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Vayigash | The Superiority of Humiliation





# MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת ויגש | אנגלית

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#### Beit Hamidrash Hameir La'aretz

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Parshat Vayigash - A Change of Approach



#### A Change of Approach

This week, we will begin with two stories, and as our discussion continues, we will draw lessons from them. This is the first story:

In the book *HaMit'angim Bah* (Part II, p. 434) by Rabbi Lior Sa'idi Shlita, it is written as follows:

Yigal Rafaeli, an industrialist and engineer, is the father of three married children and the grandfather of six. Despite being seventy years old, he remains remarkably energetic and spry.

One day, he made time to tell Rabbi Kobi Levy the story of his return to the Jewish faith:

"Rabbi Levy, up until five years ago—when I was 65—I was completely non-religious, totally disconnected from the life of a traditional Jewish home, woven of Shabbat and holidays, prayers and Psalms,

and a great deal of devotion to the Holy One, blessed be He.

Unlike many heroes of the *teshuvah* (repentance) movement like you, for example, I wasn't caught by an Arachim seminar; I didn't go bungee jumping off a cliff in Thailand and smash my body on the rocks to come to know the Creator, and no wild lion ever threatened to swallow me with a hungry roar in the depths of some jungle to make me cry 'Save me!'

to my Father in Heaven.

"I also never merited some terrifying nightmare to jolt me awake, nor even a sweet, pleasant dream of Elijah the Prophet or of Rabbi Akiva or Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to gladden me. I know those kinds of stories, too, but my return to faith didn't come from any of that—no way.

"We live in a nice, average neighborhood in a secular city Parshat Vayigash - The Crucible of Trial

in central Israel. Outside of my profession, I spent forty years of my life fighting what we called 'religious coercion.' When I would walk the streets of the town and see the *Charedim* (ultra-Orthodox) out and about, my blood would boil... And then it finally happened: the Zalmanowitz family made a soft landing four yards away from me.

"One evening, the doorbell rang. I opened up, and there, live and in person, was young Zalmanowitz himself. Only the Master of the Universe knows what stormed inside me. Pent-up anger seethed within me. From that point on, Mr. Levy, every encounter between him and me became a half-hour campaign of humiliation. The more I put him down and

shamed him, the stronger my burning inner conviction grew that I was doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing!

"And then, at the end of my vehement, lethal onslaught, he looked me straight in the eye and said, 'Bless me, Mr. Rafaeli. Bless me that the Holy One, blessed be He, grant me the same fervor that you have!'

"'Do you get it?' This Zalmanowitz *begged me* to bless him that he might attain the passion that burns in me. Zalmanowitz turned and left, not before wishing me a good night. But I was left utterly shaken. That was it, my friend—I was spent. I had nothing left to add. From that dreadful, horrifying night onward, my worldview began to crack and crumble...."

#### The Crucible of Trial

The second story was told by Rabbi Shalom Shvadron zt"l (*She'al Avicha VeYagedcha*, Part III, p. 224): It was back when Rabbi Leib Chasman zt"l was at the head of the Stutchin Yeshiva. One of the conditions he set for those who

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**1.** After later immigrating to the Holy Land of Israel, he served as the

mashgiach [spiritual supervisor] of the Hebron Yeshiva.

Parshat Vayigash - The Crucible of Trial

wished to enroll in his yeshiva was the requirement to pay a monthly tuition of one ruble. Whoever was not prepared to pay would absolutely not be accepted. In a case where a boy was completely penniless, Rabbi Leib would supply him with a letter of recommendation and funds so he could travel to a different yeshiva.

This was the admissions procedure: Whoever wanted to be accepted to the yeshiva would first approach the gabbai—one of the older students appointed to this role—and he would brief the applicant on the yeshiva's daily schedule and on the payment requirements. Only after the candidate agreed to conduct himself in the spirit of the yeshiva would he be brought for an entrance exam.

Once, an orphaned boy came who wished to be admitted to the yeshiva but said he had no money; despite this, he wanted to learn specifically in the Stutchin Yeshiva. The student-gabbai knew that Rabbi

Leib would not agree to accept him, but the orphan boy persisted and refused to leave.

Now, this same older student was also in charge of arranging meal placements for the yeshiva students. He went ahead and arranged meals for that orphan boy until the boy's situation could be clarified. Even though he knew Rabbi Leib would be angry with him, the gabbai decided that this was the necessary and correct thing to do...

Every Friday, the student would go to Rabbi Leib and show him the list of all the yeshiva students—where each one would eat on Shabbat and throughout the week. That week, when he showed him the list, Rabbi Leib's eye caught the name of the orphaned youth, and he immediately asked, "Who is this?"

The student answered that he had placed him with families for Shabbat meals but that after Shabbat, the boy would have to leave—since he can't pay the ruble every month.

Parshat Vayigash - The Crucible of Trial

The student finished his explanation and fully expected a reprimand. "True," he thought, "a scolding isn't pleasant, but I don't need to get upset—I behaved as I needed to."

Rabbi Leib responded and said, "You should have sent the orphan the synagogue to assistant, who could arrange for him. Ιt meals appropriate for the yeshiva's gabbai since the boy isn't counted among its students. Therefore, I am penalizing you – you yourself will eat from your own provisions and not from the yeshiva kitchen, and that orphan boy will eat your portion."

Since the gabbai had been bracing for a much harsher punishment, he was quite satisfied with the penalty he received, and he gladly ate his own food.

It was Rabbi Leib's custom to give a talk at *Se'udah Shlishit* (the third Shabbat meal), and the one who led the evening Ma'ariv prayer at the close of Shabbat was usually either one

of the yeshiva's rabbis or Rabbi Leib himself. But this time, he called over the student-gabbai and honored him with leading Ma'ariv—whispering in his ear: "After all, you are the one making decisions in the yeshiva. If so, you are like one of the yeshiva's rabbis. So go up to the amud (prayer stand)!"

The young man's teeth chattered against each other as he stepped up to lead the prayer. Still, he knew he was in the right, and that gave him strength—he led the Ma'ariv service with vigor, without fear.

All the students in Yeshiva were astonished at this and whispered among themselves, "What happened that they're letting a student lead the service instead of one of the rabbis?!" No one had any explanation for it...

The same scene repeated itself at Havdalah. Each week, Rabbi Leib himself would make Havdalah in front of everyone, but this time, he turned to the student-gabbai and said to him: "Aren't you now part of the

Parshat Vayigash - The Portion of Benjamin's Inheritance

Yeshiva's administration? In that case, please go ahead and make Havdalah." And again, the murmurs began: "What is the meaning of all these changes...?"

Later, Rabbi Leib began to question him and asked him: "Do you truly believe you were right in what you did?"

The boy answered, "Yes!"

Rabbi Leib opened his eyes wide, fixing him with a piercing stare, and repeated the question—this time in a louder voice: "Do you really think you were justified in what you did?!" And again, the boy, with complete confidence, asserted his righteousness.

Then the Mashgiach (spiritual supervisor) rose from his seat, extended one hand, and shook

the boy's hand, and with his other hand, he put a hand on the boy's shoulder and said: "Go with this strength of yours and work for the good of Israel! By standing your ground and not breaking despite all I put you through, you have proven that you truly acted for the sake of Heaven and that you have the strength to persevere. With that strength, you will accomplish great things for the Jewish people."

That boy indeed achieved great things with his unique capabilities—his name was Rabbi Chaim Chaikel Millezki, a well-known Rosh Yeshivah of 'Chayei Olam.'

Thus was Rabbi Leib Chasman's educational method that produced students who, in later years, became great leaders of Israel.

#### The Portion of Benjamin's Inheritance

When the people of Israel stood at the border of the Promised Land, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded

Moses to allocate the land to the tribes by lottery and by Divine inspiration, and Moses did so. But since Moses did not enter

Parshat Vayigash - The Portion of Benjamin's Inheritance

the Land, the one who actually carried out the division of the Land was Joshua bin Nun.

Rabbi Yisrael Ariel Shlita described this in detail:<sup>2</sup>

"From our Sages' words (Bava Batra 56a), we learn that the tribal borders in Eretz Yisrael were delineated in Joshua's day with precision—by planting the *chatzav* plant as a marker between fields and between tribes. The borders dividing the tribes were extremely exact, down to the centimeter.

"Our Sages (Megillah 26a) give an example of such a precise border in the boundary between the territories of Judah and Benjamin. The Sages describe the border-line of those tribes passing through the Temple courtyards and running along the altar:

"What was in Judah's portion? The Temple Mount, the chambers, and the courtyards.

And what was in Benjamin's portion? The Entrance Hall, the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies—and there was a strip that extended from Judah's portion into Benjamin's portion, and on it the altar was built." In other words, the border was so precise as to form a narrow strip wending its way into one tribe's territory and then back out. "And Benjamin the righteous would agonize over it every day, yearning to absorb it into his own portion, as it says: 'He shields him all day long' (Deuteronomy 33:12). Therefore, Benjamin merited to become host to the Divine Presence."

Although the plain reading of the Gemara implies that the entire altar stood in Judah's territory, if one examines Zevachim 53b, one finds that the whole altar stood in Benjamin's territory, except for the *southeast corner* of the altar where there was a small area

Parshat Vayigash - The Portion of Benjamin's Inheritance

that belonged to Judah (an area of about one cubit).<sup>3</sup>

Now, the commentators ask a number of strong questions on these words of the Gemara, and in this discussion, we will address only one question.<sup>4</sup>

When we consider Benjamin's portion, we see that it contained the Entrance Hall, the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies – essentially, the most central parts of the Holy Temple were in his portion and inheritance.

The location of the Ark and Tablets—the primary locus of the Divine Presence—was in his portion.

The location of the Menorah, the Table, and the golden Incense Altar was also in his portion.

The location of the [outer] altar—where the primary service of the Temple was performed, the offering of sacrifices—was in his portion as well.

So what was he missing? Only the area of one cubit's depth along most of the eastern side and along most of the southern side. That small, minute piece belonged to Judah.

Yet what was Benjamin's reaction to this? He "was pained by it and wanted to swallow it every day." Not a one-time pain when he first learned of it, but an anguish that existed and renewed itself each day—Benjamin desired to "swallow" that strip so that it, too, would be in his portion!...

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**3.** For this reason, this corner of the altar had no *yesod* (foundation base).

As the Gemara states (Zevachim 53b): "The south-eastern corner had no foundation. What is the reason? Rabbi Elazar said, because it was not in the portion of the 'ravener' (i.e.,

Benjamin, of whom it is written "Benjamin is a ravening wolf," Genesis 49:27). For Rav Shmuel bar Yitzchak said: The altar extended one cubit into Judah's portion."

**4.** See *Dibrot Tzvi* (Part 15, p. 101) by Rabbi Zvi Visefisch Shlita.

Parshat Vayigash - On the Shore of the Sea

We must ask a simple question: Why should this cause him distress? Was it in Benjamin's power to determine whether that strip would belong to him or to Judah? After all, the inheritances were divided by Divine lot and by holy inspiration!

And let us pose *another* question on a related matter...

#### On the Shore of the Sea

In Sotah 36b, we find a different reason why Benjamin merited having the Holy Temple in his territory:

Rabbi Meir would say: When Israel stood at the sea—and it had not yet split—the tribes were arguing with one another. This one said, "*I* will go down into the sea first," and that one said, "*I* will go down first!"

The tribe of Benjamin jumped forward and went down into the sea first! As it says: "There, Benjamin the youngest is ruling them" — don't read rodem ("ruling them"), but red yam ("went down into the sea"). Because Benjamin merited to leap into the sea first, he merited to become a ruler over Israel; the first king (Saul) came from Benjamin.

The officers of Judah enraged and began were them stones. pelting with it says in the as later "The princes verse: of Judah their stone-throwers." Therefore, Benjamin merited to become the host of the Al-mighty, as it says: "and between his shoulders, He dwells" (Deuteronomy 33:12).

From the words of the Gemara, it is explained that the first to risk their lives by jumping into the sea were the tribe of Benjamin. Nonetheless, that alone was still not enough to earn them the privilege of hosting the Divine Presence; only after the tribe of Judah hurled stones at them did they attain it.

If we contemplate this Gemara, the following question arises:

Parshat Vayigash - The Seal of the Tribes - Benjamin

It was Benjamin's tribe that merited, due to their silence in the face of suffering, that the Holy Temple was built in their territory. If so, why does the Gemara conclude by saying: "Therefore Benjamin the righteous (and clearly this

refers to Benjamin the son of Jacob) merited and became host to the Al-mighty." What connection does this incident have to Benjamin himself?!...

Before we answer, let us learn a bit about the character of Benjamin...

#### The Seal of the Tribes – Benjamin

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of Kislev in the year 2193 to Creation, Jacob's first son—Reuben—was born. Seven years later, on 1 Tammuz 2199, Jacob's eleventh son—Joseph—was born (in addition, he had a daughter, who was named Dinah). Then, about eight years after that, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan 2208, his twelfth son—Benjamin—was born.

The holy Zohar writes (Vayishlach 174a):

"Immediately upon the birth of Benjamin, the Shechinah began to be arrayed through the twelve tribes, for he completed the number. Through the tribe of Benjamin, the Kingdom of Heaven began to be known and revealed on earth, for Saul—who

was the first king of Israel—was from the tribe of Benjamin."

The holy Zohar continues (ibid.):

"Since through Benjamin, the attribute of kingship (the Shechinah) began to be known and revealed among the lower beings, therefore at the moment of his birth, his mother Rachel died.

"Because the building of the Malchut (Divine kingship) is accomplished via judgment and severity, which are the root of death, therefore at the time of its rectification it must expel and cast off from itself the forces of judgment—diverting them onto some righteous person who dies for this cause;

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bv that, the Malchut is sweetened, and from then on it can settle down below.

"So too, when the Shechinah wished to be arrayed and dwell upon the House (Temple) among the twelve tribes, judgment was Rachel—the executed upon Malchut cast its judgments onto her, and so she died. After that, the Malchut was rectified to reside among the lower beings and to dwell upon the twelve tribes."

Benjamin, who was motherless from the moment of his birth, found comfort and support with his brother Joseph, who was about eight years old.

And the years continued to pass...

#### **Obfuscating Tracks and Concealing Evidence**

In the year 2216 to Creation, Joseph's brothers sold him,5 while Benjamin, who was then only eight years old, was not there with them when they sold him.6 After they sold him, Issachar turned to his brothers and said:7 "What will we say to our father when we come to him, and how can we justify ourselves before him? Our mouths will be struck dumb in the face of the calamity we have brought upon him. Therefore, my advice to you is: cover your tracks and hide the evidence!"

#### 

5. The exact date of Joseph's sale is not explicitly given in the Torah. Rabbi Shlomo Yehuda Fischer zt"l suggested that it occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, hinting to this from a play on zodiac signs:

"The 17th of Tammuz is the day of the sin of the Golden Calf, and the 9th of Av is the day of the sin of the spies... I would suggest that it happened on the 10th of

Tevet. This is hinted by the zodiac sign of Tevet –a goat–which symbolizes the sin of Joseph's sale—as it is written: 'They slaughtered a kid goat' (Genesis 37:31)"

- **6.** *Targum Sheni* to Esther 3:14.
- 7. See Otzar Aggadot HaTorah (Vol. I, p. 300) by Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Klapholtz zt"l.

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They asked him, "How so?"

Issachar answered: "Slaughter a goat and dip in its blood which resembles human blood — the striped tunic that we stripped off Joseph. Then, tear the tunic into many pieces and puncture it with spear-holes. We'll send the torn, bloodied tunic to our father Jacob and ask him: Please recognize whether this is your son's tunic or not. When our father sees the tunic, it won't occur to him to suspect us or impute blame to us, and he will think that a wild animal devoured Joseph."

Issachar's plan found favor brothers' in his eves, and they agreed with him. Only Reuben protested and said, "My brothers, why compound wrongdoing top on wrongdoing? Isn't it enough that you sold Joseph as a slave and had no pity on the lad that now you seek to deceive and beguile our father by telling him this horror story?!" His brothers replied, "True, your words are correct. But what can

we do to avert our father's wrath against us? We are compelled to do as Issachar advised."

The brothers did exactly as Issachar instructed. They then gave the blood-soaked tunic to Naphtali and said to him: "When you stand before our father, tell him that we found this tunic in Shechem when we round up went to livestock." Naphtali took the striped tunic and hurried with his swift feet to his father's house. As he leaped and ran through the wheat fields, he didn't bend or break the stalks of grain, so light were his steps.

When he arrived before Jacob. he showed him Joseph's tunic and asked him, "Do you recognize tunic. Father?" Jacob examined it and, to his dismay, realized it was his son Joseph's tunic. He understood that a dreadful misfortune must have Joseph. befallen Out overwhelming grief and anguish, he could not answer a word: he fell to the ground, his mouth struck silent like a stone. After

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some time passed, he arose and cried out a great and bitter cry and hot tears streamed from his eyes...

The sorrow of Jacob, our forefather. awful and was terrible—it was anguish that lasted for twenty-two consecutive vears and caused the Divine Presence to depart from him.

Forever and Ever – Yashpheh!

The Holy One, blessed be He, hid from Jacob our father the matter of Joseph's sale. But from Benjamin, He did not hide it—Benjamin knew that his brothers had sold his beloved brother, his supporter provider, to the Ishmaelites.

The sudden disappearance of Joseph from his life caused Benjamin immense pain, and he refused to be comforted. Therefore, he gave all of his sons names that would remind him of Joseph. These are their

names: "Belah, Becher, Ashbel, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard" (Genesis 46:21). And the holy Gemara (Sotah 36b) explains the meaning behind each name:

Belah – "because Joseph was 'swallowed up' among the nations."

Becher - "because he was the firstborn of his mother."

Ashbel – "because G-d put him in captivity."

Gera – "because he dwelled as a stranger in lodgings."

Naaman – "because Joseph was exceedingly pleasant."

Echi and Rosh – "He is my brother and he is my leader."

Muppim and Huppim – "'He did not see my wedding, and I did not see his wedding.'"8

Ard – "because he descended among the nations."

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**8.** See *Otzar Aggadot HaTorah* (Vol. I, p. 300) by Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Klapholtz zt"l. (This is another source for

Midrashic expansions on the including the meanings of Benjamin's sons' names.)

Parshat Vayigash - Obfuscating Tracks and Concealing Evidence

Despite his overwhelming sorrow, Benjamin held his tongue and did not reveal the sale to his father, Jacob. In that merit, he earned that his stone on the High Priest's breastplate would be the yashpheh ("jasper") stone!

As the Midrash says (Esther Rabbah 6:12): "Rachel maintained the trait of silence—she saw her wedding gifts being given to her sister and remained silent. Benjamin, her son, maintained silence as well. His stone on the breastplate was jasper (yashpheh), to indicate that he knew of Joseph's sale and kept quiet. 'yashpheh' — yesh peh ve-shotek: he had a mouth, yet he was silent!"

Let us expand for a moment on the subject of the "yashpheh":

When the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was erected, Aaron and his sons were anointed as priests. The Holy One, blessed be He, commanded that eight special garments be made for Aaron the High Priest—one of which was the *Choshen*, the breastplate.

Embedded in the breastplate were twelve precious stones, and on each stone was engraved the name of one of the twelve tribes of G-d.

Reuben – his stone was *odem* (ruby), and its color was red.

Shimon – his stone was *pitdah* (topaz), and its color was green.

Levi – his stone was *bareket* (emerald), which contains several colors: white, black, and red.

Judah – his stone was *nofech* (turquoise), and its color was sky-blue.

Issachar – his stone was sappir (sapphire), and its color was black with a bluish hue.

Zebulun — his stone was *yahalom* (diamond), and its color was white.

Dan – his stone was *leshem* (jacinth), and its color was like saffron.

Gad – his stone was *shevo* (agate), and its color is a kind of gray.

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Naphtali – his stone was achlamah (amethyst), and its color is like clear wine.

Asher – his stone tarshish (beryl), and its color is like olive oil.

Joseph – his stone was *shoham* (onyx), and its color is black.

Benjamin – his stone was yashpheh (jasper).

Bachya writes Rabbenu (Exodus 28:15) that this jasper "contains many colors—red, black, and green."

Rabbenu Bachya continues:

"It was given to Benjamin because his heart had been

turned many colors, as it were. He wrestled inwardly over sale—whether Joseph's reveal the matter to his father or not. Yet he overcame his impulse and restrained himself and did not disclose the matter to his father. Therefore, this stone was given to him. And it is called yashpheh—a word composed of yesh meaning 'there is a mouth'—to allude to his virtue: even though he had a mouth and could have revealed what had happened, he remained silent and did not tell!"

Benjamin's silence continued to accompany him...

#### The Young Thief

At the beginning of Joseph's eighth year on the viceroy's throne, the seven years of famine began, and the very idea of "bread to satiety" became something that belonged to fairy tales.

Egypt—under in Joseph's supervision—was there food, and people from all over the world came down to Egypt to buy provisions from Joseph.

the previous Torah In portion, Parashat Miketz, we learned that when the brothers arrived before Joseph, he placed them in a holding cell for three days, as it is stated: "And he gathered them into custody for three days" (Genesis 42:17).

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Afterward, he released them, supplied the goods they had ordered, and demanded: "The next time you come, bring Benjamin with you."

"As collateral that you will return here with Benjamin," he said, "I am taking your brother Simeon as a hostage," as it says: "And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes" (ibid., v. 24).9

On their way back to the Land of Israel, they discovered that all the money they had paid for the goods had been placed back inside their food sacks, and bewilderment spread across their faces.

When they reached their father, Jacob, they related everything that had happened, and Jacob, hearing it, was shaken and cried out: "Why did you treat me so badly by telling

the man that you have another brother?" (ibid. 43:6).

"No! I will not agree to send Benjamin with you!"

But after the grain was gone and no choice remained, Judah approached his father and said, "Father, I take full responsibility to bring Benjamin back alive and intact—'I myself will guarantee him; you can demand him from my own hand. If I do not bring him to you and set him before you, then I shall have sinned against you for all of time'" (ibid., v. 9).

When Jacob heard Judah's words, he agreed, adding: "If so, then do this: take of the choice produce of the land in your bags and bring down to the man a gift—a little balsam, and a little honey, gum and ladanum, pistachios and almonds. And take double the amount of money

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**9.** Indeed, after the brothers left, Joseph released Shimon from prison and put him up comfortably in an inn. This is the language of the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 91:8): "Rabbi Haggai

said in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak:
'He bound [Shimon] before their eyes;
once they had left, [Joseph] was
feeding and giving him drink, washing
and anointing him.'"

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in your hand, and the money that was returned in the opening of your sacks, carry back in your hand; perhaps it was an oversight" (ibid., vv. 11–12).

When they arrived in Egypt, they stood before Joseph, and Joseph, thrilled to see them, ordered that a royal banquet be prepared.

Joseph sat at the head of the table, and his brothers sat around him; throughout the meal, Joseph toyed again and again with the goblet at his side, and the brothers kept glancing from him to the goblet and back again.

The meal ended, and before they parted, Joseph filled their sacks with grain, returned their money inside the sacks, and placed his goblet in Benjamin's sack.

They had not gone far when a dense cloud appeared behind them, drawing closer until a detachment of soldiers emerged.

"Stop at once, in the name of the law—you are under arrest!"

"What has happened?"

"You all have stolen the goblet!"

The brothers heard the immediately accusation and rejected it: "Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! Behold, the money we found in the mouth of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan—why then would we steal silver or gold from your master's house?" (ibid. 44:7-8).

In their fervor, they added, "Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will become slaves to my

L-rd" (ibid., v. 9).

The unit commander heard their words and would not agree. "No—no need to go that far! 'The one with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be clear and free'" (ibid., v. 10).

He searched Reuben's sack, then Simeon's, and continued in order until he reached Benjamin's sack.

"Aha!" he cried in triumph. "We have found the thief!"

Parshat Vayigash - Silence in the Face of Trouble

#### Silence in the Face of Trouble

The Midrash Tanchuma (Miketz, sec. 10) says:

"The brothers stood and struck Benjamin on his shoulders, saying to him, 'Thief, son of a thief! You've shamed us! You are your mother's son—just as your mother shamed our father when she stole Laban's *teraphim*."

The Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 92:8) continues:

Joseph's steward said to them, "Are there goats somewhere around here? Are these the brothers who sold their own brother? You all, who sold your brother and dipped his coat in goats' blood, are you not ashamed to disgrace Benjamin over such a small matter?"

Despite all the blows and the insults, Benjamin persisted in his silence.

Rabbi Shalom Zvi Shapira zt"l writes (HaMaor shebaTorah, Genesis, p. 351) as follows:

"We have quite a vivid illustration of the trait of

absolute silence in Benjamin. Let us consider: Benjamin knew for all the twenty-two years that the brothers had sold Joseph. We can imagine his bitterness toward them and his anguish. Now, at last, G-d was demanding an accounting from them for their wayward actions—suspicion has fallen on them of stealing the goblet, a fitting punishment for stealing and selling their brother—and yet they don't attribute it to their own actions, but instead say to him: 'You are the thief!'

"He was now in a situation where he could turn to them and say, 'You are to blame for this whole entanglement; it's all because of you!'—yet instead, he held steadfast to his trait and remained silent!"

Because he merited to accept humiliation with love, he merited to grow and grow further spiritually. But before we continue with Benjamin, let us pause for a moment... Parshat Vayigash - A Speedy 'Elevator' Called Humiliation

#### A Speedy 'Elevator' Called Humiliation

Our holy teacher, Rabbi Chaim Vital, wrote an ethical work called *Sha'arei Kedushah*. There (Part IV, end of Gate 1) the following is brought:

There was once a man who fasted most days, performed many acts of charity, and married off many orphaned girls – but he pursued prestige. He came to a certain group of mystics who had attained prophetic insight, and he said to the greatest among them:

"Master, by your grace, please explain one thing to me: After I have done all these good deeds, why have I not merited to reach the level of prophecy and to proclaim the future like you?"

He answered: "Take a sack full of nuts and figs, hang it around your neck, and go to the city marketplace among the dignitaries of the city. Gather some young boys and say to them: 'Whoever wants me to give him figs and nuts—come and hit me with his hand on my

neck and then on my cheek.' Do that many times. Then come back to me, and I will guide you on the path to attain the truth."

The man said to him: "Master! How could such a thing be fit for an honorable person like me?!"

He replied: "Does this seem so difficult a thing to you? This is the *easiest* step you'll have to take if you want your soul to behold the light of truth."

Immediately, the man departed, utterly crestfallen...

To quote my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l: As we know, one who wants to grow lush, flavorful vegetables must fertilize his fields. How does one fertilize? By spreading a large amount of manure (animal dung) over the soil, then plowing it under, and afterward planting seeds. A common person goes to the store and buys tomatoes, cucumbers, and other produce, oblivious to the fact that all these

Parshat Vayigash - A Speedy 'Elevator' Called Humiliation

vegetables grew and benefited from cow and sheep manure!

The same is true with a person: G-d established a law in His world that a person's growth comes through *enduring* people slandering, insulting, and reviling him; often, it is only in this way that one grows.

However, one must know that this doesn't necessarily have to come via other people 13. When a makes person honest an self-reckoning—to recognize both the good within himself and all that he still needs to correct and improve (purifying his character traits, breaking his selfish desires, and doing good)—his breaks heart within him because of remoteness from the light of G-d's countenance (which rests only on those who are worthy). Through this, he gains the strength to continue and to flourish!

This is what the holy Rav Natan of Breslov zt"l writes (*Chayei Moharan* §503): I heard in the name of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov that when people oppose and disparage someone, they are actually doing him a favor. For through this, he can grow and flourish—just as when a seed is planted in the ground: if the earth were clumped together, it would be impossible for the seed to sprout and grow into a tree; the earth must be loosened and broken apart a bit to give the sapling room to grow. So, too, when strife "breaks up" a person, it gives him the room necessary to expand and grow.

Rav Natan of Breslov likewise wrote a letter to his brother (ibid. §165), saying:

"To my beloved brother, dear friend, and wondrous rabbinic sage—Rabbi Yechiel Tzvi, whose light shines forth:

I received his letter here in Zaslav and was deeply pained to read how those evil-hearted people have filled their minds and dared to speak against you with such brazenness. I am surprised that no good has been found to counterbalance their malice so as to stand up against them and uproot their wrongdoing.

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My beloved brother, do not fear or be dismayed before them; rather, be strong and courageous in Torah and in awe of Heaven always, as we discussed privately. The merit of your ancestors will uphold you, for all of this serves to elevate you, to magnify your honor, and to cultivate your intellect. Just as a tiny seed cannot grow to its full stature all at once—first it is cast into the earth. then it is buried, then it sprouts, flowers, and becomes a great tree—so too will your greatness through emerge the abasement they heap upon you. By being humbled to the dust, you shall grow, blossom, and flourish in the world... may G-d help us to behold this speedily."

On the twelfth of Tishrei, 5776 [2015], our father Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, of blessed memory, delivered his final shiur at the yeshiva—a remarkable discourse lasting three hours. After his passing, it was printed in BeTzur Yarum (Igeret HaKodesh, Igrot 27–28), and the following is an excerpt of his words (p. 209):

David "King wrote Tehillim: "I have set the L-rd always before me" (Psalms 16:8). The holy Baal Shem explained that the word "shiviti" ("I have set") derives hishtavut, meaning equanimity —that one's demeanor should remain the same at all times; both in times of success, when all one does is blessed by G-d, and everyone honors and esteems him, as well as in times of retreat and failure when whatever he undertakes ends in loss, and everyone despises, insults, and reviles him. Always, in every circumstance and everv at moment, his heart is filled with faith and trust, joy and gratitude, and exultation to song Merciful Father, Who only does him good.

This is the meaning of the verse "I have set the L-rd always before me"—that his feelings remain constant under every mode of Divine providence.

I thank G-d that He granted me this level—and especially that He bestowed upon me

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the wondrous gift called "disgrace," for the primary growth of a person comes through disgrace! Disgrace is the "elevator" that shortens one's path to the higher worlds.

Consider an orchard owner: in the summer, he rejoices at the sight of his vines heavy with clusters, but when autumn comes, all withers and appears dreadful... and then they spread manure upon the trees-manure upon manure! As if the tree's condition weren't enough—leafless and bare, and yet they heap dung upon it! Yes, they heap manure upon it because that very dung is what makes the summer fruits flourish.

Likewise, every disgrace that came upon me I welcomed joyfully. I discovered that for every disgrace endured with joy, one merits years of life. If there were a shop selling humiliations, I would spend all of my money buying them—but people refuse to be humiliated, and so they suffer greatly. They do not recognize, as the Ramak

(Tomer Devorah ch. 2) teaches us, that one should seek humiliation openly in the marketplace.

Observe any good farmer, even now (as I speak in the month of Tishrei), go beside his fields and see dozens of trucks unloading manure. He might complain to the police: "A truck is dumping filth on my land!" But a wise farmer will say: "It's a blessing... the manure will make everything grow bountifully.

The tomato understands it, the pepper understands it, the peanuts understand it—only we humans do not."

How fitting these words are for the one who proclaimed them: throughout all of his days, our father—beginning from his first steps in teaching Torah until his final day on earth—there were always various people who, out of envy and spite at his and flourishing, success persecuted him by every possible means; they slandered his good name and humiliated publicly. Each time, our father bowed his head and accepted Parshat Vayigash - Why did the disgraces cease ... ?

these disgraces in silence—and never repaid evil with evil; on the contrary, he repaid his oppressors with kindness and strove to do good even to those who caused him much distress.

In the final period of his life, our father told his family that although he had the great merit to teach Torah publicly and support thousands of yeshiva students across the Holy Land, he rejoiced even more that throughout his life, he was humiliated and persecuted without cause, and that he never once responded to his slanderers...

Let us return to the discussion of Benjamin the Righteous.

#### Why did the disgraces cease...?

In a talk by Rabbi Elimelech Biderman (Be'er HaChayim, Chanukah, p. 246), he said:

For every drop of suffering that a person receives with joy and faith, one receives perfect reward, and for every pang of distress, his reward grows countlessfold—beyond what the tongue can speak or human understanding fathom. can Therefore, the wise rejoice in the suffering and trials that befall them, accepting them all with love and faith, and they merit later to endless bliss and tranquility.

Our Sages (Megillah 26a) teach:

"What was in Judah's portion?

The Temple Mount, the chambers, and the courtyards. And what was in Benjamin's portion? The Entrance Hall, the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies—and there was a strip that extended from Judah's portion into Benjamin's portion, and on it, the altar was built. And Benjamin the righteous would agonize over it every day, yearning to absorb it into his own portion, as it says: 'He shields him all day long' (Deuteronomy 33:12). Therefore, Benjamin merited to become host to the Divine Presence."

The Torah giants have explained, based on Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 92:8, that when Joseph's servants found the cup in

Parshat Vayigash - Why did the disgraces cease ... ?

Benjamin's sack, the tribes railed at him with words of contempt: "A thief, son of a thief!" furthermore, in Tanchuma (Vayeshev 10) it is said: "The brothers stood and struck Benjamin on his shoulders, saying to 'Thief, son of a thief! You've shamed us! You are mother's son—just as your mother shamed our father when she stole Laban's *teraphim*."

And because of those blows on his shoulders, he merited that the Divine Presence should rest between his shoulders"—that is, the Holy of Holies should be in his portion.

It is apparent that Judah did not strike him—after all, he guaranteed his safe return to his father. Had he struck him, he might have returned injured, and since Benjamin was not struck by Judah, a strip of land passed from Judah's allotment into Benjamin's, upon which Benjamin the Righteous lamented daily that he had not suffered enough

blows—otherwise he would have deserved that the altar too would be in his portion. This is alluded to by the term <code>ratzuah</code>—literally also a whip—Benjamin lamented that he did not receive more lashes, for if he had, he would have merited even more, and the altar would be in his portion. These matters are sublime and beyond our understanding, yet by recalling them, we may find it easier to accept suffering with love.

Thus, we answer our first question: Why did Benjamin's allotted portion cause him distress? Was it in his power to determine whether that strip of land would belong to him or to Judah?

Now we turn to our second question: It was Benjamin's tribe that merited that the Holy Temple was built in their territory. If so, why does the Gemara conclude by saying: "Therefore Benjamin the righteous (referring to Benjamin, the son of Jacob, himself) merited and became host to the Al-mighty?!"

Parshat Vayigash - The Strength of the Patriarchs

#### The Strength of the Patriarchs

In a discourse delivered by our father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, of blessed memory (Imrei No'am, Bamidbar 3), he said:

At the opening of Parashat Bamidbar, the Torah states: "Raise the sum of the whole congregation of the children of Israel according to their families, by the house of their fathers" (Num. 1:2). This verse also alludes to our Sages' teaching (Tana Devei Eliyahu Rabbah 25): that each and every Jew is obligated to say: "When will I reach the deeds of my forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?"

In other words, it is a sacred duty to remember from what exalted, noble, holy, and pure root one's soul was hewn—our holy Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who gave their lives to sanctify and proclaim the Name of G-d, and were a chariot for the Holy Presence (as it says in Bereishit Rabbah 74:6: "The Patriarchs themselves are the chariot").

One must aspire to elevate and uplift one's spiritual stature to the level of the holiness of one's forebears and, furthermore, to the holiness of the Patriarchs themselves (*the house of their fathers*).

Moreover, this command ("Raise the sum of the whole congregation...") was originally said to Moses—hinting to the leaders and the righteous of each generation—in whom a portion of his very holy soul resides.

Thus, the Torah hints to the leaders of every generation not to despair concerning any Jew, regardless of how distant he may seem from Torah observance, for he is nevertheless an offshoot of that holy lineage; moreover, he is a descendant of our Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, a holy soul dwells within him, and one must exert great patience to draw him closer until the holiness of his forefathers

is rekindled within him...

Thus, at the moment when the tribe of Benjamin stood at the sea's edge, having leaped into it first, and were pelted by the tribe of Judah with stones, receiving

Parshat Vayigash - Summary and Practical Conclusions

great humiliation, the strength of their eponymous leader, Benjamin the Righteous, was revealed; it was his great power that gave them the fortitude to accept those disgraces with love and joy. Hence, their deed and subsequent merit are named after him.

#### **Summary and Practical Conclusions**

- 1. Just as G-d ordained in His world that the growth of the earth's produce comes through fertilizing the soil, so too He ordained that a person's growth comes only when manure—i.e., slander and insults—is cast upon him, and only thus does he grow.
- 2. There are several levels in accepting disgrace, beginning with one performing genuine self-examination, recognizing both his virtues and all that remains for him to correct—and thus his heart is broken because of his distance from the Divine Presence, which rests only upon the worthy.
- 3. A further level: when one is humiliated by his friends and family but remains silent, continuing to treat them as before, then he becomes even more humbled, and the evil within him is subdued.
- 4. The highest level: When people despise him out of envy, persecute him by all means, slander his good name, and humiliate him publicly.

Our holy masters—the AriZal and the Ramak—write that receiving humiliation from others is more

efficacious than all other forms of asceticism in the world; even when one practices self-mortification to atone for sins and out of love of the Creator, one's merit increases all the more when one accepts disgrace with love.

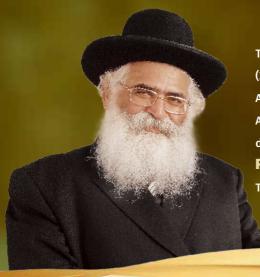
If we only would truly understand the benefit of these disgraces, he would seek them in the marketplaces and on the streets!

6. King David wrote in Tehillim: "I have set the L-rd always before me," and the holy Baal Shem Tov explained shiviti as hishtavut—that one's conduct remains the same both in times of prosperity (when all endeavors succeed and all honor him) and in times of decline (when all endeavors fail and all deride and revile him). Always, in every state and under every Divine dispensation, his heart is filled with faith and trust, joy and gratitude, and song and exultation to the Merciful Father Who only does him good. This is the meaning of "I have set the L-rd always before me"—that one's inner balance remains constant under every mode of Divine governance.



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#### **Shabbat Times** Vayigash

**7**th of Tevet ,5786

City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeint Tam
New York	4:17 pm	5:21 pm	5:47 pm
Miami	5:20 pm	6:15 pm	6:50 pm
Los Angeles	4:33 pm	5:33 pm	6:04 pm
Montreal	3:59 pm	5:08 pm	5:29 pm
Toronto	4:29 pm	5:35 pm	5:59 pm
London	3:39 pm	4:56 pm	5:09 pm
Jerusalem	4:27 pm	5:18 pm	5:49 pm
Tel Aviv	4:23pm	5:14 pm	5:45 pm
Haifa	4:20 pm	5:15 pm	5:45 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:25 pm	5:19 pm	5:50 pm

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HaRav Yoram Abarael zt"l You may have wanted to come to the morning prayer, but you didn't feel well. Hashem will testify on your behalf that you truly didn't feel wellfor only He can attest whether it was laziness or some other cause.

Hashem saw that your intention to come was pure and clean and He counts it as if you actually went to the synagogue, because He knows you felt very unwell, and that had you gotten up you might have fallen in the street; therefore you remained in bed due to

circumstances beyond your control. But here one must be honest with the Holy One, blessed be He: not to claim over every small inconvenience, "I can't come, I'm unwell...'



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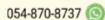


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