

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Vayigash	15 Dec 2018	7 Tevet 5779	Gen. 44:18-47:27	Eze. 37:15-28	Luke 24:30-48

Before we begin this week's Torah portion, Vayigash (And he approached), let us review last week's portion, Miketz. We read Yosef's brothers arrived in Mitzrayim (Egypt) to buy grains for Ya'akov's family. Yosef accused the brothers of spying on Mitzrayim. Finally, Yosef kept Simeon as a prisoner and let other brothers to return to Canaan with a condition that if they wished to purchase more grain, they are to bring their brother, Benjamin (Benjamin) with them to Mitzrayim. They returned several months later with Benjamin. Yosef planted his cup in Benjamin's pack and he sent them away. He then sent his oldest son, Manashsh to overtake his uncles. The eleven brothers returned to Yosef who offered a deal that Benjamin was to remain in Mitzrayim as a slave and the remaining brothers to return to Canaan.

Now, onto this week's portion, Vayigash we see Yehudah making a passionate speech that he would stay as a slave to Yosef in place of Benjamin. The Midrash points out, "And he [Yehudah] approached." (Gen. 44:18) has risen several questions. What does the Torah telling us when it said, "And he approached," since they were already in Yosef's presence. The sages say that such word demonstrates Yehudah refused to accept the condition set by Yosef on three grounds. Before we get to that, let us first discuss about Yosef and Mitzrayim.

For eighty years, Yosef was the most powerful man in the world. When the drought started, the Mitzrim sold all their possessions to Yosef to buy grains and became servitude to the Pharaoh. Now, the Torah has set three years for the landowners to reclaim their property if the new owner does not protest whether in the court or by posting signs. So, if the original landowner goes to the Pharaoh and asked for the return of their property, and since there was no objection from the new owner, they could have their land back to them. Yosef prevented that by relocating them to the cities. (Gen. 47:21) He also moved the owners to different field to grow crops as a manager, making Pharaoh the richest man in the world. Yosef taxed the managers at 20% of their crops, but he made exemption to the priests of Mitzrayim.

Let's return to Yehudah. He became a guarantor for Benjamin. (Gen. 43:8-9) The Midrash teaches that Yehudah became a guarantor during their journey to Mitzrayim and back, but not while in Mitzrayim. The Zohar teaches that when the goblet was found in Benjamin's pack, all the brothers could say, "Like mother, like son." Why? Because Rachel stole her father's idol when Ya'akov fled from Lavan. (Gen. 31:19) So, they could easily have said, "Like his mother stole an idol from her father, he [Benjamin] acted like his mother by stealing the goblet from the most powerful man." Instead, they all tore their clothes and returned to Yosef in defeat. (Gen. 44:13) The Zohar says that Yosef put his brothers to harsh tests to determine if his brothers really repented (*teshuvah*).

Rambam asks, "How do we know if they really did repent?" Because they did not repeat the same mistake they have made with Yosef. We all do *teshuvah* to Hashem every day and especially in Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). A question is raised, how do we know Hashem accepted your *teshuvah* and you really did *teshuvah*? The answer is that Hashem will test you by placing you in same situation. If you really did *teshuvah*, and did not commit same sin again, then you really did *teshuvah* and Hashem than accepts your *teshuvah*. It was for this moment Yosef was waiting for. He wanted to see their repentance to be true.

Yosef, being called as the Righteous, did not have any grudges against his brothers selling him to the Ishmalites. But he saw the guilt hanging over his brothers of selling Yosef. In order to remove such guilt, he had to put his brothers to a such test or action. Even though, he forgave them, the Heavenly Court has

not. And this is what Yosef wanted to remove. He instigated his brothers for *teshuvah* in the Heavenly Court by placing them in the same situation. Once they passed the test by not selling Benjamin, Yosef knew the Heavenly Court forgave their sins, he revealed himself to his brothers.

The Midrash explains, “And Yehudah approached” by referring to Mishle (Proverbs) 6:1-3, “My son, if you are a guarantor for your *chaver* (friend), if you have shaken your hand with a ger, You are trapped with the words of your mouth, you are taken with the words of your mouth. Do this now, my son, deliver yourself, when you are come into the hand of your *chaver*; go, humble yourself, and urge your *chaver*.” From these verses, the sages teach that we are to run from three things and cleave to three things.¹

Three things to run from: (1) Run from accepting deposits for safekeeping as one may be liable if the item is stolen or lost; (2) Run from ‘refusals’, meaning a person should not advise a minor to refuse her husband because she might regret the decision when she becomes an adult. Biblically, a father has the right to marry off his minor daughter (Deut. 22:16). Such marriage is fully binding and can only be terminated by divorce or death. If the father is no longer alive, then her mother, or brother becomes her protector to ensure her safety. Now, there are several conditions involved that the bride and the groom are separated for determined period of time and she has to become of age before the actual marriage. The sages added to protect the minor, the marriage can be terminated by her mere statement of ‘refusal’ of her husband;² (3) Run from acting as a guarantor on a loan as the guarantor is held liable if his friend does not pay the loan.

Three things to cleave to: (1) Cleave to *chalitzah* – if a man dies without a child, then the man’s brother must marry her to carry his brother’s lineage. (Deut. 25:5-10) This is known as *yibum* (levirate marriage). If the brother refuses to marry her, they must go through a procedure known as *chalitzah* (literal meaning ‘removal’). The widow removes her brother-in-law’s shoe. Now, the Torah prohibits a brother cannot cohabit with his brother’s wife (Lev. 18:16). However, this prohibition is lifted in case of *yibum*. Then why cleave to *chalitzah*? According to Gemara³, the *yibum* was suspended as their intention was for other reasons, i.e. wealth, beauty, power, etc... rather, they are to cleave to the mitzvah of *chalitzah* than the mitzvah of *yibum*. As always, there are sages who disagree on this issue. (2) The revocation of vows – The sages comment that if a man makes a vow, then he should revoke it rather than fulfilling it. “If you refrain from vowing, there will be no sin in you” (Deut. 23:23) meaning if you do not refrain from vowing, then you are being sinned. The reason it is a sin to take a vow is that it opens himself to other violations. (Rashi) If a man fulfills the vow, he would be encouraged to do more vows, thus opening himself to greater violations. To sum it up,⁴ the reason that it is a sin to make a vow and to fulfill it is that Hashem does not want us to forbid that which He permitted.⁵ That being said, the Midrash points out the vow applies the revocation of a daughter’s vow and his wife. Other vows that cannot be revoked by the husband, the court then can annul it. (3) And to bring peace between a man and his friend – The Midrash points out that since one should strive to bring peace between friends, it must be about the permissibility of telling less than the whole truth for the sake of peace.⁶

Putting it all together, R’ Berechyah said in the name of R’ Shimon bar Abba: “My child, if you have been a guarantor” – this alludes to Yehudah who said, “I will personally guarantee him [Benjamin]. “If you have given your handshake for a stranger” – this alludes to Yehudah, who said, “Of my own hand you can demand him.” “You have been trapped by the words of your mouth” – snared by the words of your mouth;

¹ R. Chanina, The Midrash, 93:1

² BT, Yevamos 107b

³ Ibid, 39b

⁴ Nedarim 22a

⁵ YT, Nedarim 9:1

⁶ The Midrash, 93:1

alludes to Yehudah, who said, “If I do not bring him back to you” then I will have sinned to you for all time. “Do this, therefore, my child, and be rescued” – for you have come into your fellow’s hand. “Go and cleave to the dust of his feet and accept his kingship and his mastery. (Gen. 43:9) Thus it is written: And Yehudah approached.

How did Yehudah approach? He offered three suggestions: (1) that he stay as a slave; (2) let go of Benjamin; (3) or go to war. The Midrash says that since the brothers were already in the presence of Yosef, there was no reason for the Torah to repeat the same words again. Therefore, the repetition of the word “approach” has different meaning. We should remember that Shimeon and Levi destroyed Shechem when their sister, Dinah was taken. The brothers, especially Yehudah was willing to go to war against the whole Mitzrim. Unlike the other brothers, Yehudah did not believe that Benjamin stole the goblet. So, he was willing to die in Mitzrayim if that was the only choice.

Why did Yehudah go such extreme? As previously noted, he became a guarantor for Benjamin. But he was a guarantor during the journey to Mitzrayim, not during their stay in Mitzrayim. The translation of Hebrew language into English, it tends to lose its meanings. Such is the case here. This verse teaches us that we are all responsible for each other’s behavior. If we see someone sinning, then we are to speak out against that sinner by pointing out that the person is sinning. For example, if a person commits *lashon hara* (evil tongue) and the other party does not oppose to it, then as a listener he is condoning *lashon hara*. Therefore, the listener is guilty of *lashon hara* twice. One he listened, and the other he is agreeing with it. To sum it up, we are blessed all together and we are punished all together as we are a guarantor for each other.

We also have the obligation to help each other to keep the mitzvah. We are not allowed to say, “I don’t care.” For example, if you know a person who did not lit Shabbat candle, then you are encourage to tell her to light the Shabbat candle and its blessings together.

If Yehudah was willing to go to war for Benjamin, why did Yosef remove all his servants? After all, Yosef knew the strength of his brothers that if two brothers can destroy the city of Shechem, how much more damage can they do? The sages say that Yosef made a tactical error by removing all his servants. But, it quickly counters that Yosef did not wish to embarrass his brothers in front of other people when he revealed himself to his brothers. He was willing to get killed by his brothers rather than embarrass his brothers. In conclusion, we are not to embarrass the other when pointing out their sins. We are all bonded together in the Covenant. As such, we became a guarantor to each other. Thus we are blessed together and punished together.

Before the destruction of the First Temple, Hashem told the Archangel Gabriel to put a letter “*tav*” on the forehead of the leaders. Then the Attribute of Judgment came in front of Hashem, “Why are you putting a “*tav*” on their head when they [leaders] did not rebuke for the mistakes people made?” Hashem agreed and told Gabriel to remove the letter. Hence, the people who were killed first were the leaders of that generation, example Eli and his sons.

During the Yom Kippur, we recite *Viduy*. It says, “We have sinned.” It does not say, “I have sinned.” We are confessing the sins of others. We are asking for the forgiveness of sins others in case that the other did not confess his sins. We do this because Moshe bonded the people with the Covenant in parashat Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1-29:9).

The Kabbalah explains that we are a small spark (soul) of one large spark (soul). If a part of our body is in pain, then the other part of the body is in pain. For example, if a person has a back pain, the legs are not going to ignore the pain and walks separately from the back. Yehudah was projecting the pain of losing

Benjamin. For losing Benjamin is like losing part of Yehudah as their sparks are also connected into one. So, whether you like it or not, we are all connected together, thus we say, “We have sinned.”

We know the story of a man going to the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel. A man goes to the School of Shammai and says, “Teach me the Torah while I stand on one leg.” Shammai picks up a stick and strikes the man and kicks him out of the School. The man then goes to the School of Hillel and says, “Teach me the Torah while I stand on one leg.” Hillel says, “What you don’t like, don’t do it to other person. This is the whole Torah” Meaning, we are too quick to make judgment against another individual. All of us don’t like someone to judge us for our action. But we are quick to judge others. Thus, Hillel is teaching that give first the benefit of doubt to treat others the way you wanted to be treated. So, we are to treat people favorably in all aspects.

The First Temple was destroyed for three things: idol worship, murder, and forbidden relationship. Since the sin was revealed, the length of exile was revealed. The prophet said that the House of Yehudah would be in exile for 70 years. They did 70 years and returned to the Land. The Second Temple was destroyed for hating another person for no reason. Since the sin is not revealed, the length of exile is not revealed. The sages teach that we already have enough mitzvot, charities, and more than we ever had. However, we are still in exile because we still hate each other. We are to look at the goodness of others first rather than judging the person immediately.

Look at Yosef. It was very easy for him to judge his brothers easily. But he did not, he saw beyond his brothers’ action by giving them the benefit of doubt. And he went out of his way to help his brothers to see the goodness in others first. So, when we are genuinely kind to each other, the exile will end and the return of our Moshiach. Thus, we are all guarantor to each other.

The Zohar teaches that all the world was created through the letter “ב”. Thus the Torah begins with the letter. The letter “ת” which means “covenant, to seal” came in front of Hashem and said, “Would you create the world through me? The Holy One, Blessed be He said, “No, for many righteous people are destined to die through you” as said in Yechezekl (Ezekiel) 9:4 “and set a mark [*tav*] upon the foreheads of the men.”

The Hebrew letter, “א” is the first letter and should start first. Hashem answers, True, but because the word damned (Heb. *arur*) starts with Alef, the world was not created through it. Although Alef contains Supernal Secret, the world was not created by it, so that no opening – namely, power and strength – could be given to Other Side called “damned.” So, why the letter Bet (ב)? Because, it contains a sign of blessing (*beracha*), thus the world was created and constructed by it.