



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת a collection of maamarim on
תנא דבי אליהו given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas VaYigash 5759

Parshas Vayigash begins with a powerful lesson about interpersonal relations. Yehuda tells Yosef, "ידבר נא עבדך דבר באזני אדוני ואל יחר אפך בעבדך כי כמוך כפרעה" ("Let your servant say something in the ears of my master, and let my master not get angry, for you are the same as Pharaoh"). Rashi brings four interpretations of the comparison, "כמוך כפרעה"

1. You are as significant to me as Pharaoh.
2. You are destined to be afflicted with Tzaraas, as your grandfather was because of my grandmother (Sara Imeinu).
3. Like Pharaoh, you decree without following through, and promise without keeping your word.
4. If you anger me, I will kill you and your master.

The Gaon R. Tzvi Yechezkel Michelzon zt"l, (Rav of Plonsk in Poland), notes the stark contrast between the first peirush, which portrays Yehuda praising Yosef, and the other three. How can such different interpretations apply to the same two words, כמוך כפרעה?

He also asks, "אדני ידבר נא עבדך באזני אדוני, (Let your servant speak in the ears of my master)?" Doesn't everyone speak in the ears of their listeners?

Rav Michelzon asks yet another question. In the previous parsha, when Yosef's goblet is found in Binyamin's sack, Yehuda responds in a very humble, submissive manner. "מה נדבר ומה נצטדק...הננו עבדים לאדני גם אנחנו גם אשר נמצא הגביע בידו. (What can we say, and how can we justify ourselves... We, and the one who was found with the goblet, will all be slaves to my master)." Yehuda seems to accept the justice of sentencing Binyamin to slavery. Why, in our parsha, does he suddenly change his approach, rebuking, attacking, and threatening both Yosef and Pharaoh?



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Rav Michelzon answers the whole series of questions with the following approach. From the beginning, the shevatim spoke with Yosef through an interpreter. They spoke in Lashon Hakodesh, and Yosef spoke Egyptian. Yehuda knew that even when an interpreter doesn't intentionally change the conversation, subtle but key differences in tone or phraseology can drastically alter statements.

When Yehuda requested permission to speak "in the ears" of Yosef, he wanted to speak with him directly, without an interpreter. From the beginning, the shevatim's interactions with Yosef seemed to be a series of misunderstandings and suspicions. Yehuda attributed those difficulties to the imperfect process of interpretation.

Yehuda supported his request by pointing to the words כפרעה as an example. The same words could be translated as a complement, or, with different intonation, as a threat or an insult. He asked to speak באזני אדוני, without an interpreter. ואל יחר, i.e., the multiple interpretations of these two words illustrate the inherent inadequacy of translation. Yehuda hoped that if he and Yosef could speak face to face, they would understand each other accurately.

This elegant peirush teaches an important lesson about the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, בין אדם לחבירו.

When barriers develop between two people, true communication and connection disintegrates. Miscommunication and misunderstanding lead to arguments and מחלוקת. Reuven believes that Levi spoke לשון הרע about him, and Levi suspects the same of Reuven. These baseless suspicions fan the fire of מחלוקת to the extent that a true friendship goes up in flames. The petty conflicts and the resulting split could have been avoided if they had simply spoken to each other directly and openly, as friends. Those conversations would have enabled their friendship to flourish and endure.

The Rebbe, the Pnei Menachem זיע"א repeatedly told us that shortcomings in the world of אדם לחבירו hold back the גאולה that we long for. Those wrongdoings bring suffering to the Jewish nation, as well as to individual Jews.

He added that even the prevalence of the terrible and malignant מחלה that affects so many רחמנא ליצלן, stems from negative אדם לחבירו behavior.

The Rebbe, zy"א pointed out that as the disease progresses, cancerous cells multiply and spread, invading healthy organs for no reason. These cells mimic the behavior of



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malignant people, who, as Chazal describe them, איש את רעהו חיים בלעו, eat each other alive (Avos 3:2). If only we internalized the outlook of bitachon, we would know that אין אדם נוגע במוכן לחבירו (No one even touches that which is destined for his friend). There is no place for jealousy or עין הרע in the world of a baal bitachon.

My grandfather zy"va was famous for caring deeply about other people's honor. When it came to his own honor, he never bore a grudge, even towards someone who ridiculed him. The following story is just one of many that illustrate his character.

At weddings, my grandfather's holy minhag was to bring simcha to the chosson by performing somersaults. At one wedding, he approached a rather unrefined chosson who disrespectfully commanded the elderly rebbe, "Do a somersault!". The people who accompanied the Rebbe, rebuked the chosson for his chutzpah. I was also there, and I refused to let my grandfather perform somersaults for such a chosson.

Not long after the wedding, the chosson himself told me that one night, there was a knock on his door. Despite his age and weakness, my grandfather had climbed many stairs to visit the newlywed chosson. He told the young man, "I owe you something from the time of your wedding". He then proceeded to perform a somersault. After this holy avoda, he showered the chosson with brochos, and went on his way.

My grandfather attained this lofty level of בין אדם לחבירו, by years of difficult and focused avoda. However, those of us who at least aspire to follow his path, can gradually transform ourselves with each small improvement. We know that האדם נפעל לפי פעולותיו (man is affected by his actions).

If we learn to see the positive in our friends, instead of the negative, even the highest levels are attainable. The merit of at least trying to improve will bring us to the גאולה השלימה במהרה בימינו אמן.



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