



Tiferet

ת פ א ר ת



TIFERET SHABBAT

תורת תפארת

A Change of Plans

Mrs Peshah Fischer

Parashat Vayigash

Vayigash is one of my favorite parshiyot - perhaps because it is my birthday parsha but really because it is so full of emotion. Vayigash starts with Yehuda's plea to Yoseph to take Binyamin's place as a slave. At the conclusion of his declamation, the Torah records that Yoseph 'could not hold back', and that he then revealed his true identity to his brothers. The fact that he 'held back' implies that had he been able, he would have kept stringing them along. Why? To what end? What was his original plan?

There are a number of different theories about what Yoseph was trying to accomplish with the whole charade: bring about the fruition of his dreams, make his brothers repent, etc. Part of the drama of these *parshiyot*, which provide some of the best drama in all of *TaNach*, is in trying to figure out who knows what, when.

It would seem that Yoseph never intended to reveal himself to his brothers. As far as he was concerned, they were strangers (*'va-yitnaker Yosef le-echav'*) and he wanted nothing to do with them. He felt that their betrayal of him had severed familial ties. Yoseph could not have known what Yaakov's role in the sale was; he may have missed his father, or he may have thought that his father was somehow party to his disenfranchisement (*Menashe = 'for God has made me forget my father's house'*). Either way, the only family member about whom he was concerned was Binyamin, his full brother who was very young at the time of Yoseph's departure.

The entire charade was to get Binyamin down to Egypt and keep him there. He designed the frame-up job to give a pretense for keeping Binyamin there while turning the rest of them loose. He even provoked their jealousy to make them less willing to go to bat for their pampered brother. Had all gone well, he would have been free to start his own family together with his brother.

He did not count on the brothers going to bat for Binyamin. He did not count on the fact that Yaakov never got over Yoseph's disappearance, as Yehuda described in his speech. Thus, Yehuda's speech causes Yoseph to change his plan and leads to the dramatic resolution of the fraternal conflict.

The holding back of emotion on Yoseph's part would have changed history. Often we hold back when we are not sure about how people feel about us, what our role in a given situation is. It is important to listen and get the whole picture before we react whether it is holding back or sharing, sometimes the filter is necessary but sometimes people are waiting to hear what you have to share

Thanks goes to my husband for sharing these Torah thoughts with me.



חנוכה שמח!

Flourishing in an Unfriendly Land Naomi Schachter (5774)

As this week's Parsha unfolds, Yosef reveals himself to his brothers and asks "Ha'od avi chai?", Is my father still alive? Then Yosef proceeds to send his brothers back to Yaakov with donkeys, wagons, food and a message, asking Yaakov to pick up and move his entire family to Egypt to be reunited with him.

Fast forward a bit and Yaakov begins his descent to Egypt, albeit with some trepidation. On his way down he travels by way of Be'er Sheva, the famous city where his grandparents Avraham and Sara had lived for a time. While in Be'er Sheva, Yaakov brings a Korban to Hashem. Hashem then appears to Yaakov to comfort him and allay his concerns about living amongst the Egyptian people.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱ-לֹקִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל... וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב; וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲנִי.
וַיֹּאמֶר, אֲנִכִּי הֵקֵל אֱ-לֹקֵי אָבִיךָ; אֵל תִּירָא מִרְדָּה מִצְרַיִם, כִּי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשִׁימְךָ שָׁם (בראשית מ"ו: ג - ד)

Rashi explains that the reason behind Yaakov's korban, and Hashem's response to it, was that Yaakov felt coerced into leaving Eretz HaKodesh. Yaakov was legitimately frightened of leaving the safety of home and venturing into a society that he knew to be hostile to both his beliefs and his way of life.

Hashem assures Yaakov that he need not fear because it is in Egypt that Hashem will turn him in to a great nation. Curiously, Hashem's message to Yaakov does not attempt to mollify him. Instead Hashem seems to distract Yaakov as a parent would distract a frightened child.

It is clear that Hashem wasn't trying to somehow ease Yaakov's distress over leaving the Holy Land because it is central to the very existence of a Jew. The longing to return to our ancestral homeland has sustained us throughout nearly two millennia of exile in the diaspora. Many biblical commandments cannot be performed outside its borders. Above all, wherever in the world a Jew may be it is always toward Eretz Hakodesh that one faces when davening. It is within this context that we are able to understand Yaakov's internal turmoil at the prospect of having to leave the Holy Land. Especially for Egypt.

Hashem also addressed Yaakov's other concern: The lack of Jewish education for the 70 souls who journeyed to the unfriendly land of Egypt with him, along with their future generations.

Since Yaakov's descent to Egypt, the Jewish people have endured numerous and lengthy exiles. During these difficult times the Jewish people have been confronted on a daily basis with obstacles and challenges to maintaining our identity and remaining true to Hashem and the Torah. The difficulties posed by these exiles also provide the opportunity for us to grow as a nation and strengthen our commitment to Hashem. It is up to us to ensure we do not become too comfortable or complacent in exile, lest we become vulnerable.

This is the message Hashem was conveying to Yaakov. Hashem reassured him that there was no reason to be distressed about living in Egypt nor should he fear for the future his descendants. The fact that three and a half thousand years later we continue to maintain our beliefs and way of life shows that Yaakov heard the message loud and clear. It also shows that the trust we, as Yaakov's descendants, continue to place in Hashem is well placed.

It is our responsibility as Jews to see the world around us in context. Whether it is working toward *tikun olam*, reaching out to fellow Jews in the far corners of the earth, or strengthening our personal commitment to Hashem we can only truly succeed if we are willing to step out of our comfort zone. Being a Torah observant Jew while surrounded by constant threats to our beliefs is not easy. But facing these challenges head on, not being paralyzed in fear of them, is what it means to be a Jew.

Shabbat Shalom!