

# Parsha Ponders

Vayigash | December 13, 2018 | 6 Teves 5779

## Careful judgement<sup>1</sup>

ויאמר אליהם אל תרגזו בדרך

...[Yosef] said to [his brothers]: “Do not quarrel on the road”<sup>2</sup>

After Yosef revealed to his brothers that he was now the viceroy of Egypt, he requested they bring their father from the land of Canaan. The seven-year famine was still ongoing, and their family was starving. Yosef had secured enough food to last through the famine, and was offering his family safe haven in Egypt. Before they departed on their journey, Yosef warned them against quarreling on the road. The simple meaning of the verse<sup>3</sup> is that Yosef was concerned that his brothers would discuss their sale of Yosef as a slave. Now that Yosef was in a position of power, and he was their savior, they might argue about whose fault it was that Yosef was sold. This discord could prove dangerous on their long journey home. He therefore cautioned them against discussing such matters.

However, our Sages also interpret the verse on a homiletical level<sup>4</sup>. Yosef was cautioning them against being overly involved in discussing Jewish law<sup>5</sup>. Another interpretation is he cautioned them against taking large steps<sup>6</sup>. A third interpretation is that he cautioned them to enter the city while there was still daylight. Besides being difficult to fit into the reading of the verse<sup>7</sup>, on a literary level these interpretations are hard to understand. Why did Yosef pick this moment, of all times he’s conversed with his brothers, to teach them proper conduct while traveling? You would think these bits of advice had been taught to them already by their father. Also, these interpretations are incredibly far apart from one another. What do delving into Jewish law, taking large steps, and entering the city with daylight have in common?

It’s possible to say that these interpretations are really all saying one idea. In fact, Yosef was trying to recall in their minds the time they sold him as a slave. His hope was that they would learn their lesson, and apply it to their future experiences. Why did the brothers sell Yosef as a slave? Many sources<sup>8</sup> indicate that it was because they felt that this was Yosef’s mandated punishment for his behavior. They had ruled that he was to be sold as a slave. Yosef wanted them to realize, that although they felt correct in their judgement, perhaps they were mistaken. Maybe they were too hasty with their ruling. They should have gone home and consulted with the wise elders of their city, and their parents. Since they didn’t do this, they made a huge mistake selling Yosef as a slave<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Be’er Yosef to Genesis 45:24

<sup>2</sup> Genesis *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Rashi *ad. loc.*

<sup>4</sup> Taanis 10b, brought by Rashi *loc. cit.* Cf. Bereishis Rabbah 94:2, which cautions the brothers **to learn** Torah on the road. This in fact is the conclusion of the *gemarra*, that Yosef was only cautioning against intense delving into Jewish law, but normal learning was in fact required as normal

<sup>5</sup> Torah Sheleimah *ad. loc.* § 84 brings from Midrashei HaTorah who suggests that *Chazal* learned this from the word תרגזו, which appears in the verse ואל תחטאו אמרו בלבבכם (Psalms 4:5), which is interpreted as the recitation of Shema (Berachos 5a)

<sup>6</sup> *Chazal* teach us (*ibid*) that large steps are bad for one’s eyesight. This has various interpretations, both literal and figurative (as shall be seen below)

<sup>7</sup> See note 5. However, I don’t know how *Chazal* saw the last two interpretations from the word תרגזו

<sup>8</sup> See Rashi to Genesis 37:17, and Bereishis Rabbah 84:14, 17

<sup>9</sup> The Be’er Yosef uses this to provide a new reading of Bereishis Rabbah 84:16

This is what Yosef was telling them when he told them not to be overly involved in discussing Jewish law. Meaning, they shouldn't make any ruling or act on it while they are on the road. This is so, even if their ruling appears completely correct in their eyes. Nevertheless, they should delay and seek the council of their elders before acting on it. They may be shown that an error crept into their thought process, negatively affecting their ruling.

This is also what Yosef was saying when he told them not to take large steps. Our Sages implore us<sup>10</sup> that we should be deliberate in judgement. What's the source for this obligation? From the juxtaposition of the verse prohibiting using steps for the Temple Altar<sup>11</sup> and the introduction to the Torah's monetary laws<sup>12 13</sup>. Just like the Torah forbids the Kohanim from taking large steps up the Temple Altar, so Hashem mandated a ramp instead of stairs, so too the Judges of Israel shouldn't take large steps in judgement. Meaning, they should be careful and unhurried in their rulings. Yosef was telling his brothers that large steps in judgement, being too quick to rule, can lead to blind spots in the case<sup>14</sup>. They could easily miss something.

Finally, Yosef was telling them the same idea when he told them to enter the city by daylight. Meaning, don't walk in dark paths, as there could easily be stumbling blocks on the way. This was hinting to them the idea of thinking in the dark; not having all the facts, which would lead to mistakes in their ruling. They should be diligent to be well-informed before making any rulings.

Our Sages saw all of this was included in the phrase "don't quarrel on the road": not to be overly involved in matters of Torah law, not to take big steps, and to enter the city with daylight. Even though these pieces of advice have simple explanations relating to tips on how to travel, there was also directives relating to matters of judgement in Jewish law<sup>15</sup>. The brothers understood Yosef's concerns, and took his advice to heart.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>10</sup> [Avos 1:1](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Exodus 20:23](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Ibid 21:1](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Sanhedrin 7b](#); [Shemos Rabbah 30:2](#)

<sup>14</sup> See note 6

<sup>15</sup> The [Be'er Yosef](#) invokes the famous *Talmudic* phrase: אלא הליכות אל תקרי הליכות (Megillah 28b; Niddah 73a)