

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Vayigash



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Torah Wellsprings

Vayigash

Kibud Av ve'Em

The *pasuk* (46:29) states, ויפל על צואריו ויבך על צואריו עוד, "Yosef fell on his father's neck, and he wept on his neck excessively." Rashi writes, לשון הרבות בכיה... אף כאן, "[the word עוד] means he cried a lot... Yosef cried more than ordinary."

However, the *pasuk* doesn't say that Yaakov cried. Rashi writes, "Yaakov didn't fall on Yosef's neck, and he didn't kiss him. Chazal say that he was saying Shema."

The question arises, if it was time to say Shema, why wasn't Yosef reciting Shema as well?

The Steipler *zt'l* (*Birchas Peretz, Vayigash*) answers that Yosef was performing *kibud av ve'em*, the mitzvah of honoring his father, and when one was occupied

with a mitzvah, he is exempt from performing other mitzvos. Therefore, Yosef was exempt from saying Shema.

Yosef certainly kept the mitzvah of *kibud av ve'em* in the best way possible. Nevertheless, accidentally and beyond his control, there was a moment of imperfection.

The *Targum Yonoson* (*ibid.*) writes that when Yaakov met Yosef for the first time וקדם ראשתמודעה אבוי סגר ליה, "Before Yaakov recognized [that it was Yosef], he bowed down to him. ואתחייב למהוי שנוי קמיען, Yosef lost years of his because of that." Probably, Yosef didn't have the opportunity to correct his father, to tell him that it was he, Yosef, and not the king of Mitzrayim like Yaakov thought.

Nevertheless, this is considered a *pgam*, an imperfection, in Yosef's *kibud av ve'em*. And therefore, Yosef lost ten years of his life. He was supposed to live until 120, but he was niftar at 110, due to this episode.

According to the Targum Yonoson, we can explain that Yosef was crying because he lost ten years of his life.

The Torah (Shemos 20:12) says that the reward for honoring parents is living a long life.¹ It isn't solely long life that is earned from this mitzvah. The Rabbeinu b'Chaya says that we see that those who excel in *kibud av ve'em* enjoy success in life: either long life, tranquility, wealth, or some other form of success. Honoring parents brings

success in a person's pursuits in this world.

A courageous young child asked the Chazon Ish, "How does one become a Chazon Ish?"

The Chazon Ish replied, "If you honor your parents as I did, you will become a Chazon Ish." Because *kibud av ve'em* grants success to each person in another way. If your goal is Torah, it will give you success in Torah; if your goal is wealth, it can grant you success there. Some people merit good shidduchim because of *kibud av ve'em*.

Let's tell a couple of stories of the Chazon Ish related to the mitzvah of *kibud av ve'em*:

In 1948/תש"ח, a *bachur* came to Eretz Yisrael, and his parents arrived two

1. *Pirush Yonoson* on *Targum Yonson* explains that Yosef lost ten years of his life because just as honoring parents grants a person a long life, as it states למען יאריכון ימך כבוד את... למען יאריכון ימך כבוד את, so too, when one doesn't honor his parents properly, the result is the opposite, r'l.

years after him. His parents were new to Eretz Yisrael, and they needed help finding an apartment and *parnassah*, suitable for their needs. Their son knew the language, understood how things work in Eretz Yisrael, and could help his parents. The bachur asked his rebbe, Reb Eizik Sher *zt'l*, whether he should help his parents settle in or whether he should continue learning in yeshiva, and his parents will somehow manage some other way.

Reb Eizik Sher replied that he doesn't know the answer because the Shulchan Aruch HaRav says that when someone has the potential to succeed immensely in Torah, he shouldn't stop studying, not even to perform mitzvos that no one else can do. And this bachur had the potential to become great in Torah.

Reb Eizik advised the *bachur* to ask the Chazon Ish *zt'l*.

The Chazon Ish ruled, "It is natural that a child should do this for his parents" (מעשה איש p.184).

Reb Yaakov Halprin *zt'l* once encountered a great *talmid chacham* in Eretz Yisrael in low spirits and asked him what was worrying him. The *talmid chacham* replied that his parents had just arrived from Lodz and he must support them. "Until now, I barely earned enough money to support my own family. How will I manage to support my parents too?"

The wealthy Reb Yaakov Halprin replied, "I will support your parents, on condition that I will earn the reward for the mitzvah."

The *talmid chacham* didn't know how to respond. He didn't want to lose the reward for the mitzvah. "I need to think it over," he replied.

He presented his dilemma to the Chazon Ish

zt'l. The Chazon Ish responded, "What's the question? Of course, you should accept Reb Yaakov's offer! And if you lose the reward for the mitzvah, so be it. Know that one must be prepared to jump into Gehinom to honor his parents."

The Chazon Ish added, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu has enough reward for both you and Reb Yaakov..." (מעשי איש p.181).

Once, a bachur in Brisk received a letter from his father requesting that he come home. The student asked Reb Chaim Brisker what to do because his father didn't send money for the trip. Reb Chaim replied, "You aren't obligated to pay for the trip home (because, often, one isn't obligated to spend his own money to perform *kibud av ve'em*), but walking doesn't cost money. You can walk home."

Reb Shlomo Kluger zt'l wrote in a letter to his son,

Reb Avraham Shmuel Binyamin z'l, "My dear son, why isn't *yiras shamayim* upon you? When you write a letter to me (with *chidushei Torah*), send greetings to your mother, and thereby perform the mitzvah of *kibud em*. From now on, send a greeting to your mother..."

We've seen a few examples of *kibud av ve'em*, and there are many others. Each person must seek to perform the mitzvah as best he can. You will be rewarded in this world and the next.

Chesed

The Yevanim made thirteen breaches in the walls of the Beis HaMikdash. The Meor Einayim says that this means they tried to destroy the thirteen middos of compassion (י"ג מדות של רחמים); the pride of the Jewish nation. No nation compares to the compassion and kindness of the Jewish

nation. Our kindness is an expression of our holiness and uniqueness.

A renowned mechanach in Eretz Yisrael related that as a child, he and his father davened in the same beis medresh as the gaon, Reb Avraham Genichovsky zt'l (Rosh Yeshiva Tchebin). Sometimes his father would ask Reb Avraham to test his son.

The young lad noticed that Reb Avraham Genechovsky always asked him a question that had a machlokes. That way, no matter what he answered, פטור or פטור, permitted or forbidden, tamei or tahor, he would be correct, at least according to one view.

Reb Avraham would say, "You answered correctly. That's Reb Meir's opinion. And what does Reb Yehudah say?"

And the child knew to say that Reb Yehudah held the opposite.

In this ingenious manner, he was careful to preserve young students' honor and give them the sensation that they know, which is a more productive feeling than to feel like a failure.

The mechanach says that when he tests students, he follows this style that he saw by Reb Avraham Genichovsky. He asks a question with two answers, as it is a machlokes. That way, he never has to tell a student that he was wrong. Whatever the child will say, he will be correct (at least fifty percent).

Reb Meir Shapiro zt'l was in America together with an assistant, collecting money during the month of Tishrei, 1916/ז'. Unfortunately, his assistant became ill and couldn't go to shul on Simchas Torah.

When Reb Meir Shapiro completed the hakafos and returned to his apartment, he felt sorry for his bedridden helper. He knew

he was certainly disappointed that he couldn't participate in the hakafos.

Reb Meir Shapiro decided that he would conduct hakafos for his friend. He pretended to be the chazan in a shul and recited the *אתה הראת*. When he completed the pesukim in the Simchas Torah nigun, he sang and danced hakafos in the room, so his shamesh could feel the joy of Simchas Torah, even in his state.

People say that Reb Meir Shapiro didn't need to hold a sefer Torah during these "hakafos" because (a) Reb Meir Shapiro, himself, was like a "live sefer Torah." (b) The chesed he performed there is the essence of Torah.

Additionally, when one does chesed, Hashem does chesed with him.

The following story happened a few weeks ago (Monday, parashas Chayei Sarah):

Reb Mendel from Beit Shemesh works for a caterer. One morning, in a *shteibel* in Beit Shemesh, Reb Mendel noticed an elderly Yid collecting money. Reb Mendel approached him, "I see you are limping. Are you feeling okay?"

The elderly person responded that he has an infection on his foot (א רוי), making it difficult for him to walk.

"You should be in bed, not standing on your feet, going around collecting money!" Reb Mendel told him.

"I know, but lying in bed won't pay off my debts. My creditors aren't willing to wait until I heal..."

Reb Mendel told him, "I will collect money for you. You can go to bed."

Reb Mendel called his boss and told him that he would be taking the day off.

His boss replied, "I have a large order for *arbes* (cooked chickpeas). All I ask is that you prepare the *arbes*, and then you can go do your mitzvah."

Reb Mendel filled a sixty-liter pressure cooker with *arbes*, closed the lid firmly, and placed it on the flame.

Reb Mendel calculated that he has a few minutes until the *arbes* is ready. So, he returned to the shtibel and collected some money.

When he returned to the kitchen, he saw that the pot had exploded. The old pot was a bit worn out and didn't close perfectly, and it couldn't contain the pressure.

Arbes were everywhere. The cover hit the ceiling and broke a light fixture. The pot was far away from the stove. Apparently, it flew off from the pressure.

If Reb Mendel were there, he wouldn't have noticed the problem before

it was too late. But because he was occupied with chesed, he was spared from severe injury or even death.

Reb Yaakov, a wealthy Yid in Eretz Yisrael, collects antique and rare clocks and watches. Approximately five years ago, Reb Yaakov ordered a clock at the cost of \$50,000. Upon placing the order, he set aside \$50,000 and put the money in his safe. The money would be sent to the antique dealer when the clock is shipped.

Three months later, Reb Yaakov was in China, when the antique dealer called, "The clock has just arrived in Israel, and it is ready to be delivered."

Reb Yaakov replied, "I'm in China now. I'll be returning to Eretz Yisrael in a few days, and then I will accept the clock."

Only a few moments after he put down the phone with the antique dealer, he received another

phone call. This time it was a close friend from Eretz Yisrael. The friend said, "There was a fire in Bnei Brak in the home of a very special *yungerman*, - a true *talmid chacham*. Baruch Hashem, he and his family are safe, but the house needs renovating. The furniture, the clothing, and all other household items were burned, and they don't have insurance. They need \$100,000 for repairs. What can you do to help them out."

Reb Yaakov replied, "Call me tomorrow, and I will see what I can do."

Reb Yaakov was in a dilemma. He had \$50,000 cash in the safe. Such an amount will certainly help the family out. But he so much wanted that clock. What should he do?

In the end, he gave the money to the *yungerman*. The other \$50,000 that was needed was supplied by his brother, Reb Yehudah.²

Hashem repaid Reb Yaakov with for his good deed when a couple of years later, there was a large fire in the forests of Eretz Yisrael, and all residents of the town Beis Meir were evacuated. Reb Yaakov owns a home in Beis Meir. His son lives in that home, and his family was forced to evacuate due to the fire.

This was on Thursday. They spent Shabbos in Yerushalayim. After Shabbos, the son returned to Beis Meir to see what was left of the house. He expected to see total disaster.

2. Reb Yaakov asked the dealer whether he would incur a loss if he backed out of the deal. He replied that he has a long list of people who were interested in this this clock. If he doesn't take it, he can easily sell it to someone else.

He first noticed his neighbor's property. It was entirely consumed by the fire. Then he looked at his father's property. The fire didn't touch it. Even the recently planted trees survived the blaze.

Three years earlier, Reb Yaakov gave money and saved a family who lost their home in a fire. And now, his property was spared from a fire. He was rewarded for his good deed.

Certainly, his primary reward will be given to him in the future, in Olam HaBa. But he also benefitted in this world because chesed is rewarded in this world, too.

Judge Favorably

People's personalities are deep and complex. We think we understand others, but we likely don't.

Therefore, we should grant people the benefit of the doubt because we are often wrong with our assumptions.

Yosef's brothers judged Yosef wrongly. They thought Yosef was a *rodef*, someone who wanted to harm them, and due to that assumption, they felt they were justified in selling Yosef as a slave. But when Yosef told them (45:3), אֲנִי יוֹסֵף... וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְעֹנֹת אוֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנֵי, "I am Yosef... The brothers weren't able to reply because they were frightened of him." The Maharal translates the words, כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנֵי, literally: "They were frightened by his *face*."³ They saw a new face, a new Yosef. For the first time, they saw him now as he truly was. A brother who loved them, who didn't seek their harm.

3. Because if the *pasuk* means that they were afraid of *him*, it would say, כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ.

Yosef told his brothers (45:4) אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אתי מצרימה, "I am Yosef, your brother whom you sold to Mitzrayim."

The Or HaChaim explains that Yosef considered them brothers, even when they sold him. As the Or HaChaim writes, גם סמך אחיכם אשר מכרתם לומר שאפילו בזמן המכר לא כהתה עין האחות ממני, "Yosef mentioned the word אחיכם, 'Your brother' together with אשר מכרתם, 'whom you sold' to tell them that even when you sold me, my feelings of brotherhood never weakened."

So, it was the opposite of what the brothers assumed. They thought Yosef was against them, but Yosef's loyalty to his family was always firm.

So, we see that people are often misunderstood. Therefore, we must train ourselves to judge our fellow man favorably because often that is the

truth, and our first impression is wrong.

Someone came to court, complaining that the moon was chasing him. Wherever he goes, the moon follows. If he goes right, the moon goes right. If he goes left, the moon goes there, too. If he stays still, the moon stays stationary as well. In short, the moon won't leave him alone.

The dayan replied, "I understand your complaint, but I can't issue a ruling without hearing what the other party has to say. Therefore, please return in a couple of days."

A couple of days later, this man returned to the court, and the dayan told him, "I spoke with the moon. I asked him, 'Why are you bothering this man? Why do you follow him wherever he goes?' The moon replied that it was your fault because you are always looking at it. If you will stop looking at the

moon, the moon promises it will stop following you."

The lesson is regarding *machlokes*. We often think that the other person is the problem, but it could be that you are the root of the problem. If you correct yourself, everything will become good.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner zt'l (Keser Rosh 119) teaches, "It is tested and proven: If you have enemies, *chas veshalom*, think to yourself that they are perfect *tzaddikim*. Judge them favorably, and their hearts will immediately turn to love you."

Reb Chaim Volozhiner's son, Reb Yitzchak, adds that Rivkah told Yaakov that he should go to Charan and he should remain there (Bereishis 27:45) עד שוב אף אחיך מןך, "until your brother's anger is removed from you." Rivkah told Yaakov, "When your heart isn't angry at your brother anymore, that's a sign that your brother isn't angry with you, either."

Because when you don't have any hard feelings against your fellow man, he won't have bad feelings against you.

There's a woman who was childless for many years, and she thought that it might be because she was cruel to a classmate. So before Yom Kippur, she called her classmate to ask forgiveness. But the woman she hurt wouldn't forgive. She said, "If only you were involved, perhaps I would forgive you. But you turned the entire class against me. No, I cannot forgive you."

Devastated, the childless woman spoke to a rav, and asked him to convince this woman to forgive her.

The rav called her on the phone, but the woman remained firm that she won't forgive. The rav said, "Is there anything that would make it worthwhile for you to forgive? Is there any salvation that you need?"

The woman replied, "I have an older brother who

is having difficulty finding his shidduch. If forgiving will help him become a chasan, I will forgive."

She forgave, and the rav told her that before

Chanukah, her brother would become a chasan.

A few weeks before Chanukah, this year, her brother became a chasan.⁴

4. The following story was told by Reb Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld *zt'l*. He heard it from Reb Zalman Chaim Rivlin *zt'l*, who heard it from Reb Nachum of Shadik *zt'l*.

Once, an egg merchant came to the rav of his city, covered in eggs and egg shells. Shocked to see him this way, the rav asked what happened.

The egg merchant replied, "Like every day, I bought a basket of eggs in a village, and I was carrying them to sell in town. Mr. So-and-so met me and asked me to deliver eggs to his home. I said that I first need payment. He became angry and hit my basket with his stick. The eggs broke all over me, and I demand a *din Torah!*"

The rav called his *shamesh* and instructed him to summon that person for a *din Torah*. The *shamesh* was afraid to call him because that person was renowned in the city as a *moser* – someone who reports on the Jewish community to the local government. Everyone was afraid of him. But the rav told him not to fear and to do his mission.

The *shamesh* went to the *moser's* home.

"The rav summons you to the court."

The *moser* ridiculed the *shamesh* and refused to go. The *shamesh* returned and relayed the *moser's* chutzpahdig words.

The rav said, "Go to his home and summon him once again. This time, warn him that if he doesn't come, he will be in *niduy*, excommunication."

This time, the *moser* slapped the *shamesh* and declared staunchly that he is not coming to court.

That Shabbos, the *moser* was called up for an *aliyah*. The rav quickly rushed to the bimah, and in front of everyone, he said, "*Rasha!* You are in *niduy* because you didn't come to *beis din*. You may not have an *aliyah*."

The *moser* stepped down, ashamed. Under his breath, but loud enough so people could hear, the *moser* said, "I will take revenge on the rav."

A few days later, the rav traveled to a neighboring village to be *sandek* by a *bris*. His student, Reb Nachum Shadik, and others were with him. From the distance, the students spotted the *moser* chasing after them. They informed the rav that they are in grave danger, as the *moser* was surely coming to harm them.

The rav became deep in thought. Soon, the *moser* caught up with them; the students were petrified. The *moser* came over to the rav, and in a surprisingly, humble voice said, "I want to hit your *talmidim*. Please, permit me to hit them."

"No!" the rav reprimanded him. "You may not touch them."

"Then allow me to spit at them."

"Also not."

"Forgive me for all the trouble I caused you."

"If you will ask the egg merchant's forgiveness, and pay for the eggs you broke, I will also forgive you."

The *moser* gave the rav ten rubles, and said, "Give it to the egg merchant. It will cover the cost of the eggs. And the extra money is to appease him. Please ask him to forgive me."

The rav took the money, and said, "I will give over the money. I am certain he will forgive you. And I also forgive you." They parted on very friendly terms.

The students were shocked by the *moser's* humble manner. Reb

We don't know the end of the story yet, but we hope and pray that in the merit that the childless woman received forgiveness, she will merit to bear children.

Hashem is Behind Everything

The Torah (45:23) states, ולאביו שלח כזאת... עשר חמרים נשאים, מטוב מצרים, "To his father, [Yosef] sent ten donkeys,

carrying the goods of Mitzrayim..." Why did Yosef send specifically donkeys, and why precisely ten?

The Maharal (*Gevuras Hashem* 10) explains that when an owner loads his donkeys with merchandise, the donkeys carry the load but don't know what they are carrying and why they are carrying it. Yosef sent ten donkeys to hint to his

Nachum Shadik asked the rav how it happened. "He was rushing to harm us. How did he suddenly become so gentle?"

The rav replied, "My teachers taught me that the solution to every problem is written in the Torah. As the *moser* was pursuing us, I thought of the *passuk*, כמים הפנים לפנים כן לב האדם לאדם. This *passuk* teaches that people are like mirrors. If you love your fellow man, your fellow man will love you too. If you hate someone, that's a sign that he hates you. I realized that if the *moser* hates me, it must be that I hate him as well. If I will love him, he will love me back. I began searching for his qualities and to find a way to judge him favorably. I realized that he was probably raised without a proper *chinuch* and he doesn't know how to act properly. I thought about this until I genuinely loved him. This automatically spurred him to think positively of me. He didn't want to harm me anymore."

Reb Nachum asked, "Why did he want to hit and spit at us?"

"Apparently he hated you because you hated him. If you would love him, he would feel positively towards you as well."

father that he shouldn't be angry at his ten children for selling Yosef because they didn't know what they were doing.

The Marahal writes, "Yosef was hinting to his father that he shouldn't punish his children for selling him, because it was decreed from heaven. When the *shevatim* sold him, they were like a loaded donkey that doesn't know why it carries its loads. Likewise, when the *shevatim* sold Yosef, they didn't know what they were doing. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decreed that they should go down to

Mitzrayim. They intended to sell Yosef because of their hatred towards him. However, the true purpose was to bring Yaakov and his children to Mitzrayim..."

Yosef told his brothers (45:8) ועתם לא אתם שלחתם אתי הנה "and now, it wasn't you who sent me here. It was Hashem..." (The Shem MiShmuel said that a Yid should repeat those words every day.) Yosef acknowledged that his brothers weren't guilty of selling him to Mitzrayim because even that was from Hashem.⁵ In this week's *parashah*, it says, אל תרגזו בדרך. The brothers were

5. The Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l* once opened the door of his room and said, "Berke needs *rachamim*." For several years, the Kotzker stayed concealed in his room, only coming out on rare occasions. This time, the Rebbe came out of his room to tell his chassidim that they should do whatever they can to help Berke.

Berke was the husband of the famous, wealthy woman Tamer'l, who gave lots of money to *tzedakah*, and in particular, she supported several Chasidic Rebbes. The Kotzer Rebbe saw with *ruach hakadosh* that her husband, Berke, was ill and needed *tefillos*.

The chasidim immediately prepared a wagon. Their plan was to travel to the Chidushei HaRim of Gur *zt'l*, and to Reb Yitzchak

returning home to tell Yaakov Avinu the good news that Yosef was still alive. They wanted to rush home to share this wonderful news. However, Yosef warned them, אל תרצו בדרך, don't be too hasty because you anyway won't be able to change Hashem's

plan. The moment destined for Yaakov to know, he will know, and not a moment sooner. Yosef told them to go quickly, מהרו ועלו (אל אבי 45:9) but don't rush too much because you will anyway not be able to change the time decreed from Above.⁶

Vorker *zt'l*, and to other tzaddikim, to ask them to daven for Berke.

At the beginning of their trip, one of the wagon wheels broke. Fixing it took some time. Finally, they were able to continue their trip, when one of the horses died.

The next problem cropped up when one of the travelers fell ill with tuberculosis. At that point, they were forced to return to Kotzk.

When they returned to Kotzk, they heard the news. Berke was niftar.

The chasidim were discussing the Kotzker's *ruach hakadosh*, that he knew from the distance that Berke was ill. One chassid replied, "Yes, our Rebbe showed us a *mofes*, but Hashem showed us an even greater *mofes*. Hashem showed us that if it's destined for someone to die, there is nothing people can do to prevent it. First a wheel broke, then a horse died, and then one of our group became ill. This prevented us from reaching the Rebbes, and they weren't able to daven for Berke. Hashem decided that it was time for Berke to leave this world and nothing could change his fate."

6. Rebbe Moshe Kobriner and his chassidim were visiting at the home of the daughter of Rebbe Baruch'l of Mezbitz. Before leaving, Rebbe Moshe Kobriner asked the hostess to repeat something

The Power of Resolve

In this week's *parashah*, Yehudah explained to Yosef why he's pleading Binyamin's case more than the other brothers. Yehudah said (44:32) *כי עבדך ערב את הנער*, "It is because your servant guaranteed the lad..."

Rashi explains, "If you will ask, why I'm pleading for Binyamin more than all the others? They aren't so connected, but I am bound, with a strong knot, to be banned from both worlds [if I don't return Binyamin to my father]."

This bond is expressed in last week's *parashah*. Initially, Yaakov refused to send Binyamin to Mitzrayim because he feared that he might die on the way. Yehudah convinced Yaakov to send Binyamin when he promised to bring Binyamin back. Yehudah said (43:9) *אנכי אערבנו מידי תבקשנו אם לא הביאתי*, *אליך והצגתיו לפניך וחטאתי לך כל הימים*, "I will be his guarantor.... If I don't return him... to you, I will be in sin before you forever" and then Yaakov agreed to send him.

from her great father. She said, "My father would say, 'A *Yid tur zich nisht yugen* - a Yid mustn't rush.'"

Hearing that, Rebbe Moshe Kobriner instructed his chassidim to stop rushing to leave. They will leave calmly when they are ready. When they finally left, people informed them that they were fortunate that they are leaving now and not earlier. "A band of thieves were hiding near the home. They heard that you'll be traveling soon, so they waited in ambush to steal everything you have. After waiting for some time, they saw you weren't coming, so they gave up and went elsewhere."

Had they rushed out, they would have run straight into the thieves. But because they were patient, the robbers left the site before them and they were saved.

Why did Yehudah's promise convince Yaakov to send Binyamin? If Yehudah failed in the mission, Yaakov would have even greater distress because Binyamin would be lost, and also Yehudah will be in a *niduy* (excommunicated). So how did Yehudah's words convince Yaakov to send Binyamin?

The Avnei Nezer *zt'l* explains that every person has amazing strengths in him. It is known and documented that people have supernatural capabilities during emergencies. Even a weak person can perform acts that the strongest people in the world cannot do under normal circumstances.

People can lift cars, jump tremendous heights, and run great distances when in danger. They find strength they previously didn't know they possessed. Those powers were always within them; they just come

to the fore in a time of need.

This is what Yehudah accomplished when he accepted on himself a ban, a *niduy*, if he fails to return with Binyamin. A *niduy* is a very serious matter. It would mean that Yehudah will be banned from the *yeshivah shel maalah* as well (as the Gemara says in *Sotah* 7). Since Yehudah's future was at stake, Yaakov knew that Yehudah would use all his revealed and latent powers to bring Binyamin back, and indeed he succeeded.

Related to our topic is the concept of שבועה, oath. Generally, we shouldn't make oaths because there is a risk of transgressing them, which is a severe sin. Yet, if someone sees that he's lax with a particular mitzvah (or if he is continuously transgressing a certain *aveirah*) and he wants to motivate himself to be more cautious, he may at times, make a שבועה. As it states, ושבועתי, "I swore... to keep your

righteous laws" (*Tehillim* 119:106).⁷

How does the שבועה help him keep the mitzvos? The answer is, as we discussed, the stronger the resolve, the greater are the chances of his success. The obligation to uphold an oath increases one's resolve, which multiplies the likelihood of success.

Teshuvah - Focus on the Present

Chazal say the word *ועתה*, "now," alludes to *teshuvah*.

This is surprising because people generally think that *teshuvah* is about focusing on the improper deeds committed in the past. They don't think that *teshuvah* is about the present.

But focusing on past aveiros leads to depression. Furthermore, focusing on past failures often results in one repeating those evil deeds.

Therefore, Chazal instruct us to focus on improving the present – *ועתה*. Do not mope over the past. Instead, focus on making the present (and the future) better; that is the ideal approach to *teshuvah*.

Yosef told his brothers (45:5), *ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם, כי מכרתם אתי הנה*, "and now, do not be sad, and don't let this anger you, that you sold me here..."

The Shinover Rav *zt'l* explains that Yosef told them, *ועתה*, "Don't dwell on the past, when you sold me. Rather, *ועתה*, think about the present, *ואל תעצבו*,

7. Generally, one shouldn't make a שבועה, not even for a mitzvah because he may transgress the שבועה, and then he will have an even greater sin. Only someone who is certain that he will keep the oath is permitted to swear.

and then you will not be sad.⁸

A *bachur* was very upset about the *aveiros* he committed and went to the Lev Simchah (of Gur) *zt'l* for guidance. The Lev Simchah told him that according to the Ramban, Yaakov Avinu never knew how Yosef ended up in Mitzrayim because Yaakov never

asked Yosef how he got to Mitzrayim, and Yosef never told him. Why? Because the past isn't important. What was, was. What's important is to make the present and the future better.

The Lev Simchah advised this *bachur* to ignore the past because the

8. Rebbe Shalom of Koidenov *zt'l* said that *teshuvah* must be with a broken heart (לב נשבר) but not with depression (עצבות). The difference between a broken heart and depression is that when one has a broken heart, he feels that he is worse than everyone in the world. When one is depressed, he is angry at the entire world.

The hint is in this week's *parashah*. Yosef told his brothers, ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם *atzvous*, if you won't have *atzvous*, then you won't be angry with others.

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* once rebuked his son and told him to be happy. The son asked, "Why do you rebuke me specifically about being happy? There are so many other things that I do wrong."

The Beis Aharon replied, "All other *aveiros* and bad *middos*, you know that they are bad, and you will eventually do *teshuvah* on them. But you don't recognize how severe *atzvous* is, and how it draws a person down. Therefore, I rebuke you specifically in this regard."

The Beis Aharon said, "*Atzvous* isn't an *aveirah*, but it pulls people down more than the greatest *aveirah*. *Simchah* isn't a *mitzvah*, but it raises a person higher than the greatest *mitzvah*."

path of *teshuvah* is ועתה, to make the present better.

The Yerushalmi (*Pe'ah* 8:8) relates that Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish were traveling to Teveria to bathe in its hot springs. On the road, they encountered a poor person, who asked them for a donation.

Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish replied, "When we return from the baths, we will give you some money."

When they returned, the poor man was already dead. He died from hunger. Reb Yochanan and Reish Lakish said, "We didn't merit taking care of you when you were alive, but we will take care of you after your death."

As they were preparing him for burial, they found a wallet filled with money on his body. They realized that he wasn't really poor. Rather, he was tricking

people into giving him money.

The Lev Simchah of Gur *zt'l* commented that this episode demonstrates how the holy Amoraim would focus on the present rather than mope over the past. Had they allowed the distress of causing this person's death to overtake them, they wouldn't have the willpower to bury him. They would live their entire life with a guilty conscience, thinking they caused his death. But because they focused on the present (and they sought to bury him), they discovered that he had plenty of money, and it wasn't their fault that he died.

It states (47:8-9), ויאמר פרעה, אל יעקב כמה ימי שני חיך ויאמר ימי שני... מעט ורעים היו... "Pharaoh asked Yaakov, 'How old are you?'"

Yaakov replied, "...They were few and bad years..."

There are thirty-three words in these two *pesukim*,

and Chazal tell us that Yaakov Avinu died thirty-three years younger than his father Yitzchak because he complained before Pharaoh. (Yitzchak lived until 180 and Yaakov until 147.)

Not all the words of the *pesukim* were Yaakov's. Among them is Pharaoh's question, "How old are you?"

Why was Yaakov punished for Pharaoh's words too?

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* answers that Pharaoh was shocked by Yaakov's elderly appearance, which caused Pharaoh to ask him his age. Yaakov explained that he isn't that old; only the *tzaros* of his life caused him to age early. Yaakov was punished for Pharaoh's question because his appearance prompted it.

Yaakov was punished for complaining and for appearing old. What lesson can we learn from this?

If we will train ourselves to focus on the present and let bygones be bygones, it will be easier for us to live without complaining and to live happily without appearing old and worn out.

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *zt'l* once said, "It states (*Vayikra* 6:6), אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה. This means that a fire to serve Hashem should always be burning על המזבח, in one's heart. לא תכבה, even if he committed sins, those sins shouldn't discourage him, and cool off his fire and passion. He should continue serving Hashem.

Once, Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuzh *zt'l* entered the beis medresh and found his chasidim sad and disappointed because of the yetzer hara which wasn't allowing them to serve Hashem as they desired. Rebbe Boruch *l'* told them, "It states (*Tehillim* 104:3) השם עבים רכובו, "Hashem places his chariot and rests his Shechinah on עבים,

people who are at very low levels. The condition is רוח, *המהלך על כנפי רוח*, that you try to rise and fly (as though you have wings) and become better.

The Gemara (Chagigah 13:) tells that malachim have six wings: Two cover their feet, two cover their face, and with two they fly (the two that fly are also used to sing shirah). After the churban Beis HaMikdash,

they lost the two that helped them fly.

We can learn from this that when one doesn't have wings to fly, that is a situation of after the churban.

Don't give up. Continue focusing on the present and serving Hashem, and you will fly to very lofty levels.⁹

9. A bachur who was having a hard time getting engaged finally found his bashert on the 11th of Kislev. His younger ten-year-old brother showed him a piece of paper, which this young brother wrote. It said, "11th of Cheshvon, I am making a kabbalah for thirty days that I will say each night kriyas shema she'al hamittah from a siddur. In this merit, may my brother become a chasan." Exactly thirty days later, his brother became a chasan.

This happened last year, and it was published in Be'er HaParshah.

A young boy of ten-years-old saw this story, and he decided to do the same because he also has an older brother who is having a hard time finding a shidduch. He decided that he will make a kabbalah for thirty days to say kriyas shema she'al hamittah, before he goes to sleep.

One morning he came to his father crying, because that night he forgot to say kriyas shema.

The father told him that it is o.k. Just keep your kabbalah for one extra day, and that will make up for the day you missed.

Belief in Tefillah

The Imrei Emes owned Reb Chaim Vital's handwritten commentary on the Michilta, but unfortunately, before this *sefer* could be printed, it was lost in WWII during the Holocaust.

The Imrei Emes repeated that in the introduction of this *sefer*, Reb Chaim Vital wrote, "After finishing writing this *sefer*, I had a dream." The dream explained the passuk (45:4) הם יצאו את העיר לא הרחקו ויוסף אמר לאשר על ביתו רדוף אחרי האנשים "[The brothers] left the city, they didn't go far, and Yosef said to the man in charge of his household, 'Go and chase after these people.'" Why does the Torah tell us that the brothers didn't go far? And why did Yosef say to the person in charge of his

home to go quickly and chase after them?

In his dream, Reb Chaim Vital heard the following answer:

The halachah teaches that the ideal time to recite תפילת הדרך is somewhere within the first *parsah* (eight thousand *amos*) of a trip. Yosef knew that if the brothers would say *Tefillas HaDerech*, he wouldn't be able to do anything to stop them from returning home peacefully. Because after they say ותצלני לשלום... ומכאן כל... etc., nothing can stop their tefillah from being answered.

Therefore, Yosef had to catch his brothers before they went too far. He wanted to reach them before they say *Tefillas HaDerech*.

The child did so, and on the 31st day (which was thirty days of saying *kriyas shema*) his brother became a *chasan*!

(As heard from the father; a great talmid chacham and a magid shiur in New York.)

The Imrei Emes added that this can explain why Yosef filled their bags with a lot of food before sending them away (see 44:1). The extra weight would slow them down, giving Yosef more time to catch them before saying *Tefillas HaDerech*.

This lesson is a reminder of the power of *tefillah*, how we can attain all our hearts desires with *tefillah*.¹⁰

Many people have difficulty davening with *kavanah* because they can't imagine that their *tefillos* can be precious and special to Hashem. They aren't great tzaddikim, so why should Hashem be interested in listening to them?

The Zera Kodesh (Ropshitzer Rav zt'l) at the beginning of this week's parashah raises this issue and offers three ideas people should think about

10. The Gemara Brochos (21) says, ולואי שיתפלל אדם כל היום, "If only a person would daven the entire day!"

Reb Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l explained: When one considers all the problems that are in the world, how there are people who are ill, people suffering from *parnassah* struggles, shalom bayis issues, etc. etc. we understand that ולואי שיתפלל אדם כל היום, how good and how necessary it is to daven all day long. There is just so much to pray for!

We say in the Shema, ולעבדו בכל לבבכם, to serve Hashem with all your hearts.

The Gemara says, "How does one serve Hashem with his heart? With *tefillah*." *Tefillah* is called *avodah* (work/toil) but why? It isn't so hard to say the words of the tefillah. The Abudarham answers that the toil is to remove all outside thoughts from one's mind while davening. It isn't very hard to say the words, but it requires immense effort to keep one's mind focused on what he is saying.

to help them recognize that their *tefillos* are valuable and that their *tefillos* will be answered.

The first point the Zera Kodesh mentions is that we have a connection to the Avos (Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov). Although they lived thousands of years ago, a child is always connected to his parents. As the Zera Kodesh writes, "It is written, *עקב חבל נחלתו*, 'Yaakov is the rope...' When there's a long rope hanging down, and one shakes the rope from its bottom end, it will shake above, too... Therefore, since I am a member of Bnei Yisrael, Hashem will fulfill my requests, and He will receive a *nachas ruach* from my *tefillah*." Knowing and remembering our prominent *yichus* - that we are descendants of the Avos - helps us understand that our *tefillos* are precious to Hashem.

The second idea that will give us belief in our *tefillos* is the awareness of

the sanctity of our soul. The Zera Kodesh writes that one should think, "Hashem gave me a *neshamah*... and since I have this very special aspect in me, I am worthy of davening."

Another thought, writes the Zera Kodesh, is to know that sometimes Hashem, *ki vayocheil*, uses man to pray through him.

Because the Gemara says that Hashem also prays. How does Hashem pray? The Zera Kodesh explains that Hashem joins man and prays together with him.

So, one's prayers can be very powerful because they may be, essentially, Hashem's *tefillos*. "*Kiveiyachol*, Hashem sometimes clothes himself in the mouth of man to pray. Therefore, a person should say, it is true that I am not worthy to pray, as far as I am concerned, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu, with His compassion and great

kindness, when He sees that I cannot pray, He *keviyachol* prays along with me. He is with my words when I daven."

The Zera Kodesh shows how these ideas are alluded to in the first passuk of the *parashah*: ויגש אליו יהודה, Yehudah means praises (tefillah). The roshei teivos of these words spell אי (how). This is the person asking, "How can I daven? What is my worth, to speak to Hashem in tefillah?"

The first answer lies in the סופי תיבות, final letters of these three words ויגש אליו יהודה, which spell שוה. These letters allude to the Avos because they are the letters that were added to the Avos. Avraham received a *heh* (אברהם) Yitzchak is sometimes written with a *sin*, (ישחק,) and Yaakov is sometimes written with a *vav* (יעקוב). This is the first counsel: to pray in the merit of our forefathers.

The passuk continues, כי אדוני, this reminds us that

within us, is Hashem *keviyachol*, because our neshamah is a part of Hashem.

The third counsel is alluded to in the words (written in the next passuk) אדוני שאל את עבדיו, Hashem *borrow*s a person's mouth and prays through it. (שאל can mean borrowed.) With these three thoughts, one is encouraged. He realizes the value of his *tefillah*, and he is able to pray to Hashem.

Recently we received a letter from a Reb Dovid from France. He writes that he was in a toy store looking to buy a playmobile set for his son, but didn't know which set to choose, so he asked the salesperson for advice.

The salesperson said, "Playmobiles are a collectors' item. Children enjoy collecting the various sets. So, it doesn't make a difference. But why not buy a toy car? We have a large car for sale..."

The father was convinced, and he drove home with the large toy car in his trunk. He was certain his son would be happy with this gift, although it wasn't what they initially discussed.

He came home joyously, anticipating his son's happy face when he received the gift. But his son had gone to sleep early that night, so the father placed the large car next to his son's bed.

When the mother saw the car, she was astounded. She said, "Every night, I put our son to sleep with a story. Tonight, I told him about an ill woman who davened to Hashem and

had a *refuah shleimah*. Our son asked, "If I daven for something, will Hashem grant me my wishes, too?"

"I told him, 'Yes, Hashem will answer your *tefillos*. Is there something particular you want?'

"He replied, 'Hashem, please give me a car.'

Reb Dovid writes in his letter that "when my son awakens in the morning and sees the car, he won't be surprised. It will be obvious to him. He davened for it, so of course, he received it. I wish I would also have this pure belief in *tefillah*."¹¹

11. There was a couple who didn't have children. The husband asked his wife to travel to Rebbe Meir of Permishlan to ask the Rebbe for a *brachah*. "Tell him that I am even prepared to lose my wealth, if that is needed, as long as we merit having children."

She traveled to Permishlan and said to the Rebbe, "My husband said that he is even prepared to *keep his wealth* as long as he can bear children."

Rebbe Meir of Permishlan laughed, because he understood that she slipped with her words.

Three months ago, a family gathered in Bnei Brak for a levayah, and then the family and friends got into cars because the niftar was going to be buried in the Rishon l'Tzion cemetery. Most of the family arrived at Rishon l'Tzion, but curiously, the niftar's daughter and son-in-law weren't there. They were at the levayah in Bnei Brak, and everyone wondered where they disappeared to.

The family waited for quite a while, and finally, the couple arrived. The levayah began immediately, as it was erev Shabbos, and there wasn't much time to waste.

After the levayah, the family went over to the couple to find out what caused the delay.

The couple explained that they are almost sure that they set their Waze to Rishon l'Tzion, but for some reason, the Waze directed them to the cemetery in Cholon and not Rishon l'Tzion.

At first, they didn't realize that they were at the wrong location. They looked around the Cholon cemetery for their family and didn't find them.

They thought that perhaps there was another entrance, so they asked around. That is when they figured out that they were

The Rebbe said, "You didn't err with your words. You said it correctly because why shouldn't your husband have both - wealth and children? Hashem can do anything. He doesn't need to take away your wealth in order to give you children. With *tefillah*, you can have both."

Obviously, they received both, because with *tefillah*, everything can be attained.

in Cholon, and not Rishon l'Tzion.

They tried to enter the correct address in their Waze, but it wasn't turning on.

What should they do now? They didn't know how to get to Rishon l'Tzion.

They stopped their car on a busy street in Cholon and asked someone for directions to get to Rishon l'Tzion. The person described the way, but he immediately realized they didn't understand him.

"My office is right here," the person told them, pointing to an upscale office building. "One of the secretaries lives in Rishon. I will dismiss her early today, and she can ride with you and direct you to your destination."

As they rode, the secretary told them that

she prepares the Shabbos food every Friday before she goes to work, but this week she didn't manage to do so. She was worried because it was Friday, and she finished work late. When will she prepare for Shabbos? She davened for siyata dishmaya to get ready in time for Shabbos. "It was a miracle that my tough boss dismissed me early this week. Hashem answered my tefillos. Now I will be able to prepare for Shabbos. That's a salvation I wasn't expecting."

We see the power of tefillah. Hashem had this couple lose their way, have a broken Waze, speak with the manager of an office where a woman from Rishon l'Tzion works, all so this woman could be ready for Shabbos.

Because when we pray to Hashem, Hashem answers our requests.¹²

12. A Slonimer chasid wrote a letter to his rebbe, the Nesivos

A group of seminary girls who studied in Yerushalayim came to Tzfas for Shabbos with their teachers. Friday night, they davened in a beis medresh, and a one-year-old child of one of the teachers was acting up, running, laughing, touching everything he could get his hands on. The mother tried to calm her son so that he won't disturb the tefillos, but the child wanted to play.

The child grabbed his mother's leather-bound siddur and threw it down to the men's section below.

The teacher couldn't see where it fell, and she was

worried that the heavy siddur may have fallen on someone's head.

After the tefillah, she went downstairs to retrieve her siddur. The siddur was held by a baal teshuvah, seeking to return it to its owner. By his appearance, it was evident that he was a very fresh baal teshuvah. He said, "I came to shul late, all siddurim were already taken, and I don't know how to daven by heart. So I prayed to Hashem, 'Please give me a siddur so I can daven,' and just then a siddur fell down from heaven..."

Because Hashem answers our tefillos.

Shalom zt'l, expressing all the hardships he was going through. He wrote in the letter (Tehillim 121) מאין יבא עזרי, "From where will my salvation come?"

The Nesivos Shalom wrote back, "I don't understand; if you write part of the pasuk, why don't you also study the end of the pasuk. Because the pasuk concludes, עזרי מעם ה' עושה שמים וארץ, "My salvation comes from Hashem, creator of heaven and earth" (Nesivos Shalom, Michtevei Kodesh 95).