



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego Study Guide**

*Vayigash* תשפג

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## **Partners In Torah San Diego**

### **Mission Statement:**

**Partners In Torah San Diego is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

**Partners in Torah San Diego has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.**

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming.**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

After sitting in prison for 12 years, Yosef was suddenly called up to interpret Pharaoh's two disturbing dreams. Yosef accurately interpreted the dreams, which warned Pharaoh of an impending 7-year famine that would wipe out all life in Egypt and its surrounding countries. The dreams also told of seven years of unprecedented plenty that would precede the seven years of famine. Yosef advised the king to store up the bounty from the seven years of plenty to provide sustenance for the seven years of famine that would follow. The Midrash informs us that Pharaoh and his wise men were enthralled with the plan but did not know how to store wheat for such a long time without it rotting. Yosef revealed the secret of mixing in a small measure of the dirt in which the wheat grew to preserve it.

Perceiving that Yosef was very wise, Pharaoh put him in charge of the entire land and all its affairs, including the collection, storage, and distribution of the food to the entire region. Yosef had storage houses built to store the abundance of excess grain for the coming famine years.

Two years into the famine, Egypt was the only country with food, and hungry people from countries all around came to purchase grain. Yaakov, in Israel, also sent his ten sons to purchase food from Egypt.

It was now a full 22 years after they had sold Yosef (one year in Potifar's house, 12 years in prison, 7 years of plenty, 2 years of famine), and after seeing their father Yaakov's distress during all of those years, the brothers decided that when visiting Egypt they would try to find Yosef to return him to his father. To this end, in an effort to cover as much ground as possible, they entered Egypt from ten different entrance points. This unusual behavior was reported to Yosef, and the brothers were brought before Yosef for interrogation. The Torah tells us that he immediately recognized them, but they did not recognize him. He was a seventeen-year-old boy when they sold him, but now was an adult with a full beard.

Yosef used their peculiar entry into Egypt as a ruse to accuse them of being spies. Why else would they enter through ten different entrances? They obviously wanted to see as much of the land as possible.

In their exchange with Yosef to explain their behavior and prove their innocence, it came out that they had another, younger brother, at home. To determine if his brothers had fully regretted their hatred towards him many years earlier, Yosef seized the opportunity to see how they would treat his younger brother Binyamin, his only sibling from his mother Rachel.

He told them (Genesis 42:19,20):

יֵט) אִם כְּנִיִּים אַתֶּם אֲחֵיכֶם אֶחָד יֵאָסֵר בְּבַיִת מִשְׁמַרְכֶּם וְאַתֶּם לָכוּ הַבְּיָאוּ שֹׁבֵר רַעְבוֹן בְּתֵיכֶם

כ:) וְאֵת אֲחֵיכֶם הַקָּטָן תִּבְיָאוּ אֵלַי וְיֵאֱמְנוּ דְבָרֵיכֶם וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן

19) *“If you are truthful people, let one of your brothers be imprisoned in your place of confinement while you go and bring provisions for the hunger of your households. 20) Then bring your youngest brother to me so your words will be verified and you will not die.”*

The brothers were taken aback by this turn of events. Such allegations are not supposed to happen to Yaakov’s perfectly righteous sons. Hashem watches over them very carefully, and all matters go as they should. How, here, they were suspected of being spies?

The brothers realized that this had to be a punishment for some type of sin. But what could that be? Selling Yosef? Not possible.

Our Sages explain that the brothers had actually convened a court, and tried Yosef on charges of being a רודף (“rodef - pursuer”). A “rodef” is one who pursues an innocent person to kill him, the rule being that anyone who is able must save the innocent victim from his pursuer, even by killing him to accomplish this. *The logic is that a person who is using his life to take the life of an innocent person forfeits his right to life.*

He was not given life for this. The Torah teaches us: **הבא להרגך השכם** - להרגו - *If someone tries to kill you, you kill him first!*

The brothers felt they had hard evidence to support their position. The Torah tells us (Genesis 37:2):

**וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם רָעָה אֶל אָבִיהֶם :**

*2) and Joseph would bring evil reports about them to their father:*

Yosef related his brothers' sins to his father. He claimed that they would cut off and eat a piece of flesh from an animal before it died, something forbidden as one of the seven Noahide laws. Further, he claimed that they were acting inappropriately with women. Finally, he claimed that his brothers were treating the children of the former maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah as slaves.

The brothers felt that Yosef's goal in reporting their sins to their father was to disqualify them as heirs to the legacy of Avraham and Yitzchak, and for him to remain their only heir.

The precedent, notably, had been set. Avraham had two sons, Yitzchak and Yishmael; but only Yitzchak was chosen to carry on Avraham's legacy. Yitzchak, too, had Yaakov and Esav, yet only Yaakov was chosen to carry on Yitzchak's legacy. The brothers alleged that Yosef was trying to accomplish the very same thing with them, attempting to become the fourth patriarch and leaving them out of the picture.

Although Yosef was certainly not trying to physically "kill" his brothers, in their eyes he was murdering them spiritually by eliminating their entire spiritual future and preventing them from becoming the kernel of the Jewish nation. They felt themselves worthy of being the building blocks of the nation that would ultimately receive the Torah on Sinai and carry Hashem's message to the world. Yet, in their eyes, Yosef was trying to

stop all of this. This was the basis for their judgment to kill him. He was guilty of a capital crime!

The brothers forbade anyone from revealing Yosef's guilty judgment to Yaakov. Hashem, Himself, abided by this ban by not revealing to Yaakov through prophesy what had happened to Yosef. Yitzchak, also knew what had happened to Yosef, but also abided by this prohibition, and did not reveal it to Yaakov. If Hashem and Yitzchak Avinu respected the prohibition of the brothers, we see, that the brothers were fully justified in their judgment. A judge can only pass judgment based on the evidence presented to him, and all the evidence against Yosef pointed clearly to his guilt.

If so, what was their crime? Rabbi Ovadia Seforno (1480-1550) explains that it is revealed in this verse.

(כא) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו אָבֵל אֲשֶׁמִים אָנַחְנוּ עַל אָחִינוּ אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוֹ אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא שָׁמְעֵנוּ עַל כֵּן בָּאָה אֵלֵינוּ הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת

21) *They said one to another, "Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as **we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us** and we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has come upon us."*

They realized that although they felt obligated by law to kill him, they did it too coldly. He cried and pleaded with them, and they just indifferently ignored his pleas. They needed to go about the whole matter with sympathy and compassion. He was their brother, and they should have felt terrible and sad that they had to treat him in such a harsh way. For this they were worthy of punishment and for this they felt guilty.

There is an important lesson for us here. We may find ourselves in a situation where we have to administer a punishment to someone. Maybe our child, employee or sibling. It is long overdue and they surely deserve it. Still, we must do it with compassion and regret. We should feel sympathy for the victim and wish that we didn't have to give the punishment at all. The brothers were found guilty because they lacked this empathy for their brother.

This concept has many applications. For example, sometimes one may ask us for charity and we do not have money to give them. Instead of feeling relieved and sending the person coldly away by telling him, "I don't have money," we could commiserate with him and have feelings of compassion for his plight of having to collect charity for himself. Even though we are justified for not giving, the "*not giving*" should be with sympathy and compassion.

Yosef then imprisoned Shimon and sent the others home. The brothers went home without Shimon and told their father what had befallen them with the Viceroy. Yaakov could not conceive of sending Binyamin, his last and only son from his beloved wife Rachel, to Egypt. If something would happen to Binyamin, Yaakov would be unable to live through it. He held out as long as he possibly could, but, ultimately, they needed more food, and the brothers needed to return to Egypt to purchase it. Because Yosef had made it very clear that they shouldn't return without Binyamin, Yaakov had to acquiesce. He entrusted Binyamin to Yehudah who took full responsibility for him.

Upon their return with Binyamin, Yosef was very pleased to see his younger brother as an adult. Binyamin was eight years old when Yosef disappeared. Everything seemed to go smoothly, until, as they were on their way home with Shimon, Binyamin, and a new ration of food, they suddenly heard the sound of horses pursuing them. It was Yosef's men coming after them!

“How could you have the audacity to steal the Viceroy’s personal goblet?” they asked.

“What are you talking about?” they responded. “How could you suspect any of us of committing such a terrible crime?”

Long story short, they indeed found the goblet in Binyamin’s saddlebag. Yosef had it planted there to frame Binyamin so that Yosef could keep him as a slave and let the others go home with the food. He really wanted to see if the other brothers would go to bat for Binyamin to save him.

Yehuda, the brothers’ leader and spokesman, tried to clear Binyamin of the crime by telling Yosef that if Binyamin had stolen it, he would not have placed it in his *own* saddle bag. That would only incriminate him if it was found out. Binyamin is the *least* likely person to have stolen the goblet, so he should go home to his father, and the rest of them will remain as slaves to serve the sentence.

Yosef would not hear of it, saying, “That would be unjust! Just the one who stole it will be my slave, and the rest of you can go home to your father.”

Because Binyamin was the only one being targeted, the brothers realized that this was the opportunity to correct the sin that they had committed with Yosef. Here they were being given the chance to save Binyamin and restore him to his father, the antidote to what they did to Yosef. They would not squander this opportunity. They would spare no efforts to secure Binyamin’s release, even if it meant that they would have to fight against the entire country.

This is where our parshah *Vayigash* picks up the story, beginning with the words (Bereshit 44:18),

(יח) וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה

*And Yehuda approached him (Yosef)*



Yehuda passionately pleaded with Yosef to let Binyamin return to his father. His main argument was that since Binyamin is Yaakov's only remaining son from his beloved wife Rachel, he is so precious to his father that if they return without him, Yaakov will be unable to bear it and will die from the grief.

Yosef was so touched by the brothers' efforts on Binyamin's behalf that he was convinced that they had properly repented for having sold him. He could not hold back, and with flowing tears, he revealed himself to his brothers.

Here is how it went. (Genesis 45:1,3)

(א) וְלֹא יָכַל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכָל הַנֹּצְבִים עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָל  
אִישׁ מֵעָלָי וְלֹא עָמַד אִישׁ אֶתוֹ בְּהִתְוֹדַע יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחָיו

(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד אָבִי הִי וְלֹא יָכְלוּ אָחָיו  
לְעַנּוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנָיו

*1) Now Yosef could not restrain himself in the presence of all who stood before him, so he called out, "Remove everyone from before me!" Thus no one remained with him when Yosef made himself known to his brothers.*

*3) And Yosef said to his brothers. "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him because **they were confounded before him.***

The Torah commentaries offer different explanations as to what exactly it was that so confounded the brothers when they finally realized that the difficult Viceroy was none other than their brother Yosef whom they sold so many years ago.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelewitz זצ"ל (1902-1979) explains their total shock in this way.

When, 22 years earlier, the brothers saw Yosef approaching, they began plotting to kill him. This is what they said (Genesis 37:19,20):

יט) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו הֲנֵה בֹעַל הַחֲלֻמוֹת הַלְזָה בָּא  
כ) וְעַתָּה לָכֵן וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנִשְׁלְכֵהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת וְאָמַרְנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה  
אֲכָלְתָהוּ וְנִרְאָה מֵהַיּוֹ חֲלֻמֹתָיו

19) *And they said to one another, "Look! That dreamer is coming! 20) So now, come and let us kill him, and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then we shall see what will become of his dreams."*

They thought that throwing him into the pit would prevent his dreams from coming true. In reality, however, their actions only brought his dreams to fruition. They now realized that were merely Hashem's tool to bring forth His plan.

We learn from this that it is impossible to thwart Hashem's plan. Hashem holds all the cards, and He will bring forth the result that He decreed no matter what we do. Whatever tactics we employ to try to get things to go our way, Hashem will use to achieve His goal.

HaRav Eliezer Menachem Schach זצ"ל (1899-2001) asks, "Why couldn't the brothers answer Yosef? Why couldn't they just tell him that he had been tried in a court of law that found him guilty of being a *rodef*?"

HaRav Shach explains that they then realized how wrong their judgment of Yosef was. They had judged him for death based on evidence that seemed irrefutable to them; yet, they now saw with absolute clarity that their vision was tainted with jealousy and that they were not impartial in their judgment. They were astounded to realize how a person can think he is 100% correct while in reality he is 100% wrong. This startling revelation stunned them.

Rav Shach points out that this is true of us, too. We feel confident that when we will stand before our Creator for judgment that we will have

all the answers for how we acted and how we were careful to do only the right thing. But in heaven, without the tinted glasses of our desires and biases, we will see, with perfect clarity, how our decisions were all influenced by those desires and biases and were not objective at all. The lesson we learn from the great and holy sons of Yaakov is that nobody is exempt from these biases; if the brothers were not, we surely aren't either.

HaRav Shach adds: *“On the day of judgment, the truth is revealed to a person with all its intensity. Hence, the embarrassment that one will feel over the mistake is a punishment even more severe than the punishment given for the actual deed. Because when a person sees how the critical thinking that he was so confident was correct, was actually distorted by his biases and desires, he will be very embarrassed that he had fooled himself so.”*

This dovetails with another reason why the brothers were so shocked to learn that the Viceroy was Yosef. They wondered to themselves, “How is it possible that we didn't figure it out? It is so obvious that this is why he was giving us so much trouble! We missed so many obvious clues!”

They realized that the reason that they could not figure it out was because they didn't want to. The last thing in the world they wanted to see was the fulfillment of Yosef's dreams; therefore, because they would not entertain the possibility of Yosef being the Viceroy, they could not see it no matter how obvious it was.

This applies to us as well. No matter how obvious something is, if we are not open to it, we will never see it. Our mind selectively sees only what it wants to see. This is scary, because when we come upstairs, we will suddenly see things that were right there in front of us, yet we didn't see because we didn't want to see them.

The Bais Halevi (Rabbi Yosef Dov Soleveichik - 1820-1892) quotes the following Midrash (Bereshit Rabba 93:10):

(י) ויתן את קולו בבכי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו אבא כהן ברדלא אמר אוי לנו מיום הדין אוי לנו מיום התוכחה ... יוסף קטן של שבטים היה ולא היו יכולים לעמוד בתוכחתו הה"ד ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו לכשיבא הקב"ה ויוכיח כל אחד ואחד לפי מה שהוא שנאמר (תהלים נ) אוכיחך ואערכה לעיניך על אחת כמה וכמה

*Abba Cohen Bardela said: Woe unto us from the day of judgment, woe unto us from the day of criticism. Yosef was the youngest of the tribes, and they couldn't stand up to his criticism, can you imagine how it is going to be when Hashem criticizes each of us **according to who we are**, ... how much more embarrassed we are going to be!*

The Bais Halevi asks a number of questions on this Midrash. (1) Where do we find that Yosef criticized his brothers? All he said was, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" Also, (2) why did he ask them again if his father was still alive? Hadn't he just asked them how their father was? And (3) what is the meaning of the words that Hashem is going to criticize us "**according to who we are?**"

He answers that Yehuda's plea to Yosef to free Binyamin was based on their father Yaakov not being able to bear losing Binyamin as he would surely die from the shock. To this Yosef asked Yehuda, "I am Yosef, and I was also very precious to my father. *Is he still alive?* He lived through my disappearance, so he will live through Binyamin's disappearance also!"

This was the greatest criticism that Yosef could level against his brothers! He showed them the flaw in their claim from their own actions. Yosef exposed the obvious inherent contradiction in their claim.

This is what R' Abba Cohen Bardela is also saying. When we stand in front of Hashem for our ultimate judgment, Hashem is going to ask us about our actions and why we did them. We think we will have a valid excuse for why we did what we did, but they will soon show us the contradiction to our claims from our own actions.

The Midrash relates that Eliyahu the Prophet told the following story.

תנא דבי אליהו זוטא - פרק יד

פעם אחת הייתי מהלך ממקום למקום ומצאני אדם אחד שלא היה בו לא מקרא ולא משנה והיה מתלוצץ ומלעיג בדברים ובא כנגדי ואמרתי לו בני מה אתה משיב לאביך שבשמים ליום הדין, ואמר לי רבי יש לי דברים שאני משיבו בינה ודעת לא נתנו לי מן השמים שאקרא ואשנה ואמרתי לו בני מה מלאכתך ואמר לי ציד אני ואמרתי לו בני מי למדך ואמר לך שתביא פשתן ותארגהו מצודות ותשליכהו לים ותעלה הדגים מן הים. ואמר לי רבי בזה נתנו לי בינה ודעת מן השמים ואמרתי לו ומה להביא פשתן ולארוג מצודות ולהשליך לים ולהעלות דגים מן הים נתנו לך בינה ודעה מן השמים ולדברי תורה שכתוב בה (דברים ל) כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיו ובלבבך לעשותו לא נתנו לך בינה ודעה מן השמים

*Once I was travelling and I met a man who knew no Torah and no Mishna. He was joking around and acting silly in front of me. I ask him, "My son, what are you going to answer to your Father in heaven on the day of judgment?" He answered me, "Rebbe, I have plenty to answer. Wisdom and understanding weren't given me from heaven that I should learn Torah." I asked him, "What is your vocation?" He answered, "I am a fisherman!" I said to him, "My son, who taught you to bring flax and weave it into nets that you cast into the sea to catch fish?" He said to me, "That they gave me wisdom and understanding for!" I said to him, "If they gave you wisdom and understanding for that, for sure they gave you wisdom and understanding to learn Torah, because the verse says, (Deuteronomy 30: 14) 'Rather the matter (Torah) is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart to perform it.'"*

Similarly, in heaven, when they ask a person, “Why didn’t you learn Torah?” he may say, “I simply didn’t have the time!” They will then say to him, “How was it that you had time to watch movies and play video games?”

When they ask a person, “Why didn’t you give charity?” he may feel justified in answering, “I simply didn’t have the funds!” But then they will ask him, “How then did you afford that extravagant vacation you took? Or the expensive luxury item you really didn’t need?”

This takes the criticism that we will receive at the time of our judgment to a new level. Not only will we see that our decisions were biased, we will also see how we contradicted ourselves with our own actions.

The Midrash connects Yosef revealing himself to his brother, to the day Hashem will reveal Himself to us. At the end of our lives, we will all stand trial in front of Hashem for the life we led. Hashem will be inquiring as to our deeds and actions during our lifetimes. If even the holy sons of Yaakov were stunned by their younger brother Yosef, what will we look like in front of the King of all kings, Hashem? It would be wise to think about this sooner rather than later.