

**Omigosh, It's Parshat Vayigash!**  
Tremont Street Shul (December 11, 2021)  
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Prologue:

We're playing those mind games together  
Pushing the barrier, planting seed...  
We all been playing those mind games forever...  
Some call it magic, the search for the grail  
Love is the answer and you know that for sure...  
So keep on playing those mind games together  
Faith in the future, out of the now (John Lennon)

1. Let us recall (last week's parasha): Joseph has been playing "mind games" with his brothers!

He first accuses them of spying, imprisons them, and holds Simeon in custody until they bring him Benjamin:

*Genesis 42:7–17: When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to procure food." ...9 ...Joseph said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness." ... 14 But Joseph said to them, "It is just as I have told you: You are spies! 15 By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place! 16 Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain confined, that your words may be put to the test whether there is truth in you. Else, by Pharaoh, you are nothing but spies!" 17 And he confined them in the guardhouse for three days.*

Joseph returns their payments in their sacks, clandestinely.

*Gen 42:27 As one of them was opening his sack to give feed to his ass at the night encampment, he saw his money right there at the mouth of his bag. 28 And he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned! It is here in my bag!" ... Gen 42:35 As they were emptying their sacks, there, in each one's sack, was his money-bag!*

When the brothers return, Joseph presents a very different face, inviting them to dine with him and giving special favor to Benjamin

*Gen 45:15 So the men took that gift, and they took with them double the money, as well as Benjamin.*

*They made their way down to Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph. 16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Take the men into the house; slaughter and prepare an animal, for the men will dine with me at noon." 17 The man did as Joseph said, and he brought the men into Joseph's house. 18 But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph's house. "It must be," they thought, "because of the money replaced in our bags the first time that we have been brought inside, as a pretext to attack us and seize us as slaves, with our pack animals." 19 So they went up to Joseph's house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house. 20 "If you please, my lord," they said, "we came down once before to procure food. 21 But when we arrived at the night encampment and opened our bags, there was each one's money in the mouth of his bag, our money in full.<sup>b</sup> So we have brought it back with us. 22 And we have brought down with us other money to procure food. We do not know who put the money in our bags." 23 He replied, "All is well with you; do not be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure in your bags for you. I got your payment." And he brought out Simeon to them.*

*Gen 43:24 Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house; he gave them water to bathe their feet, and he provided feed for their asses. 25 They laid out their gifts to await Joseph's arrival at noon, for they had heard that they were to dine there... 33 As they were seated by his direction, from the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth, the men looked at one another in astonishment. 34 Portions were served them from his table; but Benjamin's portion was several times that of anyone else. And they drank their fill with him.*

Then, Joseph turns against them again by planting of the goblet and accusing them of theft.

*Gen 44:6 [Joseph's steward] overtook them and spoke those words to them. 7 And they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything of the kind! 8 Here we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. How then could we have stolen any silver or gold from your master's house! 9 Whichever of your servants it is found with shall die; the rest of us, moreover, shall become slaves to my lord." 10 He replied, "Although what you are proposing is right, only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave; but the rest of you shall go free."*

*Gen 44:11 So each one hastened to lower his bag to the ground, and each one opened his bag. 12 He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest; and the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag. 13 At this they rent their clothes. Each reloaded his pack animal, and they returned to the city.*

*Gen 44:14 When Judah and his brothers reentered the house of Joseph, who was still there, they threw themselves on the ground before him. 15 Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?" 16 Judah replied, "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found." 17 But he replied, "Far be it from me to act thus! Only he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave;*

*the rest of you go back in peace to your father.”*

<https://media.alhatorah.org/1Bereshit/44/The%20Framing%20of%20Binyamin%20in%20Art/Ivanov.jpg>

Joseph's Brothers Find the Silver Goblet in Binyamin's Pack (Alexander Ivanov)

II. What was Joseph hoping to accomplish by bringing Benjamin to Egypt and accusing him of stealing?

- Testing whether his brothers had changed?
- Playing mind games to punish his brothers for their earlier treatment of him (exacting revenge? or helping his brothers attain the self-awareness to repent for their sins?)
- Joseph’s goal was to reunite with Benjamin (and possibly Jacob) exclusively, and originally he had no real interest in rehabilitating his relationship with the rest of his brothers.

Gen 44:18 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. 19 My lord asked his servants, ‘Have you a father or another brother?’ 20 We told my lord, ‘We have an old father, and there is a child of his old age, the youngest; his full brother is dead, so that he alone is left of his mother, and his father dotes on him.’ 21 Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set eyes on him.’ 22 We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father; if he were to leave him, his father would die.’ 23 But you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, do not let me see your faces.’ 24 When we came back to your servant my father, we reported my lord’s words to him.

Gen 44:25 “Later our father said, ‘Go back and procure some food for us.’ 26 We answered, ‘We cannot go down; only if our youngest brother is with us can we go down, for we may not show our faces to the man unless our youngest brother is with us.’ 27 Your servant my father said to us, ‘As you know, my wife bore me two sons. 28 But one is gone from me, and I said: Alas, he was torn by a beast! And I have not seen him since. 29 If you take this one from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Sheol in sorrow.’

Gen 44:30 “Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us—since his own life is so bound up with his— 31 when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief. 32

Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.' 33 Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34 For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!"

וְלֹא-יִכְלֵ יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכָל הַנֹּצְבִים עָלָיו

Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants...

Joseph could no longer restrain himself in the presence of all who were stationed around him

Rashi:

להתאפק לכל הנצבים – לא יכול לסבול שיהו המצריים נצבים עליו ושומעים שאחיו מתביישים בהיודעו להם. ולא יכל יוסף להתאפק לכל הנצבים

AND JOSEPH COULD NOT CONTROL HIMSELF BEFORE ALL THEM THAT STOOD – He could not bear that the Egyptians should stand by him witnessing how his brothers would be put to shame when he made himself known to them.

Rashbam:

ולא יכול יוסף להתאפק – עוד, כי עד עתה היה עושה כל מעשיו על ידי שהיה מתאפק בלבו, כמו שכתוב למעלה: ויתאפק ויאמר שימו להם (בראשית מ"ג:א)... כך עיקר פשוטו.

JOSEPH COULD NOT CONTROL HIMSELF: any longer. Until now he had done everything that he did by inwardly controlling himself, as it is written above (43.31), "He controlled himself and said, 'Serve the meal'..." This is the true plain meaning of the text.

R. Yosef Bekhor Shor:

ולא יכול יוסף להתאפק – מלבכות ומלהגלות להם עצמו, כי לא מצא מענה. והכיר דברי אמת, מצטער אביו יותר

He could not restrain himself from crying or revealing himself to them, because he could not respond, and recognized (Judah's speech) as truthful, and he was troubled with respect to his father in particular.

R. Avraham ben Ha-Rambam:

ולא יכל יוסף להתאפק – לאבי אבא ז"ל טעמו כי לא היה יוסף יכול להמתין מלהתודע אל אחיו עד שיגמור את צורכי כל הנצבים עליו ויתרוקן בית הוועד מהם ולכן קרא שיוציאו אותם.

Shadal (R. Shmuel David Luzatto):

ולא יוכל יוסף וגו' – בתחלה היה בלבו לעכב אצלו בנימין ולשלח את אחיו בלי שיתודע אליהם, ועתה כשאמר לו יהודה והיה כראותו כי אין הנער ומת, נכמרו רחמיו על אביו, ומצא עצמו מוכרח להניח לבנימין שישוב אל אביו לבלתי ימות אביו, אך עם כל זה חשקו לקרב אליו בנימין נשאר בתקפו. והנה לא מצא תחבולה לשלח את בנימין אל אביו וגם לקרבו אצלו, אלא בשיתודע אליהם ויקראם כלם לבא אצלו, או כדעת אח"ם, בראותו עוצם התאמצות יהודה להשאיר הוא עבד תחת בנימין נכמרו רחמיו על אחיו והסכים להתודע אליהם; אך היה מתאפק ומושל ברוחו שלא להתודע אליהם בפני המצרים הנצבים עליו, לבלתי ישמעו גנותם ששנאו את אחיהם ומכרוהו; ואולם בסוף מאמרו של יהודה נכמרו כל כך שלא יכול עוד להתאפק והוכרח לזעוק הוציאו כל איש מעלי.

Originally, it was Joseph's intention to keep Benjamin (alone) with him and to send his brothers away without revealing himself to them. But now that Judah had said "...but when my father would see that the lad (Benjamin) [was not with them], Joseph's compassion welled up within him, particularly with respect to his father, and found himself compelled to permit Benjamin to return to his father, so that his father would not die. But even with all that, his firm-desire to draw Benjamin close to him remained in force. And he could not find a ruse both to send Benjamin to his father and to keep him close at hand, without revealing himself to them, and so he called to them to come towards him. Or according to a "very important person" (?!), when Joseph saw the strong effort that Judah pleaded that he (Judah) be left a slave in lieu of Benjamin, then Joseph's compassion was aroused within him towards his brothers, and he agreed to reveal himself to them. But he had been restraining himself and attempting to govern his feelings NOT to reveal himself to them in front of the Egyptians who were attendant upon him, so that they would not hear their shame about having hated their brother and selling him (into slavery). But in the end Judah's speech (was so powerful) that it caused him to become overwhelmed to such a degree that he could no longer restrain himself, and he just had to call out "remove each person (attendant) from my presence!"

R. Yosef Kara:

ויקרא הוציאו כל איש – שאם ישמעו באלו שמכרו אחיהם, יאמרו: אין אמונה באלו, וזה אינו איש נאה למשול במלוכה.

For if the Egyptians were to hear that (Joseph's brothers) had sold their brother (into slavery), they would say "there is no trustworthiness in them, nor is that one (Joseph) appropriate to rule as a governor in the kingdom."

R. Abraham Ibn Ezra:

להתאפק – לסבול.

לכל הנצבים – [וטעם הלמ"ד בעבור.] וטעמו: עד שיצאו כל הנצבים, והוצרך לקרוא להוציאם.

REFRAIN HIMSELF. Le-hitappek (refrain himself) means to bear.

BEFORE ALL THEM THAT STOOD BY HIM. Its meaning is, until all that stood by him left. Joseph was therefore compelled to call and have them withdrawn.

Ramban (Nahmanides):

והנכון בעיני: שהיו שם מבית פרעה ומן המצריים אנשים רבים יחלו פניו למחול לבנימין, כי נכמרו רחמיהם על תחנוני יהודה, ולא יכול יוסף להתחזק לכולם. ויקרא לעבדיו הוציאו כל איש נכרי מעלי כי אדבר עמהם, ויצאו מעליו. ובצאתם, נתן את קולו בבכי וישמעו מצרים ואנשי בית פרעה המוצאים מעליו, כי עודם בחצר החיצונה. ויתכן כי פירוש הנצבים עליו – משרתיו העומדים לפניו... וטעם ויקרא: שהרים קולו בכעס, ואמר למשרתיו הוציאו כל איש מעלי בלתי האנשים האלה. [והטעם בהוצאה שהוציאם משם שלא ישמעו בהזכירו להם המכירה, כי תהיה להם, גם אליו, למכשול, שיאמרו עבדי פרעה ומצרים אלה אנשי בוגדות, לא יגורו בארצנו, ולא ידרכו בארמנותינו, באחיהם גם באביהם בגדו, מה יעשו במלך ובעמו, וגם ביוסף לא יאמינו עוד.]

THEN JOSEPH COULD NOT 'L'HITHAPEIK' (REFRAIN HIMSELF) BEFORE ALL THEM THAT STOOD BY HIM

The correct interpretation in my opinion is that there were present many people of Pharaoh's house and other Egyptians, pleading with Joseph to pardon Benjamin, for their compassions were deeply stirred by Judah's pleas, and Joseph could not overcome them all. He then called forth to his servants, "Let every strange man go out from me, because I will speak to them." And when they had gone out, he wept aloud; and the Egyptians heard, and the people of the house of Pharaoh, who had been expelled from his presence, for they were still in the outer court.

It is possible that the expression, 'hanitzavim' (them that stood) by him, means his servants who stood before him... And the reason for the removal is that he expelled them from there so that they should not hear when he mentions the matter of the sale to his brothers because it would be a source of distress to them and also to himself, for the servants of Pharaoh and the

Egyptians will say of them: "These are treacherous people who must not live in our land, nor tread in our palaces. They have acted treacherously against their brother, and also dealt treacherously with their father. What will they do to the king and his people?" They would also no longer believe in Joseph.