

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS
VAYEISHEV

בשבת

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RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

KNOW YOURSELF

Parshas Vayeira contains the unfortunate story of Yosef being sold into slavery. Immediately after this episode, the Torah records Yehuda's marriage, the birth of his children, and their premature deaths.

Why does the narrative switch from the sale of Yosef to Yehuda's family life? The *Medrash Tanchuma* explains,¹ Hashem said, "Yehuda, you haven't had children until now, and you don't understand the pain caused by the loss of a child. Thus, you deceived your father. Now you will have children and understand what it means to lose a child.

The implication of the *Medrash* is clear — had Yehuda truly understood the pain that he would be causing his father Yaakov, he would not have led the *Shevatim* in their plan to rid themselves of Yosef.

This *Medrash* is not easy to understand. Did Yehuda really not understand the terrible pain the loss of a child can cause? Additionally, he was the leader of the *Shevatim*, and as the leader, it was imperative that he understand the thoughts and feelings of those around him.²

Undoubtedly, Yehuda must have felt it was correct to take Yosef away from Yaakov. Yehuda felt Yosef was an impediment to *Klal Yisrael*, and the pain caused by his sale would be dwarfed by the damage Yosef could do had he not been sold.

With this background, how can the *Medrash* imply that Yehuda would have changed his mind had he understood the anguish he would cause? Yehuda *did* understand it, yet he felt this was the right thing to do nevertheless.

It seems the answer is obvious. Yes, Yehuda must have understood very clearly what he was doing. However, there was just a bit he was missing. Having never experienced the anguish firsthand, he still couldn't truly grasp what he was doing to his own father. And that subtle difference was enough to spell the difference between doing the right thing and making a grave mistake.

Sometimes, we can be *sure* that we are doing the right thing. It can be something as simple as sleeping through *Shacharis* (telling ourselves we need the sleep) to something as awful as speaking terrible *lashon harah* about someone (telling ourselves that it is permitted).

We find that despite our confidence, we can be drastically wrong. It is a wise practice to check oneself, have I truly chosen the correct course of action?

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

How do we break through and realize that we are missing critical information, when we don't even know that we are missing that information.

The first thing to recognize is that Hashem doesn't ask of us anything we can't do. We must try our best, but we are not expected to do the impossible.

That being said, we oftentimes are aware of more than we care to realize. In other words, we sometimes consciously or subconsciously choose to ignore information that can really change our perspective.

The trick is to tease out that information. One way to do this is to sit down and think about our motivation. Would we feel this way if the stakes were lower, if the other person was our friend, and so on? Are we really motivated by pursuit of *avodas Hashem*, or are there other aspects that are driving us?

As we ask ourselves these questions, we may find that we are purposefully ignoring certain aspects of the story, since our motivation runs contrary to those facts.

Get used to questioning yourself! It will give you that much more confidence when you are truly doing the right thing.

1 *Medrash Tanchuma Vayigash* 9

2 *Rashi* on *Bamidbar* 27:16 s.v. אלקי הרוח

Mazel Tov!

Ohr Yisrael would like to wish a heartfelt Mazel Tov to Rabbi and Mrs. Zions on the birth of a baby girl. May the Zionses have much Nachas from their new daughter.

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**Because a person's earthly
desires are generally ruled by the
subconscious, they are particularly
powerful and dangerous... the
purpose of Mussar is to reach to the
subconscious... - R' Yisrael Salanter, Ohr
Yisrael Letter 6**

BANK ON IT

Mr. Dovid Tellem* ran a free-loan *gemach* for his *shul*. He created it after his father passed away, and over time it grew to the point where he was easily in charge of five hundred thousand dollars, perhaps more. Through word-of-mouth, people came to realize that Mr. Tellem can be trusted to get the job done. Though the *gemach* was generally for the use of the members of the *shul*, Mr. Tellem could not turn away anyone who needed help. And so, people contacted him from all over, looking for a loan to tide them over, sometimes for a month, and sometimes for a couple of years.

Each case was dealt with on its own merits, and great sensitivity was used in each instance. But the common thread in each situation was the perseverance of Mr. Tellem. If a person showed that they needed the money, Mr. Tellem did everything within his power to get the money to the person. Even when the *gemach* was totally tapped out, Mr. Tellem made the necessary phone calls, and would not take no for an answer.

One day the *gemach* received a call from a woman in another community in New York. She desperately needed a couple of thousand dollars, and she needed it by 5 P.M. She had a bill due, and if she didn't pay by that time she would be in great trouble.

Having interacted with this woman before, Mr. Tellem already knew that her case was truly a sad one. She was a widow, trying to raise her family on a meager income. She had to take loans from some truly unpleasant people, and now she was trying to extricate herself. However, it was already 2 P.M., and Mr. Tellem could not think of a way to get the money to her.

Mr. Tellem called his son, Tzvi, and asked him for any ideas. "She can't take a car service to you? How about using some of the newer ways to send money peer-to-peer?" Every idea was shot down. She couldn't get to him in time, she didn't have access to a computer, and so on.¹

At this point, Tzvi became frustrated. "Look, she wants the money, she should come get it! I don't see why it's on you to figure out how to give her thousands of dollars."

There was silence on the other end of the phone. After a moment, "Tzvi, what would you say if this was your sister or your daughter? Don't tell me it can't be done, tell me how to do it!"

Now it was Tzvi's turn to be silent. "Let me call you back, I'll think about it." Tzvi hung up, sat down, and thought. After a couple of minutes, he had it. Calling back, he excitedly asked, "The bank that she uses — is there a branch near you? Why not walk into the branch and just deposit it directly into her account."

"Brilliant! Thank you."

Tzvi hung up with a smile on his face, and the realization that you can accomplish great things, if you dig deep enough.

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- A person can work his whole life on his anger, but if he doesn't truly understand what drives him deep down, it may not have any effect.¹
- Despite their wisdom, intellect, and vast Torah knowledge, a scholar may not serve on the *Sanhedrin* if he hasn't raised children recently, since memories fade, and they will not properly relate to what it means to be merciful.²

¹ *Ohr Yisrael* Letter 31

² *Sanhedrin* 26b, *Rashi ad. loc.*, s.v. וְקָן