

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vayigash 5785

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Yehuda pleads for himself and his brothers.

וְנֹאמַר אֶל-אֲדֹנָי יְשׁוּ-לָנוּ אָב זָקֵן וְיָלֵד זָקֵנִים קָטָן וְאֶחָיו מֵת וְיִתֵּר הוּא לְבָדּוֹ לְאִמּוֹ
וְאָבִיו אֹהֲבֵהוּ:

“And we said, to our lord, ‘We have an aged father, and a youngest child of his old age; And his brother is dead, and he remains alone by himself to his mother, and his father loves him.’” (Bereishis 44:19).

This is very different than the original narrative. Did Yehuda change it or did the Torah add in missing details? Also, Yehuda says, “his brother” instead of “our brother,” distancing himself from Yosef, why? He also adds in that he is the remaining of his mother. Why add that detail or the detail that his father loves him?

Yosef “caught” Binyomin with the missing goblet. Yehuda pled for his freedom. Yehuda began the narrative by saying, “My lord asked his servants, ‘Have you a father or another brother?’” (Ibid 44:19). This is an odd question for a Vizier to ask patrons who have come to purchase grain and bread. The ten brothers that came to purchase foodstuff were all older than Yosef, forty or older. Would such adult men be beholden to still live with their father? If Yosef was not asking about their household, then would it matter if they had siblings who had their own households? Also, the Torah does not record Yosef asking this question.

When Yosef asked the brothers where they came from. They answered: “From Canaan to procure foodstuff.” (Ibid 42:7). That last detail was an unnecessary volunteering of information. Of course, they came for provisions, as did the thousand people in line with them. This made Yosef – acting as Vizier – think they were spies. (Ibid 42:9,12,14). They try to profess their innocence by saying they are all brothers, and there is another son and a father left at home. (Ibid 42:13). Again, they volunteered too much information. Yaakov even censures them for volunteering information. (Ibid 43:6).

Yehuda, however, recounts this differently. He says, Yosef asked outright if they have a father or brother. (Ibid 44:19). Then he added: וְנֹאמַר אֶל-אֲדֹנָי יְשׁוּ-לָנוּ אָב זָקֵן וְיָלֵד זָקֵנִים קָטָן וְאֶחָיו מֵת וְיִתֵּר הוּא לְבָדּוֹ לְאִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו אֹהֲבֵהוּ: “Yes, we have an aged father and a youngest child of his old age, and his brother is dead. He is alone from his mother, and his father loves him.” (Ibid 44:20). This is different than how they told the story previously. They had told Yosef, “We are your twelve servants, we are brothers of one man, in the Land of Canaan, and lo! The youngest is with our father today, and one is not longer with us.” (Ibid 42:13).

These are starkly two different narratives. They said, we are twelve servants – eleven brothers and one father. The eleven brothers are from one man, the youngest attends his father. There is also a twelfth child – they do not use the term “brother” – to this same man, but he is not with us. They did not say if he died or disappeared or had

his own household. They did not call Yaakov old. They made no mention that Binyomin is the last remaining from his mother. They made no mention of their father's love. According to Yehuda, however, their father is elderly, their youngest brother is a ben-zekunim—child of his old age. Their other brother is dead. Now, poor, youngest Binyomin is left alone from his mother, and his father loves him very much.

In the actual narrative, Yosef demands they bring Binyomin down on pain of death. (Ibid 42:15). He also wants only one brother to ascend to fetch Binyomin while the remaining 9 remain in captivity. (Ibid 16). They refused, so he held them for three days. (Ibid 42:17). Then Yosef relented and allowed only one to remain captive—innocent Shimon (ibid 42:24)—and sent the rest home with provisions (ibid 42:25). It was to Yaakov's criticism that they said the Vizier kept asking about their father and brother. (Ibid 43:7). This could be indicating that Yosef did ask about their family—testing their answers. However, their response “and one is no longer with us” was the wrong answer.

The brothers refused to have one go fetch Binyomin because, as Yehuda recounts, “If he leaves his father will die.” (Ibid 44:22). While Yosef said they must bring Binyomin on pain of death, Yehuda merely says, “Unless your younger brother comes down with you, you will not continue to see my face.” (Ibid 44:23). This is the same they told their father. (Ibid 43:3). Either this is missing narrative, or revisionist history. The way they defended themselves to Yaakov is how Yehuda recounted to Yosef.

Yehuda admits that Yosef should never have left his father. Yosef was called naar / attendant. (Ibid 37:2). Yehuda says, “the naar cannot leave his father.” (Ibid 44:22). He was referring to Yosef, now realizing how painful that separation was, and indicating that he was now also looking for Yosef. He called Bimyomin a naar when he asked Yaakov to take Binyomin. (Ibid 43:8). He reminded Yaakov he would now find Yosef, too. Yaakov said, “I have not seen [Yosef] until now.” (Ibid 44:28). This indicated Yaakov believed Yosef was alive. Yehuda also said, “And his brother is dead.” (Ibid 44:20). Saying “not with us” is okay. But dead is a lie. Yehuda explains and continues to refer to Yosef: “And he remains alone, by himself, to his mother.” וַיִּנְתָּר הָיָא לְבָדּוֹ is the same expression that happened to Yaakov. (Ibid 32:25). The double expression of “left alone” and “by himself” means, he was left alone—in Mitzrayim—and he by himself—eldest to his mother. “And his father loves him.” This recalls Yaakov's love for Yosef. (Ibid 37:3). He understood Yosef's importance to Yaakov. He was the eldest of his mother, he was given kingship by his father (the tunic), and he is now all alone. Yaakov said, “his brother is dead.” (Ibid 42:38). Yehuda merely repeats that. Neither he nor Yehuda believed Yosef dead. He was halachically considered dead/missing.

Throughout the episode they did not recognize Yosef as their brother. Yaakov responded to Reuven, “my son will not go with you” (ibid 42:38)—indicating they did not consider Yosef a brother so Binyomin is not their brother either. Yehuda was giving himself and his brothers rebuke. He said, before his brothers, if Binyomin left, “his father” would die. It was Binyomin's father, not theirs, because they took the position it was Rochel versus the remaining mothers. Yaakov had said to Yehuda, “take your brother.” (Ibid 43:13). Now, the third time down, Yehuda understood the mission. It was not to procure food or rescue Shimon. It was to find Yosef and acquiesce to him.