



## PARSHAS VAYIGASH – GERSHON HEPNER

This week we read about the emotional moment when Yosef revealed his true identity to his brothers. However high their feelings were running at that time, the mood was immeasurably more intense when, after twenty two years apart, Yaakov and Yosef were eventually reunited.

During their years of separation, Yosef had ample opportunity to comfort Yaakov by informing him that he was alive and well in Egypt. Yosef could have reassured Yaakov that he still clung steadfastly to the Torah tenets which Yaakov had instilled within him. Yet Yosef did nothing of the sort. Why not?

There are a number of approaches to this difficulty.

According to the Midrash (quoted by Rashi 37:33), when the brothers sold Yosef, they took a communal oath between themselves, that anyone who revealed to Yaakov the truth behind Yosef's sale, would be in *cherem* – excommunication. Nine brothers were involved in the sale (Reuven was on duty at home looking after his father, Yosef was the object of the sale, and Binyomin had never accompanied the brothers on their trip to Shechem), and to take a 'communal' oath requires a minyan. The Midrash tells us that they included HaKodosh Boruch Hu in the number to make up the 'minyan'.

All those party to this minyan (including HaKodosh Boruch Hu) were desperate to keep the truth from Yaakov, out of fear of repercussions. Yaakov had previously rebuked Shimon and Levi for their role in annihilating Shechem, and there was no doubt that if Yaakov were to learn of the sale of Yosef, he would curse all the brothers – with eternal ramifications.

Furthermore, we understand that the sale of Yosef was the prequel to the slavery in Egypt. Yosef's abduction, his journey to Egypt, the incident with Potifar's wife, Yosef's imprisonment, Paroah's dreams and the ensuing years of plenty and famine were all part of the backdrop that was to continue with *Shibud Mitzrayim, Yetzias Mitzrayim, Kerias Yam Suf and Matan Torah*. There are endless questions to be asked about the story of Yosef, all along the lines of "How could this and this happen?...Why didn't this or this happen?..." Indeed the story of Yosef flies in the face of logic at almost every turn! The answer to these difficulties is simply that it was all the decree of Hashem, in order to lead Bnei Yisroel into slavery in Egypt. This too would explain why HaKodosh Boruch Hu was complicit in keeping the secret of Yosef's whereabouts from Yaakov.

Involving HaKodosh Boruch Hu in a minyan was not unprecedented. Rabbeinu Bachye notes that when Avrohom entreated on behalf of Sodom, his final attempt was based on the possibility of there being ten Tzadikim in the town. Rabbeinu Bachye explains that this 'minyan' also included Hashem as one of the ten Tzadikim.

Rashi (37:33) tells us that Yitzchok was aware that Yosef was still alive. Yitzchok reasoned that if HaKodosh Boruch Hu did not reveal this fact to Yaakov through Ruach HaKodesh, then he had no right to tell Yaakov either. The Lubavitcher Rebbe applies the same idea to Yosef, who took a conscious decision not to tell Yaakov, following the example of Hashem who did not reveal the fact to Yaakov.

A slight variation on the Midrash is found in Sefer Chasidim, who learns that the minyan was completed by Yosef himself. Even against his will, Yosef would have been bound by this communal oath, and was under pain of *cherem* were he to divulge the secret of his sale.

Yosef never told Yaakov how he came to be in Egypt, and the Ramban learns that until his dying day Yaakov was under the misapprehension that Yosef had somehow become lost, kidnapped and transported to Egypt. Once the family was reunited with Yosef in Egypt, to tell Yaakov the full story would be pure *Loshon Hora*, and Yosef was not prepared to stoop that low.

Other meforshim understand that Yosef wanted to test whether the brothers had done Teshuva or not for their treatment of him. He gave them grounds for jealousy by bestowing excessive gifts upon Binyomin and then framed him as a thief - yet the brothers did not abandon Binyomin in his hour of need. To inform Yaakov any earlier of his whereabouts may have succeeded in bringing the family together again, but for all Yosef knew, it may still be a family fraught with friction. Before enlightening Yaakov, Yosef felt the need to be certain that the brothers had done Teshuva, and that the reunited family would be a harmonious one.

The Ramban (42:9) explains that Yosef understood his dreams to be *nevuos* – prophecies – which would have to be fulfilled in every detail. His first dream represented his brothers bowing down to him, while the second dream represented his father bowing down to him. If Yosef were to inform Yaakov of his whereabouts, Yaakov would immediately make his way to Egypt, and fulfil the prophecy of the second dream. Yosef felt that in line with the nature of prophecies, the first dream needed to be fulfilled first, so he bided his time until the brothers had bowed down to him, and only then did he reveal his identity and instruct his brothers to bring Yaakov down to Egypt.

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