



Vayiqash – Learning To Let Go

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The mounting tension reached a pinnacle with Yosef's revelation of his true identity to his brothers. The much anticipated reunion finally occurs. The emotional dam breaks and a deluge of tears envelop the sons of Yaakov. Tears representing the pain of the past intermingled with tears of joy for what all hope will be a peaceful and loving future. The brothers are speechless. They have no words for the brother they maintained was dead. They have no response to the simple statement, "*I am Joseph.*" They are overwhelmed, ashamed and profoundly broken. Yosef sensing his brothers anxiety makes an amazing statement, "*And now, you did not send me here, but God, and He made me a father to Pharaoh, a lord over all his household, and a ruler over the entire land of Egypt (Bereishis 45:8).*" *It wasn't you my dear brothers who sent me to this place, it was God! This was all part of the plan.* But how can Yosef say this? Was it his right to purge his brothers of their iniquitous sin? Did Yosef really believe that his brothers were blameless simply because everything worked out in the end? How can Yosef say, *LO ATEM SHE'LACHTEM OSI - it wasn't you who sent me here!* Was it not these very brothers who stripped him of his clothing and dignity, threw him in a pit to die and afterwards decided to spare him by selling him to a group of Ishmaelites? And now - it wasn't them! Furthermore, Yosef seems to convey a very different message just a few verses earlier, "*But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that God sent me before you (Bereishis 45:5).*" In this verse Yosef clearly states that it was the brothers who sold him. True, God had a plan, but the brothers still bear the responsibility of having sold Yosef.

Was Yosef absolving his brothers of all responsibility since it was all part of the Divine plan or were the brothers responsible for their brutal behavior despite the fact that all worked out?

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Vayiqash Siman 5*) sheds light on this dynamic. Immediately prior to Yosef's revelation, the exchange between Yosef and his brothers becomes heated and was dangerously close to turning violent. Yosef understood that he must reveal his identity. "*Yosef said to his brothers, 'Did you not tell me that your brother died? In fact I purchased him and I will bring him out to you.' At this point Yosef called out, 'Joseph son of Jacob come to me, Joseph son of Jacob come to me and speak with your brothers who sold you.' The brothers began scanning all corners of the room to catch a glimpse of their long lost brother. Yosef turned and said to them, 'Why do you look here and there - I am Yosef your brother.' In that moment their souls left their bodies and they were unable to answer him.*"

Yosef was conflicted; on one hand he was overjoyed to see his brothers and feel a sense of belonging and familial security. On the other hand, Yosef realized that these were the very men who turned an indifferent ear to his cries; these were the men who were supposed to be his beloved protectors but instead became rage-filled antagonists. These were the men who were ready to murder their own flesh and blood. Perhaps, I cannot have a relationship with them. Perhaps, it is better to remain distant and repay them in kind so they can suffer as I did. And so Yosef calls out, "*Yosef the son of Yaakov come to me, Yosef the son of Yaakov come to me*" - he is looking for his self, for his identity. Who should I be? What should I do? Should I seek revenge or reconciliation?

Yosef finds resolution with one simple phrase - *I am Yosef your brother.* I choose to be your brother and not an indifferent, vengeful tyrant. I make this choice not because you have earned it – I make this choice because it is best for me. Yosef understood that if he held on to the rage and animosity it would consume him from within. In order to continue to lead a healthy and productive life – he had to let go of his pain.

We now understand the apparent contradiction in Yosef's approach. When Yosef first revealed himself to his brothers he placed the responsibility for his circumstances on their shoulders. As the conversation continues Yosef says, "*Despite your responsibility and culpability, I choose not to focus on what you did to me rather, I will focus on the Divine Providence in this entire episode.*" "*It wasn't you who sold me,*" is not a statement of fact, but a statement of emotional resolve and strength. I choose not to focus on the hurt and pain you have visited upon me. I choose to focus on the positive results of this tumultuous episode.

This emotional strength was the foundation of Yosef's identity. "*And Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, for "God has caused me to forget all my toil and all my father's house (Bereishis 41:51).*" I have to learn to "forget" and let go in order to build a future. The Torah continues, "*And the second one he named Ephraim, for "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction (Bereishis 41:51).*" No matter how much success he encountered - Egypt was a land of suffering and affliction for Yosef. Yet, he became "fruitful" - how? Because he was able to let go, he was able to "forget," he was able to release the anger, animosity and hurt that was rightfully his. It was this forgetfulness that allowed Yosef to grow, thrive and build a successful life.

We each have certain things that keep us tethered to our past and present while preventing us from building a future. For some it may be pain caused by another, residual anger from a failed relationship, or some unresolved life issue that has been too difficult to address. There are painful realities that sap us of our emotional strength and prevent us from self-actualizing. Yosef teaches us to find the strength to identify those things that hold us back and to look within to find the courage to finally let them go.