

Ki Mitzion: Parshat Vayigash

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“God spoke to Israel in a night vision, and said, 'Jacob! Jacob!' 'Yes,' replied [Jacob]. [God] said, 'I am the Omnipotent God of your father. Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, for it is there that I will make you into a great nation. I will go to Egypt with you, and I will also bring you back again. Joseph will place his hands on your eyes.’” (Bereishit 46:2-4).

In the previous verses of our *parasha*, we learn that Yosef and his brothers have met and identified each other. This occurred in the second year of the seven years of famine, when Yosef’s brothers went down to Egypt in order to acquire food, when Yosef alone was sustaining the entire country. This was the second time that they went down to Egypt and, in accordance with the demands and conditions that Yosef had imposed upon them, they brought with them their brother, Binyamin: “you may return to me if and only if you bring your youngest brother with you.”

As recorded in the text, in the presence of Binyamin,¹ Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers, gives them great gifts, and asks of them to bring their father Yaakov to him: “and bring my father here” (Bereishit 45:13).

Upon hearing all of this news, Yaakov chooses to join Yosef: Yosef is not gone, but he is alive, a ruler in Egypt and for all the land.

“And Yisrael said further, ‘Yosef, my son, lives; I will go and see him before I die.’” (Bereishit 45:28).

On the way to Egypt, Yaakov stops in Be’er Sheva. In the first verse of chapter 45, he offers offerings “to the God of his father Yitzchak.” At that moment, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* calms him and shows his approval of Yaakov’s decision to move to Egypt.

¹ “In this journey, center stage is reserved for Yisrael’s youngest, Binyamin. Binyamin practically holds the key to the future. If he goes with Yosef and stays with him, history will progress in a certain direction. If he goes with Yehuda, the direction is completely changed. This is why Yosef is so insistent that Binyamin go down to Egypt. Binyamin’s descent constitutes from Yosef’s perspective the proof that justice is on his side, that his path is correct. Binyamin determines what phase of the process we are in: are we still Yaakov or already Yisrael?” (from *Sod Midrash HaToladot Volume 7*, in the chapter “Yaakov or Yisrael.”)

The Midrash is perplexed as to why permission is needed for Yaakov's decision. The answer can be found in the first verses of chapter 26. It is told there that in a similar time of famine, Yitzchak planned to go down to Egypt but was prevented from doing so through a Divine revelation which he actually received in Be'er Sheva. Therefore, when Yaakov arrived in Be'er Sheva, he is plagued by his conscience and requests permission to go down to Egypt.

An important lesson can be taken from this Midrash: despite the apparent similarity in circumstances, the true path is not uniform."² In a seemingly identical time period, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s answer can be different. When we search for an answer in the Torah, before anything else, the precise question must be: "what period are we in?" In this instance, the nature of the famine is irrelevant. The question is: "are we found in a time of Yosef, or in a time of Yitzchak?" Are we in the time period described in chapter 46 of Bereishit, days in which it is permitted to go down to Egypt, or the time period of chapter 26, days in which the same descent is forbidden?

² As in: "And I will stop and offer praise to God; I will bless the Lord, God of my master Avraham, who set me on the true path, to take my brother's daughter for his son" (Bereishit 24:48).