

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Out of an abundance of caution, my family and I will not be in Shul this Shabbos. I wish everyone a Shabbat Shalom and a restful and joyous Shabbos, and look forward to being back in Shul soon, iy”H.

I want to thank the sponsors of this Shabbos drasha:

- Dr. Allen Bennett, in memory of his wife, Judy Ann Bennett, Pessel Chana bas Reb Moshe; in celebration of his 58th Bar Mitzvah anniversary, Parshas Vayigash; and “in honor of Rabbi Marwick.”
- Max and Sophia Liskovich, in memory of Max's grandmother, Julia Khanina, Yuliya bas Gamshish, whose yahrtzeit is 14 Teves.
- Tommy and Judy Weiss, in memory of Tommy's mother, Magda Weiss, whose yahrtzeit was 9 Teves.

May the *neshamos* have an aliya and all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha* and *hatzlacha* and good health!

On Thursday, the Torah world lost a giant in Pesak Halacha, with the passing of HaRav Yehuda Herzl Henkin, zt”l. Rav Henkin was a close talmid of his grandfather, the Gadol HaDor, HaRav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin. It is rare in our generation to find *teshuvos* written in the style of the great *shailos and teshuvos sefarim* of the past centuries, but his four volume *Bnei Banim* is a treasured exception to that rule. He also wrote a commentary on Chumash and some important English works; books, articles, and essays about important contemporary *halachic* and *hashkafic* issues. I was fortunate to correspond with him many times over the past decade and his responses were always prompt, erudite, sensitive, and very helpful. The Jewish community and Torah world will miss him. Yehi zichro Baruch.

Among the many puzzling aspects of the story of Yosef and his brothers is that, although Yosef met with them repeatedly, they did not recognize him.

בראשית פרשת מקץ פרק מב פסוק ה
(ח) וַיִּבְרַךְ יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָהוּ:

Even when Yosef eventually revealed himself to them, he strangely repeats his admission of his identity— as if they were not convinced the first time; once was not enough to convince them. It seems like they still did not recognize him!

בראשית פרק מה
(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד אֵבְרִי חֵי וְלֹא־יִכְלֹוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלָו מִפְּנָיו: (ד) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו גִּשְׁוֹ-גֵּא אֵלַי וַיִּגְשׁוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרַיִם:

In fact, Chazal teach us that eventually he needed to **prove** his identity to them. This seems very odd. He was their brother, after all. They had grown up with him for seventeen years.

Chazal (**Bava Metzia 39b**) suggest that they did not recognize him because he had grown a beard.

בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף לט עמוד ב
שנאמר ויכר יוסף את אחיו והם לא הכירוהו מלמד שיצא בלא חתימת זקן ובא בחתימת זקן.

But this statement seems like only part of an explanation. Maybe if he had passed them on the street, they would not have recognized him because of his beard. Maybe the first time they met, this would explain why they did not recognize him. But they had a lot of detailed interactions with him. In addition, there were many oddities about his behavior that should have alerted them that something was going on. He singled them out. He asked very specific questions about their family, to such an extent that **Rashi** tells us that Yehuda was skeptical about why he asked such prying and detailed questions about their family. In light of all these oddities--shouldn't his face and voice have been familiar? Why did they not recognize Yosef?

The **Baal HaTurim** writes that Yosef's dramatic change in status made him unrecognizable. When they last saw him, he was 17 years old, he was their "kid brother," and now he was an adult and a mighty ruler in Mitzrayim.

בעל הטורים בראשית פרק מב

אף כאן לא הכירוהו בשביל שנשתנה שהיה עבד ונעשה שר וגדול בכל הארץ. . אבל הכא לא הכירוהו כלל, שלא העלו על דעתם שיגיע יוסף למעלה כזו ועל כן הוא חסר:

Rav Yosef Karo, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, writes:

כדי שלא יכרוהו בפניו שם המצנפת על פניו, וכדי שלא יכירוהו בקולו דיבר אתם קשות

Yosef intentionally placed a scarf over his face and disguised his voice with angry tones to hide his identity from them.

But this, at most, explains the lack of recognition up until he reveals his identity. But once he tells them who he is, why didn't they believe him?

I would like to share an insight from a classic Mussar anthology called *Chochmas Hamatzpun* in the name of a sefer called *Degel HaMussar* by Rav Gershon Libman of the Navhardok school of *mussar*. This insight is based on the psychological phenomenon called denial...

מה שהיה חסר כאן לא הכשרון ולא החכמה, **אלא חוסר הרצון להבין**, עמוק עמוק בתוך תוכם לא יהו מעונינים להגיע למסקנה כזו, שהרי כזו חקירה תוביל אותם לשורש הענין שהם מכרו אותו, ושמתרתם היתה שהוא לא ימלוך ולא ימשול עליהם, הנגיעה הזו פעלה בנפשם דק מן הדק, והעלימה מעיניהם כל אפשרות תהבין מה שלא היו מעונינים להבין ולכן כל הסימנים לא נקלטו אצלם... Rav Liebman claims that all the signs were there, but the brothers were not able to **deal with the truth**...so **they could not see what was right in front of them**.

Their inability to recognize their brother was the product of a subconscious act of denial. Even when Yosef revealed himself, it took them some time to acknowledge who he was. This was because doing so would have required them to come to terms with a part of themselves and with actions they had taken, that they preferred to forget.

Let's remember how they acted when they sold Yosef. Motivated by jealousy and hatred, according to the Torah, they were even ready to kill him. After stripping him of his clothing and dignity and selling him to an uncertain future, it is unsettling that they had the equanimity to sit down and enjoy a comfortable meal. It is unsettling that they were able to cause their elderly father such pain and anguish...and continue with their lives as if nothing happened.

It is hard to believe that their behavior did not disturb them, as well. How did they live with themselves? These memories of their own actions and their accountability for their deeds were pushed away from their conscious minds...

Erich Fromm in his book The Forgotten Language cites a famous philosopher who said--
"My memory says I have done this, my pride says I could not have done it. My memory yields."

When we cannot handle what we have done, we change the way we see and remember things...

We find a similar idea in Parshas Vayera, when Sarah laughed in the face of the angels who announced that she would have a baby. Her husband, Avraham, was a prophet, and had been told by God about her laughter. But when he confronted her, she responded that she had not laughed...

בראשית פרק יח: (טו) ותכחש שרה לאמר לא צחקתי כיון יראה ויאמר לא כי צחקתי:

How could she say such a thing? What did she hope to accomplish by lying?

I once heard a fascinating insight from **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski** that the Torah does not write that she **lied**—vatishaker. Instead, it writes vatichachesh, that she **denied**. She was not intentionally lying. She

was so ashamed of what she had done that she could not handle the truth of it—and she therefore denied reality. Her memory yielded to her pride.

Similarly, the brothers were so filled with shame that they **could not recognize that it was Yosef standing in front of them.** Their conscious mind wanted to keep the episode buried deep in their subconscious.

And that is why, when Yosef finally revealed himself, he did not need to give them any *mussar*. When they were shaken from their sense of denial and forced to come to terms with who he was, what they had done, and the pain they had caused their father, that was *mussar* enough.

They had no excuses. They accepted responsibility for what they had done...and he forgave them.

בראשית פרק מה פסוק ג
וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד אֵבִי תִּי וְלֹא-יִכְלֹוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנָיו:

All Yosef had to prove was that he was still alive ...to make them come to terms with what they had indeed done...and they got the *mussar*. Their pride finally yielded to their memory...

The **Medrash Rabba** (93:10) comments on this episode of Yosef revealing himself to his brothers:

אמר אבא כהן ברדלא אוי לנו מיום הדין אוי לנו מיום התוכחה יוסף קטנן של שבטים לא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו לכשיבא הקב"ה ויוכיח לכל אחד לפי מה שהוא שנא'(תהלים נ)אוכיחך ואערכה לעיניך על אחת כמה וכמה

Abba Kohen Bardela commented:

Woe to us from the day of judgment

Woe to us from the day of rebuke

If Yosef, the youngest of the tribes, was able to rebuke his brothers in a way that they were unable to respond, when Hashem will come and rebuke each person לפי מה שהוא how much greater the rebuke!

The **Beis HaLevi** writes that the Medrash is telling us that the *mussar* Hashem will give each of us after we pass on is just like Yosef's *mussar* to his brothers. Hashem will not yell at us. He will simply make us look reality in the face, and we will be forced to take responsibility for our actions; all the things we try to forget. After 120 years, all the rationalization and denial will no longer help.

Rav Hirsch in his commentary on Chumash defines *tochacha*, rebuke, as follows:

“to bring someone to the recognition of an unpleasant fact about himself, to explain to him that he has committed an intellectual error (Iyov 9:33) or that he has strayed morally (as in most other instances).” *Tochacha* is whatever it takes to bring that recognition—to shake us from denial.

It is no coincidence that the Hebrew word for rebuke is *tochacha*—which comes from the same root as *hochacha*—a proof. **Effective rebuke comes from getting someone to a place where the proof is overwhelming.** In the face of such proof, they must emerge from their preferred state of denial.

The Medrash is teaching that the most effective way to get someone to acknowledge reality and commit to change is not through harsh argumentation or lengthy persuasion. The best way is by showing them clear and obvious proof. A person must see for himself what he is doing wrong and understand the effects of his actions—all that he seeks to keep buried in his subconscious--and be taken out of the deep denial that allows him to continue living an imperfect or harmful life. The “proofs” that are necessary to help us escape our denial often come from surrounding ourselves with the right kinds of *people*—people with proper values. Observing how they successfully face their challenges can serve as a *tochacha* to us—to help us recognize the truth--and change our ways.

The **Mishna in Avos** writes:

רבי מתניא בן תרש אומר . . . והוי זנב לאריות ואל תהי ראש לשועלי

Rabbi Masya ben Charash said it's better to be the tail of the lions than the head of the foxes.

It feels great to be the best among the foxes, but is that what's best for us in the long run? The Mishnah is teaching us that the way to grow is to surround ourselves with good people—the lions. By observing their deeds and lives, we will be inspired and be grounded in reality. By noting their standards, we will be elevated.

We all live life with a certain amount of denial. Therefore, it is crucial to surround ourselves with good people who can help keep us honest and on the right path in life. Such people can help us stay grounded, instead of in deep denial. Let us not wait to face the truth until God shows us the video of our lives and our actions. Let us face the truth as we live our lives, and make responsible and meaningful choices...

But ultimately, it is about being honest with ourselves. As **Shakespeare** taught us in Hamlet —"to thine own self be true..." We must be honest with ourselves. We cannot escape reality forever. We will all face our moment of judgment.

The **Mesilas Yesharim** teaches us, at the very beginning of his *sefer*, that the essence of *avodas Hashem* is making sure we **remain aware** of what we already know to be true...

אמר המחבר: החיבור הזה לא חברתיו ללמד לבני האדם את אשר לא ידעו, אלא להזכירם את הידוע להם כבר ומפורסם אצלם פירסום גדול. כי לא תמצא ברוב דברי, אלא דברים שרוב בני האדם יודעים אותם ולא מסתפקים בהם כלל.

The writer says: I have composed this work not to teach people what they do not know but to remind them of what they already know and which is very familiar to them. For you will find in most of my words only things which most people already know and do not have any doubt about.

...אבל התועלת יוצא מן החזרה עליו וההתמדה. כי יזכרו לו הדברים האלה הנשכחים מבני האדם בטבע, וישים אל לבו חובתו אשר הוא מתעלם ממנה.

...Rather, the benefit derived [from this book] comes from review and diligent study. For [then] he will be reminded of these things which, by nature, people tend to forget and he will put to heart his duties which he hides from.

We should learn from the story of Yosef and his brothers to live our lives with clarity and without denial. But we also learn that sometimes large groups reinforce incorrect thinking. It gives us some insight into how easy it is for whole nations to convince themselves that a different version of reality is absolutely true. We must take this as a reminder not to be afraid to look honestly at our own choices and lives and to remain strongly committed to our values, and to do everything we can to live lives of truth, honesty, and integrity. We are ultimately responsible to be our own moral compass.

As the **Mesilas Yesharim** says in Perek 14, sometimes we need time alone to make sure we are staying true to what we know to be true and not giving in to peer pressure or "group think."

ספר מסילת ישרים פרק יד

והפרישות במנהגים הוא התבודדות וההבדל מן החברה המדינית לפנות לבו אל העבודה וההתבוננות בה כראוי. . . ויתבודד אחר - כך להדבק באלהיו ולהשיג דרכי היושר והעבודה האמיתית.

Separation consists of secluding and separating oneself from societal company in order to turn one's heart to the divine service and to proper reflection in it... and then seclude himself afterwards to cling to his G-d, and to attain the ways of the just and the true service.

During this pandemic, we have all been alone to an unparalleled extent. It has truly been a time to think. We also have a greater appreciation of why we need others...the support we get from having a community of people with strong values and a commitment to bringing kindness into the world. We are fortunate to be part of such a wonderful shul and community with people who live lives of meaning. May Hashem soon lead us to the day when His Oneness will be evident to all...to the point that it will be impossible to deny His presence. May we all live the way we should, and may the world be filled with kindness and Godliness...*bimhera viyamenu...amen.*