

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vayigash 5786

Mordechai Schlachter

With a single word Yosef rebukes his brothers for 20 years of neglect.

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד אֲבִי חַי וְלֹא-יָכְלוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ  
מִפָּנָיו:

“And Yosef said to his brothers, ‘I am Yosef. Does my father still live?’ And the brothers could not answer him, because of their terror from his face.” (Bereishis 45:3).

Why did Yosef ask if their father was alive? They told him several times their father was alive. Now that Yosef revealed himself to them, why could the brothers not answer? And what was their terror?

At first glance this challenge to Yehuda’s speech about how Yaakov would perish seems strong. Yehuda was so worried about their father, was he worried when they put Yosef in the pit? However, Yehuda could just respond: First, *when we put you in the pit, we did not realize how devastated our father would take the news. Now that he has suffered for twenty-two years, we know that confining Binyamin will kill him.* Second, *losing one son is one thing, and we were justified because you wanted to lord over us. However, losing the innocent and blameless Binyamin would be fatal to Yaakov, on top of what we did to you.* Third, *if you also care about Yaakov’s well-being, why did you not reach out to him for the nine years you have been a royal and freeman here?*

These responses, especially the last one, makes Yosef’s rhetorical question look silly. If so, what was his challenge, and why were the brothers terrified, and why could they not respond?

Yoseph challenged Yehuda, and his brothers, differently. First, Yehuda said his other brother was dead. (Ibid 44:27). Yet, *I am Yoseph.* Yosef was alive. Second, Yosef was sitting on the throne! The brothers felt adversarial to Yosef because Yaakov loved him (wanted to give him the Brochos). (Ibid 37:4). They were more adversarial to him after he had his dreams of kingship. (Ibid 37:8). Further, they could not speak to him peacefully. (Ibid 37:4). When Yosef came to check on his brothers, they said, “Here comes the dream.” (Ibid 37:19). “Let’s see what will become of his dreams.” (Ibid 37:20). Yet, here was Yosef, sitting on the throne. The brothers were bowing down to him. It all came true despite their best efforts.

*The brothers could not answer Yoseph.* They were shocked. Their self-righteous indignation, all their justifications and theories on their correct behavior at the pit and afterwards, including not knowing what happened to him for twenty-two years, came before them suddenly. In their mind they considered Yoseph dead or missing. Recall, Reuven had gone back to the pit and found it empty. (Ibid 37:29-30). They spent twenty-

two years convincing themselves he was dead so when they answered he was dead, they believed it. Yet, here he was, alive and on the throne.

*Is my father still alive.* Yosef asked directly about their father several times. (Ibid 43:27). They had told him that they had an elderly father. (Ibid 43:13). Yehuda even recounts the conversation where the vizier asked about their father (ibid 44:19) and Yehuda responded he was alive (ibid 44:20). Yosef was not asking if *their* father was alive. This time he asked is MY father still alive? He was telling them, I am Yosef, is my father still alive? The father that believed in my dreams. (Ibid 37:11). The father that refused to be consoled because he knew I was still alive. (37:35).

Yosef also understood when they told him, "We are twelve brothers; one is no longer with us" (ibid 42:13) what they really meant. Yosef was not considered their brother. They did not consider him their brother since he had his dreams. They called him the dreamer, not their brother. Yehuda revealed this in his own words. He told Yosef, "We told our father we cannot go back down without our little brother." (Ibid 44:25). He said their father responded, "my wife gave me two sons." (Ibid 44:27). Yehuda revealed Yaakov's rebuke. Yaakov knew the brothers did not consider Yosef a brother. That is why he said "my wife gave me two sons" not "you had two brothers from my wife." Yehuda exposed that Yaakov understood that they were Yaakov's sons, not their brothers. Yehuda also revealed that Yaakov held out hope that Yosef was alive: "One was torn from me and I have not seen him since." (Ibid 44:28). If he was torn, why would he see him? Clearly, Yaakov meant, he was torn away from me, but he is alive, and not been seen yet. Yosef realized that Yehuda admitted that Yaakov still believed Yosef was alive.

Yosef rebuked the brothers. Is MY father still alive? You forsook me all these years, you could not talk to me peacefully, you did not believe in my dreams. Well, I am Yosef, sitting on the throne, and Yaakov is my father. You were adversaries to me because Yaakov favored me. The brothers, in a way, also removed themselves from Yaakov, too, by being Yosef's adversary instead of his ally. They were not brothers by their own actions. This is why they could not answer. This was not about Yaakov's health; this was about their attitude toward Yosef. They had no response.

They feared because of his (Yosef's) face. If Yosef was still alive, on the throne, and in charge of the grain, they were at his mercy. They could not appeal to a familial relationship; they severed that long ago. They also now surely feared their sin against Yosef as they were wrong in their actions. Hashem proved Yosef correct. Their sin was great and weighed on their shoulders.

They had good reason to be frightened of Yosef and his power. They were, however, more frightened of themselves. They felt shame for their error and realized now how wrong they were. They felt great terror at the fact of how mistaken they were.

Often times in our lives we are faced with choices of how to deal with other people's success or position. It is easy to be jealous or act distant from friends or family that see success. However, if one believes that all is from Hashem, then it is easier to remain allies and benefit from other's success. There can be no benefit from adversarial feelings.