

## *Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality*

From Rav Binny

### **(Portion of Vayigash)**

*In retrospect, it seems almost trivial, but one of the difficulties of my time in Lebanon, was the lack of space; the sense of being on top of one another.*

*I particularly recall once, during the scramble to get down into the bunker when the siren went off (signaling the possibility of an incoming mortar or artillery barrage) squeezing into one of the small rooms with three-tiered bunk beds, to wait out the alert. As the workload of missions in the area had increased, and the infrastructure of the positions (mutzavim) had not, the army used a system for quarters known as 'mitah chamah' or 'warm bed. This meant that when you had time to sleep for a few hours, you did not get your own bed, and certainly not your own room; you grabbed an empty bed as someone was always out on a mission or patrol.*

*But this time, the alert had sounded as the patrols had just returned and the next shift had not yet managed to get out, so everyone ran back down into the bunker when the alert sounded as it was too dangerous for a vehicle, even a tank, to get caught out on the road down from the mutzav (IDF fortified position) in the event of a barrage.*

*I got stuck in a small room with three bunk beds one on top of the other, with about nine or ten guys, so we all crammed into the space available and stayed there until the alert finally ended. I had managed to jump into the bottom bunk (the best spot in such a situation) but had failed to take into account that three other guys would cram in around and on top of me. After about ten minutes, the guys started getting on each other's nerves, until eventually two guys on the top pushed one of the guys off the bunk and he crashed to the floor; it was only his flak vest that was still on that saved him from serious injury.*

*Even when you went top side, you could only walk a few hundred yards in any direction before hitting the barbed wire and tank barriers on the edge of the mutzav. You couldn't go for a real run, even if you had the time....*

*And I can still remember, when we finally got out for Shabbat, crossing the border past Marja'oun on the Lebanese border and getting off the safari truck in Kiriath Shmonah back in Israel, just enjoying the wide open spaces, and the ability to run for more than five minutes before turning around....*

Sometimes, we need our space.

This week's portion *Vayigash*, is so named because it begins with Yehuda getting into Yosef's space. Over two decades after throwing their brother into a pit and seeing him sold as a slave, the journey has come full circle, as Joseph, still disguised as the Viceroy of Egypt, prepares to take Binyamin as a slave, in return for his supposedly having stolen the royal goblet.

One would think Yehuda would just let it go. After all, Binyamin, the younger son of Rachel (whom the other brothers must have despised as the favored wife of Yaakov), is now himself the new favorite son (*Bereishit* 42:36-38). Indeed, Joseph even arranged for the brothers to see Binyamin receive favored treatment (*ibid.* 43:34) so why not let him be sold as a slave and be done with it?

But Yehuda comes forward (*Vayigash Yehuda* *ibid.* 44:18) and takes a stand, offering himself in place of his younger brother Binyamin.

One cannot help but notice that the story which reached its climax when the brothers “*see Joseph from a distance*” and conspire to kill him (*ibid.* 37:18), now turns around precisely when the leader of those same brothers, finally comes close. And as this action finally breaks Joseph’s veneer causing him to reveal himself at last, one wonders whether all Joseph ever wanted was for the brothers to make that effort; to come close.

The **Ramban** points out based on the aforementioned verse that it is only when we see someone from a distance that we can hate them. Once you get closer and see them as a person it becomes harder to hate.

That said, sometimes, before we can let go of anger and hatred, we may need a little distance.

Yaakov and Esau are a great example of this idea. They are born on top of each other, twins, with Yaakov exiting the womb holding on to Esau’s heel. And as they grow up wanting the same blessings, the conflict leads to hatred, with Esau swearing to kill Yaakov for stealing his blessings.

Yet, twenty-two years later, with the separation of so much time and experience, Esau is able to let go of his anger and the brothers appear to have a rapprochement. (*ibid.* 36:1-10). And again, that same word appears (*ibid.* 33:7) “*va’tigash...*”) as Leah and her children come close to Esau.

And the same thing happens with Yitzchak and Yishmael who seem to be in conflict of some sort, but eventually re-unite to bury their father together, once the distance of time heals old wounds....

After so many years of separation, it is time to make peace. But no peace can come unless eventually the brothers will come back together which is exactly what happens here, as Judah finally comes close....

And this is true in life. Maimonides (*Hilchot Deot* 2; 3) points out that anger is a terrible trait that one should strive to remain distant from. And when one finds oneself in a state of anger the best thing to do is to distance oneself from the situation; remain silent, walk away and so on.

But eventually one has to be willing to come close again, to see inside the other person. Indeed, it is precisely when we are able to see the other person’s perspective that we are able to let go of anger and make peace.

Which perhaps is why, when Joseph finally reveals himself to the brothers he too uses the same phrase: (*ibid.* 45:4) “*...geshu’ na’ eilai ...*” “*come close ...*”

There is a value to separating oneself from conflict, but there is also a time to come back together to resolve it, and the wisdom is to know when distance should give way to coming back together....

Shabbat Shalom from Jerusalem,

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