

## Vayigash - Rabbi Lerner - December 25, 2011

How much were the brothers held culpable for their actions?

45:4-8: Yosef can no longer restrain himself and reveals himself to his brothers. No one other than the brothers knew about the sale, so when the grand vizier tells them these who he is and that they had sold him, they know it has to be Yosef. He tells them several times that they should not be sad or angry; that it was all God's plan. He says to them that *God sent me here to create a refuge for our family to live. You didn't send me here, it was God who sent me here.* He says that God created this incredible elevation for him to save the family and the nation. Yosef seems to absolve them of all guilt, saying that it was all Hashem's plan, and they were all actors on God's stage.

**Rambam** in Moreh Nevuchim: What does this statement of Yosef say - that they had no choice in the matter, that it was all part of God's plan? This can't be. They acted as free agents with free will - yet Yosef seems to be washing away their guilt. There are many times when the choices of humans - such as the decision of a nation to conquer another or the desire for a person to do harm to another - that it seems that God had directed the action. For example, Nevuchadnezzar came down from Bavel to conquer the land of Israel. It says in Yeshayahu that Hashem had commanded and summoned the strong ones from the north because of His anger, in order to punish His nation. And yet, here it says that Yosef told the brothers that it wasn't them, but God who sent him down there; they were all just pawns? These statements are not to be understood literally - it doesn't mean what it sounds like. There are many times in Tanach where it says that God caused someone to act in a particular way - does this mean that God rejected free will? Absolutely not! There is one intention here - it doesn't mean that God caused these things, that He put the idea in their heads to act accordingly. It just means that Hashem caused it indirectly by allowing human beings to have free will to carry out their own actions. He could have stopped all of the evil in the world by controlling everyone; but He allows people to do as they see fit. He gives everyone choices and encourages people to choose correctly; He doesn't make the evil person be evil - He would prefer that they don't act this way. When Yosef tells his brothers that God did this, it means that God allowed it to happen. Yosef did not mean to make God a partner with the brothers in their actions. He knew that it was their free will, and the brothers knew it as well. From all of the different events from the moment he was sold until this moment when he revealed himself, God allowed it all to happen; God can make use of these forces to allow His will to be done. God gives people a lot of latitude, giving them the choice to be good or bad. He makes the free will of man ultimately fulfill His grand design for the world. He told Avraham about the future slavery of his descendants, but He did not force these things on the individuals who helped bring about their entry in to Egypt, nor the actual Egyptians who enslaved the Jews. Yosef and Hashem do not give them a free ride just because they got the nation down into a foreign land as prophesied.

**Abarbanel** disagrees with the Rambam: If this is so that whatever happened was totally of their free will and they were guilty, then why don't we ever find Yaacov chastising them about what they did. The proof that Yaacov knew about it is in Vayechi, when he is blessing his children on his death bed, he says about Shimon and Levi that they are brothers with violence as their way, and in their anger they killed a man (**Rashi**: reference to the city of Shechem) and with their will they hamstrung an ox (**Rashi**: this refers to Yosef, that they wanted to kill him; **Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel**: in their evil you sold your brother Yosef). So it looks that Yaacov

clearly knew this. If this was the case and they were totally guilty because of free will, then why did he not chastise them all? He should have asked Yosef for all of the details of the sale. We don't see remorse by any of the brothers for their actions. This whole thing was God's plan and design, and they were not deserving of any punishment; they were in fact pawns on a chess board. There are times when God overrides our free will and forces us to do things. These rare exceptions include Pharaoh with the plagues in Egypt, and Sichon coming to battle Moshe and the Jews in the desert. Yosef's brothers likewise were pushed to do this. The only punishment that they deserve would be that they started off with hatred and jealousy towards him; when a person things evil of someone, they will be led further with actions in that direction. But it was Hashem who engineered the whole series of events. They are never punished for their actions. We do see that the tribes of Shimon and Levi are punished with their not receiving any of the land, but the tribes are not punished for the actions of their father, and Shimon and Levi themselves are not punished. While the 10 Rabbinic martyrs who according to the evil Roman emperor are to be punished for the actions of Yosef's brothers, it doesn't make sense to say they are punished for the evil of the brothers - the brothers themselves should be punished if they did evil, not descendants. This would again offer proof that they were just acting because God wanted them to do these things.

45: 27-28: In these and subsequent pasukim, we seen an interesting pattern of what the Torah and Hashem call Yaacov. After the brothers are sent back to the land of Canaan, *Yaacov* is told that Yosef is still alive; he sees the wagons and is convinced and his spirit is revived. *Yisrael* wants to see him before he dies. Then the Torah again uses the name of *Yaacov*, *Yaacov* and *Yisrael* again - seemingly the names are being used interchangeably. **Rabbeinu Bachya**: until the Ruach Hashem returns to him, Yaacov is in the dark - for all 22 years he was not receiving God's communication and he was referred to by his lower, less spiritual name, Yaacov. Now that he is revived, he is again called Yisrael. Why does Hashem call out to him Yaacov, Yaacov? Yaacov is the lowly name, Yisrael the powerful name of one who can take on angels of God. When he is being sent down to Egypt, he will not be invincible - he will be oppressed and humiliated - Hashem wants it to be clear that he is going down to Egypt as the downtrodden person, the Yaacov. But he shouldn't worry because He will be with him, Yosef will protect him, he will be brought back up to the land; they are going down there as Bnei Yisrael - God will be with them and they cannot be destroyed.

What does it mean *Rav Od Yosef Beni Chai*? **Rabbeinu Bachya**: the simple interpretation is that they told Yaacov two things when they returned: first that Yosef is alive, and secondly that he is the leader of all of Egypt. So Yaacov is saying that all he cares about is that Yosef is alive; he doesn't care that he is the leader of Egypt - all of what is meaningful to him is that Yosef his son is alive. The trappings of power mean nothing to him. He is going down to see his son, not the viceroy of Egypt. The second meaning is how good God is to him - that he is being rewarded both in this world and the next; these last years will be wonderful years for him and he won't have to wait until going to the next world to be rewarded.

46:1: They come to Beersheva and Yaacov offers korbanos - zevachim - for the first time in Torah, this is not an Olah, but a korban Shelamim, a piece offering - offered to the *God of his father Yitzchak*. Why is he going here? Why does it say the God of his father Yitzchak and ignore his grandfather Avraham? **Rashi**: this teaches us that one has to give greater honor to one's father than grandfather; that is why he mentions his father Yitzchak rather than Avraham. But why not list both? He didn't just have to choose one of them? Yaacov remembered that

Yitzchak was also heading down to Egypt at a time of famine, and he was stopped at Beersheva where Hashem told him that he cannot go down there. **Rav Yaacov Kaminetsky**: Yaacov deliberately went there because he was incredibly nervous about going down to Egypt. He offered peace offerings because he was hoping God would tell him the same, that he should not go down there. He was hoping God would temper the original plan of Shibud Mitzrayim. A korban shelamim tries to soften God's judgment, softening the midas hadin with that of rachamim. He was hoping God would tell him that he should stay in the land, just as He stopped Yitzchak from leaving. It did not work out that way. On the contrary, God tells him not to be afraid of going to Egypt. Another reason for going to Beersheva was that Avraham planted cedar trees in Beersheva. Yaacov cut them down and brought them down to Egypt because he knew in the future the Jews would get the command to build the Mishkan, and he knew they would need these trees to build the vessels and walls. The message of these trees is that when they are going through hell, they would have something concrete for hope for tomorrow - these trees will represent the Jewish future, that they will leave Egypt and have a brighter future and will build a Mishkan and ultimately a Bais Hamikdash. This was the sign that there will be a redemption and a future, and it served to give them hope during the entire galus of Mitzrayim.