

Parshat Vayigash Assessing Aging

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

When Yaakov and his family arrive in Egypt, Yosef introduces his father to Pharaoh. Pharaoh asks him how old he is and Yaakov answers, "Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life..." What prompted Pharaoh's unusual question and what meanings are alluded to in Yaakov's convoluted reply? Why, according to the Medrash, did Yaakov lose thirty three years of his life, one year for each word of this dialogue which seemed to imply Yaakov's complaining about the hardships of his life? Even so, asks Chochmat Hamatzpun, this seems a very harsh punishment for what seems to be an honest response.

Rabbi Pam z"l asks, why did Yaakov also lose years for the number of words in Pharaoh's question? In all his years on the throne, Pharaoh had never seen anyone who looked as old as Yaakov. In his reply, Yaakov implied, "I'm not as old as I look. I've turned gray from the stresses of my life..." If this was in fact a logical response, why was Yaakov punished? Rabbi Pam z"l cites Rav Salanter in explaining that while Yaakov had indeed experienced a difficult life, that pain should have remain private, in his heart. A person's countenance is public, and should always appear pleasant. Since Yaakov's face mirrored the inner challenges of his life, he was held accountable for Pharaoh's question as well as for his response.

While Yaakov remembered his troubles, he neglected to mention the tremendous chessed Hashem showed him. All his challenges were eventually reversed and returned to him. His face should have reflected the joy of rejuvenation in Hashem's chessed instead of remaining dark and old. As Rabbi Chasman notes, the gift of life is so great that its challenges pale in comparison.

Therefore, we should joyously thank Hashem for every breath we breathe.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz z"l proves this point by citing the Medrash about the three advisers to Pharaoh who were asked how to handle the "problem" of the Israelites. Yitro, who ran away was rewarded and eventually became Moshe's father in law. Bilaam, who gave the advice to kill the baby boys was punished with instantaneous death. Iyov who remained silent was forced to suffer many tragedies in his life. Why did Bilaam who was more evil die so quickly while Iyov was forced to suffer so greatly? Rabbi Shmulevitz points out that the value of life is so great that it outweighs all the misfortunes one may endure while living.

The Oztrot Hatorah teaches that we should thank Hashem with joy for the challenges as well as for the good in our lives, for the challenges provide a path for growth. The carpenter needs to saw and "break" the wood to create a beautiful table. Similarly, we cannot judge what is truly good or bad in our lives until the process is complete and we see the result.

Although Yaakov called the troubling years when Yosef was lost "bad," continues the Oztrot Hatorah, it was from those very years that Hashem transformed Yosef into the Prime Minister of Egypt with the ability to sustain not only his family, but the world. We must acknowledge that everything Hashem does is ultimately for the good, even though the process may appear challenging. When we feel pain, we cry out to Hashem, unlike the serpent who never has a need for anything. Our trials in exile are meant to bring us closer to the Almighty and hasten the redemption and should be re-framed in that context.

We do not see the full picture and can therefore not understand what Hashem does. Therefore, when we say the blessing of the New Moon, we ask that Hashem fulfill our requests for the good, writes Rabbi Pam z"l. We see only the present and cannot know why a particular event is necessary for the future. Only if Hashem reveals the entire picture to us can we understand the importance of everything that has happened, just as Yosef's brothers could make no sense of Yosef's actions until he told them, "Ani Yosef/ I am Yosef." We do not understand this long and dark exile, continues Rabbi Pam z"l, but as we read Parshat Vayigash, usually in the darkest days following Chanukah, we must remember that Hashem is always with us, and will redeem us.

The Chochmat Hamatzpun explains that while Yaakov was truthful about his suffering, he should also have remembered Hashem's chessed. Because he allowed the suffering to suffuse his entire being until he did not appreciate the good, Hashem punished him. Similarly, when we are going through difficult times, we must also remember the good times and allow for the proper perspective.

Rabbi Gifter z"l explains that Yaakov examined his years and was affected by his shortcomings. He felt he would never be able to live up to his potential. In this context, the loss of these years was a consequence of his own making rather than a punishment. Rabbi Biederman tells us that the energy of renewal that Chanukah brings extends to the Shabbat immediately following. It should be a time of re-dedication and training in the ways of Hashem, to again begin living, not merely existing.



Introduction to Eishes Chayil

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Hochheimer

Many of us are familiar with Eishet Chayil as the song we sing Friday night at the Shabbat meal. But in fact it's a poem found in the last chapter of Mishlei, part of the Kesuvim. The Kesuvim were written with ruach hakodesh (divine inspiration) by righteous people who were given clarity, great depth of understanding, and divine wisdom. Mishlei was written by Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of all men. The Midrash explains how he became wise. When he was first appointed king, he fasted for 40 days. Hashem asked him, "What is it you want?" He answered, "I don't want silver or

gold. All I want is knowledge and understanding." Hashem replied, "I will give you wisdom as a gift." And Shlomo Hamelech gained the ability to think and understand on a level unprecedented in human history so that he was able to write a book of wisdom for all of us to learn how to lead our lives.

Rashi and Malbim explain that in order to study Torah and become a complete person one must have an awareness of the ideas that are embodied in Mishlei. The Malbim points out that in everything in life there were always be

two paths to take. Let's say someone insults you. You can either ignore it which might make you look passive or say something which might make you look aggressive. How do we know when to be assertive or when to walk away? When is something an expression of impurity or purity? How do we make these fine distinctions? Going with our opinion is not the best way because we are swayed by other people, our personality, and our external culture. The Malbim says the best way to do this is to learn the wisdom contained in Mishlei.

A Woman's Lifestyle Within the Home

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The lifestyle of a woman who does her husband's will is described in the Rambam. All of her deeds are in accordance with what he says. In her eyes he is like a minister or a king. She goes according to the desires of his heart and distances everything he despises. He sees the vision. She actualizes it. She hears what he says. There are so many women who don't listen, who assume. There are so many husbands who feel locked out, who retreat into silence because the woman is in a continual state of self-expression and doesn't hear him. What she does reflects that she has heard him. She is aware of what's truly in his heart and brings that close while distancing what he hates.

There are things people do with a defined plan and other things they do because they are on automatic pilot. They aren't always aware of what their motivations are. If a man and woman are living together, they have to be on one page in both of these aspects of life. He articulates what he wants to be achieved. It's not her role to redefine where he's headed. Her part is to use her insight to make his desires happen in a way that will bring the best possible end results. Every husband's vision is to have children who are successful, who know who they are, have a

sense of meaning and purpose, know their spiritual goals and how to reach it. His vision might be that the chinuch of the children be according to Torah. She doesn't have to redefine what Torah is. She has to see that whatever is pure and good in her children finds expression. For that she needs enormous insight. She has to know the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara of each one of her children. She has to know what her husband's vision is and move it along the right path. He sets the direction. She has to make it happen.

Going according to the desires of his heart means being aware of his subconscious desires. They are not strangers. She knows what will draw forth what is good in him. She knows what despises and repels him. Let's say you have a man who is a thinker and has a rich inner life. He's disturbed by a lot going on. His wife should be sensitive to this. She shouldn't build a home that is a hubbub of distractions. If you have a husband who likes people, creating a home that is an ivory tower will leave him and the rest of the family suffocated. She has to be sensitive to what he wants, what makes him feel unheard, and conversely understood.

I'll give you an example from my own life. My husband did not like vacations and travel. To

him happiness was being at home. So when the children were young he would be set up in our air conditioned house with food in the fridge and I'd go off for a day or two with the kids. Later on he would go with us. His idea of having a great day in Tzefat was, you go to shul, have breakfast, and then go straight to the beit medrash to learn. My idea was going to Banyas and to graves of tzadikim. There was nothing to fight about. He was happy that I came home and had something to say over dinner and I was happy that he was happy.

The same way a person instinctively follows his own heart, so too a man's wife should be like his own body. They should have a collective self. The goal is that they should feel like one soul where neither one is striving towards autonomy, but rather towards unity. The deepest connection in life is the connection you have to your own body. The soul and body are compared to flour and water. Once mixed, it can't be separated. When it says, "One's wife is like one's body," it means that their unit is like body and soul where you can't say, "This is her this is me." It's one team working together towards one goal.