

Parsha Ponders

Vayigash | Dec 21, 2023 | 10 Teves 5784

Parental priority punishment¹

וישלח את-אחיו וילכו ויאמר אלהם אל-תרגזו בדרך

[Yosef] sent off his brothers and they went. He said to them: “Don’t quarrel on the road”²

After finally revealing himself to his brothers, the long-thought dead or enslaved Yosef had reunited with his family. Yosef told them to return to Canaan to bring their father to Egypt, where there was salvation from the global famine. Before they left, Yosef cautioned them not to quarrel on the road. The simple explanation is³ that he was telling them not to argue about whose fault it was that Yosef was sold as a slave in the first place, as Hashem had engineered everything to bring Yosef to political power.

However, Rashi brings⁴ a homiletic reading of the verse: “Don’t study Torah laws on the road”. There was a concern that perhaps they’ll get overly engrossed in their study and make a wrong turn. Rather, they are to simply go, focused on their journey to their father⁵. There are those who ask, why didn’t Yaakov warn his sons of this when he sent them to Egypt? Yaakov also wanted to ensure that they got there in a timely fashion. As well, how did Yosef know that Yaakov didn’t already warn them about this⁶?

Our Sages teach us⁷ that learning Torah, in a way, is greater than honoring one’s parents. What’s the source? Yaakov was away from his parents for 36 years. He was punished for 22 of those years, where he was trying to find a wife and was dealing with Lavan’s flock. Those years he didn’t spend honoring his parents, and he was punished with losing Yosef for 22 years. This was appropriate, as he was then also deprived of his son honoring him. However, we see that 14 of those years Yaakov wasn’t punished. This is because he was spending that time studying at the Academy of Shem and Eiver. Since he wasn’t punished, despite not honoring his parents, we see that Torah study is greater than honoring parents.

With the above in mind, it makes sense why Yaakov didn’t warn his sons against Torah study. He didn’t need to tell them not to take breaks in their journey to Egypt to get involved in their studies. From their perspective, it was obviously forbidden to ignore their fathers command for the sake of Torah study. Why? They didn’t know where Yosef was. They didn’t yet realize that their father wasn’t going to be punished for the 14 years he spent studying. For all they knew, Yosef is going to be missing for another 14 years. For behold, it’s been 22 years and he still hasn’t surfaced. In that case, they thought that honoring parents comes before Torah study.

However, Yosef himself definitely needed to warn them. They saw he was alive and was planning on reuniting with his father. That means then that Yaakov’s punishment was only for 22 years, and didn’t include the 14 he spent studying. They realized then that Torah study is greater than honoring parents. They would be inclined to interrupt their journey home to Yaakov by getting engrossed in their studies. To this, Yosef implored them to hold off on their studies. They were to hurry home and inform Yaakov that Yosef was still alive. Yosef felt that in this instance, their father’s concerns came first. Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Chanukas HaTorah parshas Vayigash](#) § 44

² [Genesis](#) 45:24

³ [Rashi ad. loc.](#), quoting [Ta’anis](#) 10b

⁴ [Ibid](#)

⁵ The [Chanukas HaTorah](#) adds this into [Rashi](#), although it’s not exactly what he writes

⁶ The [Chanukas HaTorah](#) didn’t ask this, but I found it in the [Chida’s Pesach Einayim](#) to [Ta’anis loc. cit.](#) See there for his approach to these questions

⁷ [Megillah](#) 17a, brought by [Rashi](#) to [Genesis](#) 28:9