

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Vayigash

“AND YEHUDAH APPROACHED HIM [YOSEF] AND SAID, ‘PLEASE, MY MASTER, LET YOUR SERVANT SPEAK INTO THE EAR OF MY MASTER AND DO NOT BE ANGRY WITH YOUR SERVANT, FOR YOU ARE LIKE PHARAOH.’” (BEREISHIS 44:18)

But why should Yehudah launch a personal attack on Pharaoh?

RASHI INTERPRETS, “For you are like Pharaoh” as a criticism: just as Pharaoh decrees and does not fulfill, so too you, Yosef. The Sifsei Chachamim quotes Rabbeinu Eliyahu Mizrachi who explains that Pharaoh’s royal statutes included a rule that a slave may not become king, nor wear the garments of royalty. When Pharaoh elevated Yosef, a slave, to be second to the king, he violated these laws. But why should Yehudah launch a personal attack on Pharaoh at this crucial moment? This question is asked by the Maharshal (Sifsei Chachamim ibid.) who answers, “Yehudah told Yosef, ‘On whom are you relying [for your strength and security], on Pharaoh? Pharaoh himself makes decrees and does not abide by them, for it is written in Egyptian law that a slave may not become king and he did not obey it.’”

He elevated Yosef to prevent a national emergency

Yehudah challenged Yosef, warning him not to feel secure in Pharaoh’s support of him, because Pharaoh would eventually deceive Yosef and betray him. As proof of this prediction, Yehudah showed that Pharaoh had violated his own laws in crowning Yosef as viceroy over Egypt. But, what kind of proof is this? Pharaoh violated the law in order to save his country from starvation and not for any personal interest. He elevated Yosef to prevent a national emergency and to help his citizens, including Yosef. Why should Yehudah assume that Pharaoh would suddenly turn around and betray Yosef, the man whose vision and foresight rescued the Egyptian people from famine?

He is demonstrating precisely the opposite

Pharaoh’s action of openly transgressing his own edicts showed a blatant disregard for *emes* – truth. He didn’t bother to rescind or even amend the original decree, and thereby legalize his action of appointing Yosef. Once a person has broken this barrier of *emes*, Yehudah warned Yosef, he is no longer trustworthy. As warm and friendly as he seems to be, he is not a reliable friend. He can turn around on a moment’s notice and stab his “good friend” in the back, because he has no scruples to abide by, no morals to keep him honest.

When a student helps a classmate cheat on a test, or a businessman assists his colleague in conducting an illegal transaction, he is not showing friendship or trustworthiness. He is demonstrating precisely the opposite – a breakdown of *emes* and moral values that ultimately can bring him, with all his love and affection, to betray the recipient of his “friendship.” A forbidden action done on behalf of a friend or relative will only serve to hurt both parties and undermine the very basis of their relationship.

Our challenge is to realize that the greatest demonstration of genuine friendship is to help our fellow man in a manner of absolute integrity. A true friend is exactly that – a **true** friend. If our love for others is faithful to the ideals of *emes*, it will foster stronger bonds of brotherhood, and eventually lead to a unified *Klal Yisroel*, a beacon of morality and friendship in a world so sorely lacking in these virtues.