



Parashat Vayigash 5772 - #215

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On the Parashah...

Yosef's Talent

[Tal Chermon]

In this parashah, we again encounter Yosef's organizational talent. It reached its peak as he rearranged the agrarian and economic policy of the Egyptian kingdom. Since Egypt was the pivotal point of the ancient world, this amounted to changing the entire economic structure of the time. The Torah elaborates in detail on all the economic steps taken by Yosef during those depressed years. He accumulated all the money in Egypt, he bartered food in exchange for all the Egyptian livestock, he bought their land in exchange for food, he transferred the people to the cities and imposed a system of taxation.

Question: Why does the Torah inform us of all the intricacies of Egyptian agriculture? What difference does it make to us?

Answer: It is of great import because we see that Yosef created a just and equitable state of affairs. The economic and social significance of Yosef's actions was that all means of production were nationalized and then justly and equally redistributed. Firstly, he collected all the money, then all the cattle and finally all the land. He abolished private ownership. After nationalizing all means of production, he moved the people into the cities, thus breaking up the clan framework and creating a new socio-economic structure. Yosef then distributed the means of production that he had acquired to the people for their livelihood. He devised a progressive of their produce was handed over to the king while the rest remained as ample sustenance for their families. The Egyptian masses, deeply grateful for this new order, praised Yosef by saying: "You have saved our lives" (Bereshit 47:25). The Egyptians for their part were willing to forgo their freedom and to completely submit themselves to the king so they suggested: "Let us, with our land, be serfs to Pharaoh" (ibid. v. 19). Yosef did

not accept their advice because slavery was contrary to his plan for social justice and therefore, "Yosef bought [only] the land of Egypt for Pharaoh (ibid. v. 20).

In order to achieve one's goals one has to wait for a ripe opportunity. Had Yosef tried to introduce his innovations, at a time of plenty when private property was flourishing, it would have been foiled because of fierce opposition. He was aware of this and thus waited for the right moment to realize his vision of social and economic justice.

Yaakov Avinu acted the same way with Esav. He knew that chronologically Esav was the firstborn but he also knew that it was he, Yaakov and not Esav, who was destined to perform the firstborn's mission of building the spiritual basis of the world. But to confront Esav and request the birthright would definitely not work, so he bided his time. One day Esav arrived home from hunting famished and exhausted. He said to Yaakov: "Fill me up with that red stuff" (ibid. 25:29). This was the ideal opportunity to accomplish his plan for true justice. The ways of the world are tortuous and complicated and they are strewn with obstacles that prevent truth from emerging smoothly. The man of virtue has to follow events waiting to seize the opportunity when circumstances are ripe, to illuminate the world with truth and to establish practical procedure for its accomplishment.

Rav Aviner on... Same question to various Rabbis

Question: Is it permissible to ask the same question to more than one Rabbi?

Answer: It depends on what you are asking. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (7a) says that one who asks a Rabbi a question and he declares it impure may not ask another Rabbi who will declare it pure, and one who asks a Rabbi a question and he declares it forbidden may not ask another Rabbi who will declare it permissible. This ruling is quoted in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 242:31). Why is it forbidden to ask the same question a second time to a different Rabbi? Some explain that it is because of the honor of the first Rabbi (Rashi to Niddah 20b): You asked a question and don't like the answer so you are going to a different Rabbi?! You are shaming the first Rabbi! Others explain that when the first Rabbi rules, the object on which he ruled now has the status which he placed upon it. This means that if I ask a Rabbi if something is kosher or not and he rules that it is not kosher, the ruling of another Rabbi cannot change it. The Halachah follows the second explanation (This is the opinion of most Rishonim – Rabbis of the Middle Ages – including Ra'avad, Ramban, Rashba quoted in the Ran Avodah Zarah ibid. and Rosh, ibid. 1:3). Therefore, when I ask a Rabbi a question about a piece of meat, the meat has the status of his ruling, but if I have another piece of meat and I have the same question, I can ask a different Rabbi. There are also questions regarding a person's activities: How do I act in a

given situation? A Rabbi's ruling fixes the status of an object, but not the status of a person's activities. Regarding an object, you can only ask one Rabbi, but regarding a person's conduct, you can ask various Rabbis. Even in the case of an object, if I really, really want to ask a second Rabbi, I can ask a second Rabbi if I tell him that I already asked the first Rabbi. If the second Rabbi so desires, he can talk to the first Rabbi and try to convince him to change his mind (Rama ibid.). I remember that someone once asked me a question regarding the laws of Family Purity and I answered: she is impure. The questioner went and asked Ha-Rav Mordechai Eliyahu. Ha-Rav Eliyahu called me and said: "Rav, look at it from this perspective and that perspective." I then understood that it was permissible to be lenient and I said: "I retract, she is pure." Furthermore, it is obvious that someone who asks a theoretical question may ask as many Rabbis as he wants. You may also ask questions to different Rabbis at different times, since all Rabbis are Torah.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Hilchot Sheleg – Laws of Snow

Blessing on seeing snow

Q: Is there a blessing on seeing snow?

A: No. It seems that snow was not a rare occurrence in Israel (see Tehillim 148 where King David said that we should praise Hashem for fire, hail, snow... and Yoma 35b where Hillel climbs on the roof of the yeshiva because he does not have enough money to pay to get in and snow falls on him).

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