

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PARSHAT VAYIGASH

### DVAR TORAH: "I AM YOSEF" MOMENTS

"Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef.'" (Bereishit 45:3)

When Yosef's brothers went through the ordeal of being accused as spies by the Egyptian viceroy, they were filled with questions: "Why is G-d doing this to us?" "Is it because of what we did to our brother – not listening to his pleas for mercy?" "Should we have listened to Reuven when he tried to stop us from spilling blood?" "Why is behind all of these strange happenings?"

But when they heard two words from Yosef, "אני יוסף" – "I am Yosef" – then everything became clear. With those two words all of their questions, wonders, and doubts lifted. The cause behind the whole progression of events became apparent in a moment.

The same thing will happen at the end of world history, says the Chafetz Chaim, זצ"ל. When the world hears those two words, "אני ה'" – "I am Hashem," all of our questions, doubts, and wonders about the events of our lives and of history will be resolved. All that is still wondrous in our eyes will make sense as all of humanity together sees how the Hand of G-d has done everything for our greatest good.

Our lives are periodically graced with similar revealing moments. Every now and then we are given the opportunity to get a glimpse at what is really going on. In a moment strange events make sense and strange behavior sensible.

The Tzaddik of Yerushalayim, Harav Aryeh Levin, זצ"ל, once shared such a moment he experienced himself (quoted by Simchah Raz in *איש צדיק היה*, p. 62). The episode happened near the beginning of the funeral procession of one of Yerushalayim's tsaddikim, Harav Elazar Rivlin, זצ"ל. Rav Aryeh noticed that a lifetime close friend of the niftar, Harav Shmuel Kook, זצ"ל, the brother of Harav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, זצ"ל, went into a store and was buying a vase. Rav Aryeh could not believe how a person who worked with and shared a deep and close friendship for decades could leave a funeral to go buy something. Rav Aryeh, a close friend of Rav Kook's brother, felt the obligation to give *תוכחה*, rebuke, to his friend for interrupting a mitzvah to be involved in mundane affairs. Rav Aryeh approached him and gently asked: "For years you were like a brother to the deceased; why did you leave his funeral to buy a vase?" The answer he received, said Rav Aryeh, inspired him to always judge people favorably.

"I've been taking care of a leper in the leper hospital, and he just died yesterday," said Rav Shmuel. "In order to avoid any chance of contamination, the doctors, who are not Jewish, want to burn all of his possessions – including his tefillin. I was shocked, and pleaded with them not to burn the tefillin. We finally agreed that if I bring a vase there before 12 noon, they'll bury the tefillin sealed within the vase and not burn them. It is approaching 12 now and I have to get to the leper hospital. That's why I left the funeral."

Strange behavior now made sense. What looked like callousness was really righteousness.

## SOURCE GUIDE: STARTLED BY HIS FACE

When Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers, they were not able to respond to him because they were startled. To say that they were startled by Yosef, the Torah uses the expression "נבהלו מפניו" and not נבהלו ממנו. The Shem Mishmuel asks: Why was מפניו chosen over ממנו? The starting point of his answer is that the literal translation of the word מפניו "from his face."

### A. The Verse

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>1. Bereishit 45:3</b><br/>Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" And his brothers were not able to respond to him because they were startled by him.</p> | <p><b>בראשית פרק מה:ג</b><br/>וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד אֲבִי<br/>הִי, וְלֹא יָקְלוּ אֶחָיו לְעֲנֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ<br/>מִפְּנָיו.</p> |
|---|---|

### B. A Straightforward Explanation

על דרך הפשט, following a straightforward understanding of the verse, the choice of מפניו over ממנו in the expression נבהלו מפניו makes sense in light of how the two words are used elsewhere in Tanach. The word מפניו appears relatively often, and is used for "from it," "from him," or "from us." מפניו, on the other hand, is relatively rare, appearing only 23 times. Without exception, it is used in contexts of fear, forming expressions like "fear him," "flee from him," and "startled by him." It is therefore the appropriate way to express Yosef's brothers' shock and fear.

### C. Yosef's Face

The Shem Mishmuel's answer to his own question taps into a midrashic theme. First, let us imagine: What did Yosef's face look like? Rashi (based on Tanchuma 2:2) answers:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>2. Rashi on Bereishit 37:3</b><br/>"Son of his old age" – Yosef was born near Yaakov old age. Unkelos explains: Yosef was Yaakov's wise son. <b>Another explanation: The shine of Yosef's face was similar to that of Yaakov's.</b></p> | <p><b>רש"י על בראשית לז:ג</b><br/>"בן זקנים" – שנוולד לו לעת זקנתו.<br/>ואונקלוס תרגם בר חכים הוא ליה. כל מה<br/>שלמד משם ועבר מסר לו. ד"א שהיה זיו<br/>איקונין שלו דומה לו.</p> |
|---|--|

This shifts the question to Yaakov: What did Yaakov's face look like?

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>3. Bava Metzia 84a</b><br/>The beauty (Rashi – the shine of his face) of Rav Kahana was similar to the beauty of Rabbi Avahu. The beauty of Rabbi Avahu was similar to the beauty of Yaakov Avinu. The beauty of Yaakov Avinu was similar to the beauty of Adam Harishon.</p> | <p><b>בבא מציעא פד.</b><br/>שופריה דרב כהנא מעין שופריה דרבי<br/>אבהו. שופריה דרבי אבהו מעין שופריה<br/>דיעקב אבינו. שופריה דיעקב אבינו מעין<br/>שופריה דאדם הראשון.</p> |
|---|--|

This now shifts the question to Adam Harishon: What did the face of the Man that Hashem created look like?

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>4. Vayikra Rabbah 20:2</b><br/>Reish Lakish quoted Rabbi Shimon son of Menasia: The protruding part of Adam Harishon's heel would make the sun seem dim; all the more so the shine of Adam's face.</p> | <p><b>ויקרא רבה כ:ב</b><br/>ריש לקיש בשם ר' שמעון בן מנסיא אמר<br/>תפוח עקיבו של אדם הראשון היה מכהה<br/>גלגל חמה קלסתר פניו על אחת כמה<br/>וכמה.</p> |
|--|---|

For other examples see Nedarim 49b (Rabbi Yehudah's face shone) and Rashi on Sanhedrin 31b (that Mar Ukva, also referred to as Natan Tzutzita, was a great תשובה בעל, a penitent, whose face shone when he refrained from sinning).

### C. Hiding the Shine

If Yosef's face shone like their father's, how did the brothers not recognize Yosef?

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>5. Shem Mishmuel Vayigash 5672</b><br/>... For up until now, when he hid himself, he also hid the appearance of his face ... They didn't recognize him at all and they thought he was no more than a wise man of the nations of the world. It was certainly not easy for him to hide himself so much – all the more so [to hide] from wise and righteous men like the tribes who must have understood the meaning behind a person's face ...</p> | <p><b>שם משמואל ויגש תרע"ב</b><br/>... דעד כה שהסתיר עצמו מהם הסתיר עצמו גם במראית פניו... לא הכירו בו מאומה והי' נדמה להם רק כאיש חכם מחכמי האומות ולא יותר, ובודאי לא נקל הוא להסתיר עצמו כ"כ, ומכל שכן בפני אנשים חכמים וצדיקים כמו השבטים שבודאי היו מבינים בצורת הפרצוף...</p> |
|--|---|

What happened when Yosef then revealed himself?

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>6. Shem Mishmuel Vayigash 5672</b><br/>Therefore, when he made himself known to them, all of the lights broke through even more. This is the nature of anything that is held back – when it breaks forth it comes out with a great power. His face must have certainly appeared extremely awesome.</p> | <p><b>שם משמואל ויגש תרע"ב</b><br/>וע"כ כשהתודע עצמו להם היו כל האורות שבפניו בוקעים עוד יותר, כטבע כל דבר העצור כשהתפרץ לצאת בוקע ויוצא בכח גדול מאד, והיו פניו בודאי נוראים מאד.</p> |
|--|--|

This is meaning of the expression in our verse, they were startled "by his face":

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>7. Shem Mishmuel Vayigash 5672</b><br/>And through this we can see how they were startled particularly by his face. The word נבהל connotes someone who stands astounded and profoundly affected by something. They said, "What is this? A moment ago he appeared to be a simple person and in a moment his appearance transformed to one of an extremely awesome angel of Hashem."</p> | <p><b>שם משמואל ויגש תרע"ב</b><br/>ובזה נבהלו מפניו דייקא. ולשון נבהל הוא כמו עומד משומם ומתפעל לאמר מה זאת, לפני רגע הי' נראה כאיש פשוט, וכמו רגע נהפך למראה מלאך ה' נורא מאד.</p> |
|--|---|

In that moment they got a glimpse at the real Yosef, the awesome and lofty individual he truly was. This caused them in a flash to realize how terribly wrong they had been about him. They were shocked, could not speak, and were embarrassed to lift up their faces before him.

The Shem Mishmuel then adds one postscript: "We can now understand the meaning of פני שבת נקבלה, let us receive the face of the Shabbat."

## 10TH OF TEVET BY RABBI SHAYA KARLINSKY

The month of Tevet opened with the conclusion of Chanukah, and in another few days we will be presented with the fast of Asarah b'Tevet, the Tenth of Tevet.

The official event given by the Mishnah for the fast of Asarah b'Tevet is the siege of Jerusalem by Nevuchadnetzar, three years before the actual destruction of the Holy Temple. On the face of it, this event lost its significance once the walls were breached and the Temple was eventually destroyed.

The Ba'al Halachot Gedolot, based on a Baraita in Masechet Sofrim, describes an additional event connected to Asarah b'Tevet: "On the eighth of Tevet, the Torah was translated into Greek in the days of King Talmi. It was as grave a day for the Jewish people as the day the Golden Calf was made, for the Torah could not be adequately translated. And darkness descended over the world for three days."

Translating the Torah into Greek seems like a neutral act, possibly even a positive one, enabling more people to have greater access to Torah wisdom. What about it was so terrible? What darkness did it create that merited comparing it to the making of the Golden Calf?

The Greek world view only acknowledges the reality of what is perceived with our senses and understood with the tools of human intellect. No “givens” precede or circumscribe man’s perspective of reality. A Greek understanding of Torah would be bound by that perspective.

But Torah is Divine wisdom, revealed to man by G-d, enabling man to have a glimpse of the “Mind of the Creator,” and the true purpose of creation. Man’s understanding of the Torah must be within that framework; but that comes only with great struggle and true striving for objectivity and character refinement, transforming one into a more G-d-like person.

The Greek perspective puts man, his goals, and his understanding at the center of the stage; and a Greek understanding of Torah is based on man’s subjectivity, celebrating his most base instincts.

Translating the Torah into Greek gave the false sense of it being accessible with no need for the struggle and refinement that is required to access Divine Wisdom. But this leads to its misinterpretation, encapsulated in the critique that the Torah simply “could not be translated in an adequate way.”

The Torah provides man with the opportunity to illuminate the hidden realities of G-d’s world. What King Talmai commissioned was a document to hide that illumination, replacing clarity with the illusions of human instinct. Reality being replaced by illusion is the root of idol worship, and the “mother” of idol worship is the Golden Calf, thinking you are “seeing G-d” when you aren’t. When the Torah you study has been “translated into Greek,” emptied of its transcendent nature, you think you understand the world, but you are actually creating your own world.

The culmination of the three days of darkness coincided with the anniversary of the siege of Jerusalem by Nevuchadnetzar centuries earlier, the event for which the fast was formally legislated. The common denominator between the two calamities is the principle that things of value need protection. When not cared for properly, they deteriorate. Deterioration is a gradual process, and it may not be noticeable while it is happening. The fast of Asarah b’Tevet was instituted to mourn deterioration, not actual destruction. Because the failure to perceive deterioration and protect against it is the first step towards destruction.

In a world built on “Torah translated into Greek,” fantasy overshadows reality; the shallow triumphs over depth; we value the surface rather than the substance. Without overtly destroying Torah, it leads to its deterioration. We are fasting to remind us that we must invest hard work in reversing the deterioration in our connection to the most precious gift that G-d has given us – His Torah.

שבת שלום ומבורך

This issue is dedicated in memory of  
ז"ל Moshe ben Yosef

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples’ programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

To dedicate a Taste of Text, please email Rabbi Freedman at  
[rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com](mailto:rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com)

For back issues and other articles by Rabbi Freedman please see  
[www.moshefreedman.com](http://www.moshefreedman.com)