

This Week In Torah *Vayigash*

The *parasha* begins: “Then Judah went up to him and said, “Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not be impatient with your servant, you who are the equal of Pharaoh.”

Keep that verse in mind as read thru this.

When have you felt distant from God? It is easy to criticize God—there are moments of loss, times of frustration, and occasions when the rational intellect cannot comprehend the realities of living. These all fall into that Yiddish catchphrase: times of *Tsuris!* It is easy to doubt or question God’s world. The harder question is how do you bring yourself back to the intimacy with the Holy One? That requires effort, diligence, and faith. Now think about the question not in terms of a theological challenge but as a person in relationship with others. When we are frustrated or hurt, we can approach or be approached to repair the breach. It should be that way in our faith as well.

Remember that verse? The Torah commentator RaSHI commented on this verse by quoting *Genesis Rabbah*— “May my words penetrate the heart.” For RaSHI, Judah approached with humility and with a sense of subservience. Petitioning Joseph to bend a little bit to show kindness and mercy. For us, we approach God with that same type of trepidation. On the High Holidays, we stand before the open ark and plead with God by quoting Exodus: “*Adonai, Adonai, chanun v’rachum...* God, God, gracious and compassionate One...” Then it lists attributes, all before we confess our sins. But what if God said something like our verse to us? “Please be patient with Me; you who think you are so great and mighty?” Maybe God is calling us in an intimate way to be humble and vulnerable; to check the arrogance of our intellect as placing our hubris aside to see and recall who we are in the universe—just as we see in Isaiah 40: “All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass”

But what Judah said in our Torah verse might be interpreted as what appears on face value—two men talking, one with far greater control over the other. And in truth, many of our friendships and relationships have that type of power dynamics. Sure, they can shift with a degree of fluidity that leads to balance or the other having a more dominant

presence. But that yearning that Judah called for is essential for us to embrace—whether uttered by another or a still small voice within. The Slominer Rebbe of the 20th century challenged us to embrace the response found in Psalm 91: “When he calls on Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in distress... I will rescue him and make him honored.” Here the sage sees it as God’s response... just as it will be Joseph’s response... and perhaps our response to those we love.

The *parasha* begins: “Then Judah went up to him and said, “Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not be impatient with your servant, you who are the equal of Pharaoh.” And the Psalmist replies: “When he calls on Me, I will answer him; I will be with him in distress... I will rescue him and make him honored.”

Remember the verse... hear it spoken to you... feel as if you have said it. Then find the response... as God did... as Joseph did... as we all can.