**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**MIDRASH ON THE PARASHA**

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**Parashat Vayigash: On Leadership**

**Introduction**

In the wake of the Torah's account of Yehuda's confrontation with the ruler of Egypt — his brother Yosef in disguise — the words of *Chazal* in *Bereishit Rabba* 93 revolve around the issue of leadership. Over the course of this *shiur*,we will discuss several insights arising from their *derashot* regarding the nature and character of leadership.

**Realization of the Surety**

In the face of Ya’akov's hesitation to allow Binyamin to go down to Egypt, Yehuda accepts upon himself to serve as the guarantor of Binyamin's welfare: "I will be surety for him; of my hand shall you require him; if I bring him not to you, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame for ever" (*Bereishit* 43:9). Our Midrash deals with the uncompromising commitment born of the act of becoming a guarantor, from which there is no escape:

"Then Yehuda came near to him, and said: Oh my lord…" (*Bereishit* 44:18).

"My son, if you are become surety for your neighbor, if you have struck your hands for a stranger; you are snared by the words of your mouth, you are caught by the words of your mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver yourself" (*Mishlei* 6:1-3).

Rabbi Chanina said: Run away from three things, and cling to three things.

Run away from three things: From receiving a deposit, from annulments of marriage, and from becoming a trustee between a person and his fellow.

And cling to three things: *chalitza* (releasing a widow from the requirement of levirate marriage), releasing from vows and making peace between a person and his fellow.

Rabbi Berekhya said: "My son, if you are become surety for your neighbor."

Rabbi Shimon bar Abba said: It ought not to be called *pikadon* (deposit), but rather *puk don* (go out of this, avoid it).

Another explanation:

"My son, if you are become surety for your neighbor" — this is Yehuda, as it is stated: "I will be surety for him."

"You are snared by the words of your mouth, you are caught by the words of your mouth" — "If I bring him not to you, and set him before you."

"Do this now, my son" — cover yourself with dust and declare him as king over you.

"Then Yehuda came near to him, and said: Oh my lord." (*Bereishit Rabba* 93, 1, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1150-1151)

The *petichta* before us is comprised of two parts: the first relates to the force of a guarantee in principle, while the second connects "Then Yehuda came near" to his becoming a surety for Binyamin. The words of the Amoraim of Eretz Israel, Rabbi Chanina, Rabbi Berekhya and Rabbi Shimon bar Abba (of the third to fifth generations of Amoraim) in the first part appear also as a unit in the Talmud Yerushalmi in the context of annulment of marriage.

The verses brought from the book of *Mishlei* for the purpose of the *derasha* describe a surety as a trap or snare in which a person is inescapably caught. In the first part, this verse appears in the words of Rabbi Berekhya, who adds becoming a surety to the three things from which one must run away in the words of Rabbi Chanina, and he points to the two verses in *Mishlei* as relating to the four things.

In the second part of the *petichta*, it is not just these two verses that are expounded, but also, and primarily, the two verses that follow them: "Do this now, my son, and deliver yourself, seeing you are come into the hand of your neighbor; go, humble yourself, and urge your neighbor" (*Mishlei* 6:3-4). In contrast to the first two verses, which describe becoming a surety, these verses offer advice on how a person should get out of such a situation — one ought to humble and humiliate oneself in order to get out of it.

The Midrash connects this sequence of verses to the Torah's account concerning Yehuda, who is forced into the delusional act of a lone foreigner confronting one of the highest officials of a world empire in his own palace because of a guarantee that he has given. The wording of the *derasha*, however, "'Do this now, my son' — cover yourself with dust and declare him as king over you," relate less to the confrontation itself, and more to the flattery and acceptance of authority that are required of Yehuda.

What is the connection between this *derasha* and the issue of leadership? Does the use of the imperative in the verse and in the *derasha* "'Do this now, my son' — cover yourself with dust and declare him as king over you" indicate a positive attitude toward taking the initiative in a place from which there is no way out? The *derasha* does not praise one who upholds a guarantee that one has given or the act of giving a guarantee as a value. The attitude toward becoming a surety is similar to the attitude toward an oath: "Better is it that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay" (*Kohelet* 5:4). Yehuda's confrontation with Yosef results from absolute necessity. The *derasha* seems to touch upon a fundamental characteristic of leadership, namely, responding to a state of necessity. "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man" (Mishna, *Avot* 2:5). A person who assumes a role in order to address a situation crying out for rectification is a leader.

**Leadership by Consensus**

"For, lo, the kings assembled themselves, they came onward together. [They saw, straightaway they were amazed; they were affrighted, they hasted away. Trembling took hold of them there, pangs, as of a woman in travail]" (*Tehillim* 48:5-7).

"For, lo, the kings assembled themselves" — these are Yehuda and Yosef.

"They came onward (*averu*)together"— this one filled with anger (*evra*)against the other, and that one filled with anger against the other.

"They saw, straightaway they were amazed (*tamahu*)" — “And the men marveled (*vayitmehu*)one with another" (*Bereishit* 43:33).

"They were affrighted, they hasted away" — "And his brothers could not answer him [for they were affrighted at his presence]" (*Bereishit* 45:3).

"Trembling took hold of them there, pangs, as of a woman in travail" — these are the tribes.

They said: The kings are arguing with each other; of what concern is it to us.

It is fitting for a king to argue with a king.

"Then Yehuda came near to him."

"One is so near to another" (*Iyov* 41:8) — these are Yehuda and Yosef.

"That no air can come between them" (ibid.) — these are the tribes.

They said: The kings are arguing with each other; of what concern is it to us.

It is fitting for a king to argue with a king.

"Then Yehuda came near to him."

Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake [the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed]" (*Amos* 9:13).

"That the plowman shall overtake" — this is Yehuda; "the reaper" — this is Yosef [as it is stated], "For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field" (*Bereishit* 37:7).

"And the treader (*ve-dorekh*)of grapes" — this is Yehuda, as it is stated: "For I bend (*darakhti*) Yehuda for Me" (*Zekharya* 9:13).

"Him that sows (*be-moshekh*) seed" — this is Yosef, who drew (*mashakh*)his father's seed and brought them down to Egypt.

They said: The kings are arguing with each other; of what concern is it to us.

It is fitting for a king to argue with a king.

"Then Yehuda came near to him." (*Bereishit Rabba* 93, 2; 93, 5, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1151-1153)

The refrain in the three *derashot* is the statement of the tribes: "The kings are arguing with each other; of what concern is it to us. It is fitting for a king to argue with a king." The Midrash combines them into a single statement concerning the leadership of Yosef and Yehuda in the eyes of their brothers. The confrontation between Yehuda and Yosef confirms what is clear to any reader of this Torah section, and also to the brothers — that they are witnesses to a struggle in an arena that does not belong to them, in the league of the leaders. While we know that the emerging leadership is the internal leadership of Israel, the brothers, who do not yet know Yosef's true identity, see a different type of struggle.

The first *derasha* relates to the magnitude of the anger and fear in the confrontation between the two leaders, frightening the other brothers and causing them to stay away. This is accomplished by way of the exposition of the word *averu* in the verse "For, lo, the kings assembled themselves, they came onward (*averu*) together" in the sense of anger (*evra*).

The entire psalm in which this verse appears deals with the establishment of the city of God in Jerusalem and the fear of the kings because of it. The *derasha* turns the friction between the kings (Yehuda and Yosef) themselves into a source of fear for the tribes. In the end, however, this friction will pave the way for the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, which is the very thing that will bring about the building of the city of God. It is possible that the exposition of the words in the verse "pangs as of a woman in travail" as relating to the brothers' fear of the intensity of the encounter between Yosef and Yehuda comes to express the process arising before their eyes of the building of the leadership of the people of Israel. According to this, the energy of the clash between Yehuda and Yosef is vital and constructive.

The second *derasha* emphasizes the exclusivity of the struggle of Yehuda and Yosef, by way of the exposition of the word "air" (*ruach*) in the verse "One is so near to another, that no air (*ruach*)can come between them" (*Iyov* 41:8), in the sense of gain (*revach*). The context of this verse is a description of the might of the leviathan, which is immeasurable compared to that of all other creatures. Just as there is no resemblance between its power and that of the other creatures, so too the intensity of the encounter between Yehuda and Yosef creates a clear distinction between them, as kings, and the rest of the brothers. In contrast to the first *derasha*, here the figures of Yehuda and Yosef merge into a single entity.

In the third *derasha*, the militant aspect of Yehuda's confrontation with Yosef has disappeared altogether, and in its place use is made of agricultural metaphors of growth taken from a prophecy of consolation delivered by Amos: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt" (*Amos* 9:13). In this *derasha*, Yehuda and Yosef are identified as a pair of laborers working together; once as a plowman and a reaper — Yehuda beginning the process and Yosef completing it, and once as a treader of grapes and a sower of seeds — Yehuda completing one process at the same time that Yosef begins a second process. The harmony between them brings the entire house of Israel — the tribes — to a state of peace and prosperity ("and the mountains shall drop sweet wine").

These *derashot* touch on two central elements of leadership: the need for the people's recognition of the leadership, and the need for strength (spiritual, ideological) for leadership. All of these reveal themselves in times and in circumstances of friction or resistance to existing reality.

**Speech and Leadership**

The power of speech is the instrument to express a guarantee but also the instrument to make good on it. Yehuda's rhetoric is his main weapon as he stands before Yosef, like any person standing before a higher authority who must attain from the potentate what one wants. The Midrash refers explicitly to Yehuda's power of speech in general, and in relation to the content of his words and the way they are organized. Let us look at the general statements:

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (*Mishlei* 25:11).

Akilas translates: "Apples of gold in saucers of silver."

"A word fitly (*ofanav*)spoken."

Just as a wheel (*ofan*) shows itself to every side, so the words of Yehuda appeared (reasonable) to every side when he spoke to Yosef.

"Then Yehuda came near to him."

"Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out" (*Mishlei* 20:5).

This may be likened to a deep well full of cold water, whose waters are good.

But no person could drink from it.

Someone came and tied rope to rope, string to string, and drew from it and drank.

They all began to draw and drink from it.

Thus, Yehuda did not move, answering Yosef regarding each matter, until he understood his heart.

"Then Yehuda came near to him." (*Bereishit Rabba* 93, 3-4, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1152-1153)

Two metaphors are used in these *derashot*: a wheel and a well. The circular shape of the wheel is characterized by its symmetry — the center of the circle is at an equal distance from all of it edges — and thus this shape is considered an expression of perfection. According to this, the metaphor of a wheel describes the perfection of the content of Yehuda's words to Yosef "that appeared (reasonable) to every side."

The "apples of gold in settings of silver" which appear in the verse in *Mishlei* are a bed of gold covered with a silver mesh. Only through close observation may one see the gold through the silver, which is also a fine and precious metal, though not as valuable as gold. Therefore, the verse indicates the depth of wisdom in Yehuda's words, which is revealed through repeated contemplation of them. To this dimension of depth, the *derasha* adds that his words stand up to piercing criticism, to scrutiny from all sides, or by various people. In contrast, the parable of the well refers to the emotional dimension. Yosef's heart is a deep well, and Yehuda searches for and finds a way leading into it, in order to cancel the decree of Binyamin's slavery.

The wording of the parable that describes Yosef's heart as "a deep well full of cold water, and its waters were good," emphasizes the goodness inherent in Yosef's heart, which Yehuda works to reveal. Yehuda, therefore, brings good not only to himself and his brothers, but also to Yosef himself, who will be a source of blessing to all. According to the parable, this process is realized through Yehuda's speech. His words are not just a plethora of just arguments that are tastefully arranged, but — most importantly — answers coming from listening to each and every word uttered by Yosef.

**Conclusion**

The *derashot* discussed here touch upon three characteristics of leadership: stepping up to a mission that is dictated by necessity, which arises from the matter of the surety; the power of leaders and their recognition by the people; and the power of speech as a leader's most important tool.

(Translated by David Strauss)