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Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayechi

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**This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Jeffrey and Rochel Silver
in honour of the birth of their granddaughter, Aliza Esther Silver**

The Hidden Tears

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him?!" So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before his death, your father left this instruction: So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the G-d of your father." And Joseph was in tears when they communicated with him. His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, "We are prepared to be your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for G-d?" ... Thus, he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. (Bereishit 50:15-21, adapted from JPS translation)

There is no happy ending in the saga of Yosef and his brothers. Even after years of Yosef supporting them, forgiving them, seeking no revenge, they never trust him. Full reconciliation evades them. Why can't they accept that he forgives them? Why, until the end, does Yosef live apart from his family, isolated in the palace while they reside in Goshen? Why does he remain the untrusted outsider?

A motif that permeates the story offers a painful possibility. The interactions between Yosef and his brothers are consistently marked by their inability to convey or perceive each other's feelings. From the start, the brothers cannot speak with Yosef. (Bereishit 37:4) When Yosef is sold, the Torah records no reaction by Yosef. Yet,

when the brothers begin to feel remorse, they recall that Yosef had indeed cried out – they had just ignored his pleas. (ibid. 42:21) The Torah's initial silence seems to illustrate the experience of the brothers. In the heat of the moment, they heard no cries, and so neither do the readers. Only when the brothers feel remorse, and Yosef's pleas resonate in their hearts, do we hear them.

However, when Yosef next meets his brothers, he actively hides his tears. From their vantage point, they are persecuted by a remorseless viceroy who baselessly accuses them of being spies, imprisons them, and forces their elderly father to part from his beloved son. They don't know that this pains Yosef, at least once he sees their collective conscience awakening. "They did not know that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between them. He turned away from them and wept. But he came back to them and spoke to them; and he took Shimon from among them and had him bound before their eyes." (Bereishit 42:23-24, adapted from JPS translation) His humanity, his brotherliness is touched by their admission of guilt. However, all they see is him binding Shimon.

After forcing Yaakov to agonizingly allow Binyamin to descend to Egypt, the brothers' pain and guilt is nearly unbearable. Yosef is overwhelmed by love when he sees his only full brother. He weeps, but again does not allow them to see: "Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brothers and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there." (ibid. 43:30) Instead they see

that, "He washed his face, reappeared, and—now in control of himself—gave the order, 'Serve the meal.'" (ibid. 43:31)

Only once do they see Yosef cry – when he reveals himself. Yet, from the Torah's words it sounds as if they don't perceive it: "Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone withdraw from me!" So there was no one else about when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear, and Pharaoh's palace heard." (ibid. 45:1-2) Yosef wants only his brother to hear him – but it is everyone else who hears him. As for his brothers, their shock prevents them from hearing: "But his brothers could not answer him, so dumbfounded were they on account of him." (ibid. 45:3)

Even when Yaakov dies, and the brothers relay their message to Yosef, it is through a messenger. Thus, when he cries, they are not present to see. When they come in person – he is no longer crying.

The Torah shows us poignantly – if we want people to know how we feel, we need to show them. Otherwise, they may never internalize it, even when it is most important.

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**Enjoy this mini-edition;
our full publication
should return next week!**

OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

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Moshe commanded the Jews, “Write for yourselves this poem, and teach it to the Children of Israel, place it in their mouths.” (Devarim 31:19) The Talmud (Sanhedrin 21b) explains that each Jewish male is commanded to write a Torah; possessing a Torah written by others is insufficient. This obligation is recorded by Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Tefillin, Mezuzah v’Sefer Torah 7:1) and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 270), and it is the Torah’s 613th, and final, mitzvah. This mitzvah is separate from a king’s responsibility to write another Torah; that is the Torah’s 503rd mitzvah.

Per Sefer haChinuch, we learn multiple lessons from this mitzvah, including spiritual independence. He wrote, “People engage in activities if the materials are readily available. Therefore, G-d instructed us to have each Jewish man keep a Torah scroll ready with him, so that he will be

able to read from it always, and he will not need to go after one in his friend’s house.” He also noted the important element of personalization, even though the words of each Torah scroll are the same: “It is so that each Jewish man will read from new scrolls, lest their spirits be disgusted when they read from old scrolls left by their fathers.”

We are encouraged to write a Torah personally; as the Talmud states, “One who purchases Torah from the market is as though he grabs a mitzvah from the market. One who writes a Torah personally is as though he received it at Mount Sinai.” (Menachot 30a) According to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Megilah 3:1), our practice of holding the public Torah reading using a complete Torah scroll, and not with an individual chumash, is meant to encourage us to write complete Torah scrolls. [Gittin 60a offers a different explanation.]

(to be continued)

Weekly Highlights: Dec. 30 – Jan. 5 / 12 Tevet – 18 Tevet
Most of our classes are on break this week, but opportunities remain!

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Dec. 29-30				
After Hashkamah	Adam Friedmann	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	Not this week
8:50 AM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Pre-Shacharit Parshah	BAYT	Turk Bais Medrash
Before minchah	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi’s Classroom
After minchah	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Not this week
Motzaei, 6:30 PM	Yaron Perez	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	Not this week
Sun. Dec. 31				
8:45 AM	R’ Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	Not this week
8:45 AM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Not this week
9:30 AM	R’ Aaron Greenberg R’ Jonathan Ziring	Is This Ad Kosher? Halachah & Capitalism	BAYT Breakfast served	University Students and Parents
Tue. Jan. 2				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Nechemiah	Shaarei Shomayim	Not this week
7:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua	129 Theodore Pl.	Not this week
Wed. Jan. 3				
2:30 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Exploring Bamidbar	32 Timberlane Ave.	Not this week
8:00 PM	Adam Friedmann	Why do we do that?	Shaarei Tefillah	
8:00 PM	Yaron Perez	הפרשה ואני	Shaarei Shomayim	Not this week
Thu. Jan. 4				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim	49 Michael Ct.	Not this week
Fri. Dec. 5				
10:30 AM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Melachot of Shabbat	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim
11:00 AM Sunday, Contemporary Halachah, Not this week
8:30 AM Monday, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, Nefesh haChaim
8:30 AM Friday, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, The Book of Yeshayah

For University Women, at Ulpant Orot: A Special Winter Break Seminar on “Modern Israel”!
Wednesday: Elliezra Perez, “Signs of Redemption Through Netflix”
Thursday: Rabbi Aaron Greenberg, “HaDegel Sheli”
Friday: Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, “The Challenges of a Halachic State: Civil Marriage”