

RABBI ZIEGLER - VAYIGASH 2020

“SHOULD WE CONCEAL OUR TRUE AGE??”

[47:7] Yosef brings his elderly father to meet Par’oh. The first question out of Par’oh’s mouth to Yaakov was “How old are you?” I am not exactly sure about Egyptian protocol of those times but it is hard to imagine in any society that when one meets a distinguished guest for the first time, the first question thrown out to initiate the conversation would be, “How old are you?” What prompted this question?

The “Sha’agat Aryeh”, authored by Rav Aryeh Leib ben Ashur Ginsberg, (1695-1785), suggested an answer from his own life experience. The Shagat Aryeh was an amazing genius who in later life became the Rabbi in the French city of Metz. He was appointed to be the Rav of Metz at the age of 70, in the year 1765, keeping in mind that in those days the life span of individuals did not surpass age 60. His first Shabbat in Metz was Parashat Vayigash. People took a look at him and thought, “Did the search committee lose their minds?” “He is such an old fellow, who will lead our youth? How can he possibly relate to our younger members?”

The Shagat Aryeh heard their murmuring about his age. On Parashat Vayigash, in his first drasha [sermon] of his tenure, the Shagat Aryeh asked this very question, “How rude was it of Par’oh to begin the conversation with Yosef’s father by asking him how old he was! What kind of question is that?”

The Shagat Aryeh explained as follows. As soon as Yaakov came to Mitzrayim, the famine ceased. Par’oh understood-the arrival of a Righteous man was a windfall for Egypt. Par’oh immediately began calculating- if this Tzaddik stays with us, who knows how prosperous we will be! The only problem was that Yaakov appeared to be an old man. Who knows how much longer we will have TO BENEFIT FROM him? The actuarial tables began floating around in his head. Par’oh could not help himself and he blurted it out: “How old are you?” This was the primary question on his mind-how many years OF BENEFIT am I going to get out of this old man? Yaakov understood the meaning of the question and he reassured him. “I am 130 years old. I still expect to be around for a very long time. My father lived a long life; my grandfather lived a long time. I expect to be around for a long time as well. The reason I look so old is because I have had a very bitter and trying life until this point.

The Shagat Aryeh told his new congregation: “Do you know why I look like this? It is because I have been in the Rabbinat all my life! I have had to deal with Baalei Batim [congregants] all my life. Everyone who has had this experience looks like this, even though I am not really that old. In addition, I will tell you something. I intend to lead this congregation for at least the next 20 years! And so it was. The Shagat Aryeh lived into his nineties and he was the Rav of

Metz until he passed away, in 1785. Looking old is no shame, as long as we feel young, act young, work creatively, making every day, hour and minute into a useful experience.

Shabbat Shalom ,From Yerushalayim--- Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT VAYIGASH: [answer any 5 out of 6 for a perfect score]

1-44:24, Yehuda, when speaking to Yosef, refers to his father Yaakov as “Avdecha Avi” –“your servant, my father”. According to gemara Sotah (13b) Yehuda was punished for describing his father in a degrading manner. What punishment did he get? 2-Once Yosef identifies himself to his brothers, 45:3, what was the first question he asked them? 3-In 46:15 the Torah states the total number of Leah’s offsprings was 33. Yet counting them as they are listed in 46:16-19, we count only 32. How do we account for the missing child? See Rashi., 4-Yehuda was the one who spoke up to Yosef, to release Binyamin and take him as a prisoner instead. Yehuda was not the oldest brother, he was the fourth in line. Where do we see that the 4th son spoke up to Yosef in the first pasuk of our parasha? (you must learn a little about the “Trup” cantillations to answer that. 5-Why did Yosef resettle the entire Egyptian population from one city to another? [47:21] 6- In what way is the ending of Parashat Vayigash different than the ending of other parshiyot?

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