Jewish Tribune – Vayigash

**The Strength of Silence**

Yosef cannot restrain himself any longer. He asks all the Egyptians to leave the room and reveals himself to his brothers, saying the immortal words:

אֲנִי יוֹסֵף, הַעוֹד אָבִי חָי

I am Yosef, is my father still alive?

Yosef reassures his brothers that he bears no grudge, and that Hashem has orchestrated the whole story. He says:

וְהִנֵּה עֵינֵיכֶם רֹאוֹת, וְעֵינֵי אָחִי בִנְיָמִין, כִּי פִי הַמְדַבֵּר אֲלֵיכֶם

And behold, your eyes see, as well as the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth speaking to you.

Based on the Gemoro in Megillah (16b), Rashi explains:

השוה את כולם יחד לומר שכשם שאין לי שנאה על בנימין אחי, שהרי לא היה במכירתי, כך אין בלבי שנאה עליכם.

He compared them all together, saying that “just as I harbour no hatred against my brother Binyomin, for he was not involved in selling me, so too I do not have any hatred in my heart against you.”

It really is quite astonishing. How could Yosef bear no hatred?

His life had been turned upside down by his brothers! He had been torn away from his beloved father at the tender age of seventeen when his childhood came to an abrupt end. He had been exposed to the decadent way of Egyptian life and endured twelve years in prison. How could he so quickly and genuinely declare that he bore them no hatred?

Perhaps the answer lies in a famous Chinuch.

The Chinuch (mitzva 241) talks about taking revenge and says that a person must realise that everything comes from HKBH. All things, good or bad, that befall a person ultimately are decreed by Hashem. When a person suffers harm or indignation from another person, he should look upward and inward and not outward.

Citing the famous example of Dovid Hamelech, who after being cursed by Shimi ben Geira, resists attempt to immediately exact punishment and instead says:

כֹּה יְקַלֵּל, כִּי ה' אָמַר לוֹ קַלֵּל

So let him curse, because Hashem has said to him “Curse” (Shmuel 2, 16,11)

Yosef learned this superhuman strength, the realisation that HKBH runs the world and remaining silent amidst all the noise, from his mother Rochel. The Medrash (Tanchuma Parshas Vayeitzei 6) says that when Yaakov sent gifts to Rochel, Lovon intervened and gave them to Leah, and Rochel remained silent. Noting this, the Medrash adds:

א"ר שמעון בן גמליאל כל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says, all my days I have been raised amongst the wise and I have found nothing better for the body than silence.

The Medrash continues and says that this middah was inherited by her descendants and they also displayed it. Not just Yosef, but Binyomin too.

When the goblet was found in Binyomin’s bag, the brothers initially thought that he had stolen it. Remarkably, the Medrash (Berieishis Rabbah 44) says that the brothers called him גנב בר גנבתא, a thief the son of a thief; Rochel had stolen the idols from her father Lovon and now Binyomin stole the goblet. They beat him and he remained silent, and the brothers only desisted when he made an oath that he had not taken it.

And it didn’t stop at Binyomin. He bequeathed this trait to his descendants. The Medrash (Tanchuma Parshas Vayeitzei 6) continues:

בנימין בנה האבן שלו מן האפוד ישפה יודע במכירת יוסף ושותק וזהו ישפה יש לו פה ושותק, שאול בן בנה ואת דבר המלוכה לא הגיד לו (שמואל א) אסתר אין אסתר מגדת מולדתה (אסתר ב)

Her son Binyomin, whose stone in the ephod, was a jasper (yashfeh), knew of the sale of Yosef and remained silent. The word jasper (*yashfeh*) may be read as “he has a mouth” (*yesh peh*) but he nevertheless remains silent. Shaul was descended from her: *But concerning the matter of the kingdom, he did not tell him*. Regarding Esther (another descendant) it is said: *Esther had not made known her people nor her lineage*.

Both Shaul and Esther, descendants of Rochel, displayed this trait too.

Interestingly, the fitting reward for Binyamin was that the Beis HaMikdash, the international display that Hashem runs the world, would be in his territory.

Remaining silent is a very difficult trait to master. A person who was one of the hijacked passengers at Entebbe relates that the operation mission was top secret even after the event and all soldiers involved were strictly forbidden to disclose any details. But the Israeli army knew this would not be easy. The rescue was international news and the soldiers involved were heroes. Everyone was desperate to hear their stories. The IDF arranged psychological training for a whole year to help those involved in the rescue mission keep silent about the operational details.

Remaining silent is exceptionally hard; responding to provocation is highly tempting. We are fortunate to have role models to emulate so that we can aspire to this lofty level.

**Rabbi Golker is the** **Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**