

## VAYIGASH – 5771

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

“To Remember or Not To Remember-That is the Question”

[FYI: This parsha has 106 pesukim, 1480 words, and 5680 letters]

I have always been troubled with the question of- How is it possible for ten mature grown men not to have recognized their own flesh and blood sibling brother? I know that Rashi stated when Yosef was a 17 year old he had no beard and now he did have one, but in real life does that make such a difference? What about the eyes, the nose and especially the **voice**? Furthermore, according to Chazal Yosef had *d'mus d'yukno* of Ya'akov, meaning, he looked like Ya'akov, then with a beard Yosef must have looked exactly like Ya'akov, so how is it that not one of the brothers saw the resemblance in this Egyptian man they confronted? I submit my theory is, that they **wanted to forget**. I recall in psychology, that when people want to forget an unpleasant painful experience they consciously tend to suppress it from their memory and eventually block it out completely. Here too, they wanted to forget and not remember anything about Yosef.

Ya'akov on the other hand could not be consoled over the loss of his son, *vayema'ein l'hit'nachem* (37:35), he wanted to remember Yosef and every minute detail about him.

In our parsha, Ya'akov is informed that Yosef is indeed alive (45:26). He was of course elated, but at the same time very suspicious. (see Rashi 42:36-*oti shikaltem* that Ya'akov was suspicious of them all along), perhaps the whole thing was some kind of cruel hoax. He only believed them when he saw the *agalot* (45:27), the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him. According to Chazal, the word for wagon is *agalah*, which is reminiscent of *eglah*. The subject of *eglah arufah*, was the topic that Ya'akov had privately discussed with Yosef on the last day they had seen each other. Why was this conclusive proof? Why was he so certain that this could not be an imposter?

I once heard a story from Rabbi Frand that during the time of the Vilna Gaon, a very strange incident took place in his city. A young couple had gotten married, and shortly afterward, the husband vanished without a trace. The poor wife was left an *agunah*, a widow unable to remarry because her husband might still be alive.

Thirty years passed, and then, one day, a man appeared on her doorstep and declared, “My dear wife, I’m back”! He then told her a long story about what happened and what kept him from returning for so many years. The woman looked at the man but did not recognize him as her husband. But on the other hand, she couldn’t be sure that he wasn’t.

Thirty years does change a person. They also fade the memory, especially in days when there were no photographs. The man was about the same built as her husband, and his features were not really dissimilar. It was not impossible that this was her husband, and yet, intuitively, she she felt something was wrong. .

The man saw that she had reservations so he suggested that she ask him anything about their life together in the past. She asked him and he knew all the answers. He knew about the family, their wedding day, including some intimate details that only the two of them could have known. Still, she had suspicions and decided to seek the advice of the Beit Din. The *dayyanim* interrogated the man but could not find any flaws in his story. He was convincing, but the fact that the wife was not convinced gave them enough concern to seek the advice of the Vilan Gaon. The Gaon said, “Take the man to the shul and ask him to point out his *makom kavu’a*, the place where he normally sat.” They took him to the shul and asked him to point to his regular seat. The man hesitated, but he could not do it. Then he broke down and admitted the truth that he had learned all his information from the husband whom had befriended many years ago.

The Vilan Gaon had perceived the truth about this man and assumed he was an imposter seeking to move in with another man’s wife. Such a person would seek out all the important information to prove his identity but it would not occur to him to find out about the husband’s seat in shul or any other religious detail about his life.

Similarly, Ya’akov knew that if the man who claimed to be Yosef was an imposter he might have extracted all sorts of intimate and personal information from the real Yosef. But it would never occur to an imposter to ask which page or topic he and Ya’akov were studying on the last day they were together.

This is true in our life as well. There are many people who “claim” they know you well. They might know what cars you like to drive, about your favorite color, favorite politician, your favorite baseball or football team. But see if your best friends or your spouse knows your favorite gemara, your favorite perek in Tehilim or your favorite rebbi in High school, in Metivta or in kollel, and finally, your *makom kavu’a in shul*.