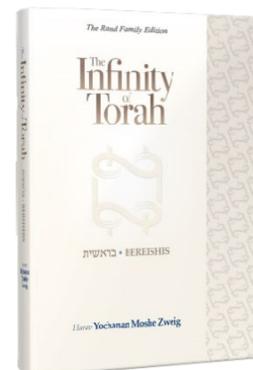
itself when it comes to peripheral family issues like deciding whether to place a parent in a nursing home or deciding which child should get which of the family heirlooms. No one wants to sound petty and say that they're just plain jealous. Rather they begin to claim that their sibling is uncaring or self-centered or any one of a hundred pejorative complaints. But the real issue is never the issue at hand, it is always how they feel about each other, the latest issue is only the frustration outlet.

What Yosef realized was that his siblings were now faced with their colossal failure to him as a brother. Yaakov hadn't considered that it might be an issue because he was, as of yet, unaware of their role in Yosef's disappearance. On the other hand, Yosef was aware of their personal disagreements, he knew that inevitably they would begin to blame each other. He knew that even if they would start a seemingly innocuous discussion on a *halachic* issue it would inevitably lead to what seems like a "kosher" disagreement; a *halachic* discussion. However, due to Yosef's understanding of human nature, he knew it would further devolve into a

personal fight over who was responsible for what happened to him. This personal fight could easily cause them to be distracted and lose their way. Thus he instructed them not to have an intense *halachic* discussion.

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No Man Left Behind

And they told him all the words of Yosef, which he had said to them; and when he saw the wagons which Yosef had sent to carry him... (45:27).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the wagons sent by Yosef hinted to the last Torah topic exchanged between father and son before Yosef departed - the *mitzvah* of *eglah arufah*. The Midrash (*Beresishis Rabba* 94:3, 95:3) notes the similarity of the words "eglah - calf," and "agalah - a wagon." In response to finding a corpse in the Land of Israel, the elders of the closest town would decapitate a calf, an *eglah arufah*, as a communal atonement for the crime - proclaiming that the townsfolk did not shed his blood (*Deuteronomy* 21:1-9).

Perhaps while escorting his son on his journey, Yaakov taught Yosef the *mitzvah* of *eglah arufah*, the calf whose neck was axed by the elders of the nearest town upon the discovery of a murdered corpse. It was commonly understood that a person who was not properly escorted from a city would easily fall prey to thieves and murderers. But there is a fascinating element to this law. The Talmud (*Horayos* 6a) explains that this atonement is actually for the generation that left Egypt. In fact, we learn a very important *halacha* from here; that a nation is a corporate entity and that a corporate entity is eternal. Even though the actual generation that left Egypt was long gone, the national identity remains and therefore an atonement can be brought even for those who left Egypt because the corporate entity remains.

Why would Yosef choose this *mitzvah* out of everything he studied with his father to send to Yaakov as a sign? In fact, as Rashi explains, it was something of a contrived message because Yosef didn't actually send the wagons, Pharaoh did! Yosef went out of his way to make sure that the brothers conveyed

this lesson to his father. The question is why? What is so remarkable about this *mitzvah* that made it relevant to the current events that had transpired?

Clearly, Yosef (and pretty soon Yaakov as well) had come to the realization that this was the beginning of the fulfillment of Hashem's punishment to Avraham that his children would be in a foreign country for four generations. The only thing worse would be the possibility that they would never leave. However, in order to leave they first had to become a nation by overcoming the final barrier to achieving nationhood: appreciating the value of each and every member. That is why in the process of *eglah arufah*, an atonement, is brought "for those who left Egypt." Because it was on that condition that they left Egypt and became a nation.

Yosef, remarkably, had already addressed this issue with his brothers. Firstly, he wanted to see if they would abandon Shimon after he took him captive. When they returned with Binyomin he created the whole charade of accusing Binyomin of stealing his silver "magical" goblet to determine whether or not his brothers had finally internalized the lesson that they must be "one for all and all for one." The brothers passed this test with flying colors when they all equally agreed to serve as slaves in place of their brother Binyomin.

Yosef never really held them responsible for what they did to him on a personal level. His real issue with them was whether or not they had what it takes to become a nation. They finally proved that they did, and this was the message he sent back to Yaakov. We will survive this exile into a strange land.

Did You Know...

Yaakov had two main wives (Rochel and Leah) and two other wives (known as maidservants) that had a lesser status. The Torah sometimes refers to the latter wives as "*pilagshim*." A *pilegish*, commonly translated as concubine, actually has *halachic* status of a wife though with lesser rights (e.g. a *pilegish* doesn't have a *kethubah*, which is the security and financial protection that regular wives are provided).

It is very interesting that the word *pilegish* is really a contraction of two words *plag* and *isha*. *Plag* means half and *isha* means woman. In other words, a *pilegish* means half a woman. This explains a fascinating verse in the Torah. After Leah gave birth to her fourth child the Torah says, "She stopped giving birth" (29:35). What this means is that she was supposed to have four sons and her maidservant was supposed to have two and Rochel was supposed to have four and her maidservant was supposed to have two. Each "*pilegish*" would have exactly half the amount of the main wives! Unfortunately, because Rochel "sold" Yaakov for the *dudaim* she lost two of the children who were supposed to be hers (Yissacher and Zevulun) and Leah ended up with six children.

But in the end, of course, Hashem guides everything to the end that is supposed to emerge. In this week's *parsha* we actually see how it all worked out – Leah had thirty two descendants while her maidservant had exactly sixteen, and Rochel had fourteen descendants while her maidservant had exactly seven. Each *pilegish* had exactly half the descendants of the main wife!



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