
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER mail.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for Self Study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT VAYIGASH

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

TREATING STRANGERS

1. In your opinion, how do the Egyptians relate to anyone who is not an Egyptian? In your answer, relate to Breishit 43:32 and 46:31-34. Note as well 39:17 and 41:12-14 (& explain why Yosef must shave!).

Based on these psukim, how do the Egyptians relate to 'ivrim' and 'can'anim'? [See also Shmot 8:22.] Do you think that it was specifically those nations or any type of foreigner?

In your opinion, is there a logical reason for this treatment of 'non-Egyptians'? To the best of your recollection, throughout history, does this phenomenon occur in other societies as well? [If so, to what extent, and for what reasons?]

Would you consider this phenomenon morally correct (or proper)? In your answer, relate to Shmot 22:20 & 23:9!

Relate this as well to what may have been the underlying cause of Bnei Yisrael's enslavement in Egypt many decades later (or at least the ability of Egyptians to enslave them)?

2. In your opinion, and based on your answer to the above question, are the people of Egypt aware that Yosef was once an 'ivri', or is this a 'well kept secret' (known only to Pharaoh and his closest advisors)? In your answer, relate to 41:14 & 41:42-46!

With this background, review 45:16 in its context. According to this pasuk, why are Pharaoh and his servants 'happy to hear' that Yosef's brothers have arrived?

Be sure to see how Ramban, Radak, and Seforno each answer this question. Note how each commentator relates to this question, and what is unique about each approach?

VISITING CANAAN

3. In your opinion, why does Yosef prefer that Yaakov come down to Egypt instead of Yosef himself traveling to Eretz Canaan to visit his father? Can you relate this to your answer to the above questions?

Why is Yosef worried that Pharaoh may not allow him to bury Yaakov in Eretz Canaan (see 50:4-6)? Based on those psukim, what 'excuse' does Yosef use to convince Pharaoh? Relate this as well to 47:29-31.

As you review 50:7-13, note as well where the Egyptians travel to (when they go to bury Yaakov), and why they stop for the 'eulogy', and who (alone) goes to Eretz Canaan for the actual burial! Relate this point to the above questions.

DOWN TO '210'

4. Review 45:9, noting Yosef's command "redah eilai" - come down to me (to Egypt). What is the problem with the grammar of this pasuk, in regard to the word 'redah'?

See Chizkuni on 45:9; note how he explains how this relates to 'redu' said by Yaakov in 42:2, and how this relates to the years of exile according to the 400 years of Brit bein ha-btarim! [See also Rashi on 42:2.]

ONE TOPIC OR THREE?

5. Note that the Torah includes all of 44:18 thru 46:7 in ONE 'parshia' while the classical division into chapters considers this 'parshia' as part of three different chapters, and hence three different topics.

Attempt to explain the logic for each division.

In your opinion, which division makes more sense?

What is the thematic significance of considering all of these psukim as one complete unit?

[Similarly, compare 44:18 with 46:28, noting how and why each

pasuk begins a new 'parshia'.]

SHIV'IM NEFESH

6. In Parshat Pinchas, the Torah records the census that was to serve as the basis for the proportional "nachala" [inheritance] of Eretz Canaan, and its division among the twelve tribes.

Compare the family names in that census (Bamidbar 26:2-56) to the list of the 'shiv'im nefesh' (70 souls) who go down to Egypt (see 46:8-26). Attempt to explain the reason for the similarities between these two lists (and for the differences as well).

Can you point to a thematic connection as well? In other words, how does Bnei Yisrael's inheritance of Eretz Canaan relate to the events that took place earlier in Parshat Vayigash specifically (and Sefer Breishit in general)?

WHAT'S A CHOK?

7. To the best of your recollection, how would you define the Hebrew word 'chok'?

Now, read 47:20-26, noting the use of the word 'chok'.

Does your definition fit with its context in these psukim?

[Relate as well to the word 'chok' in Yirmiyahu 33:25.]

Relate this to your understanding of the mitzvot that are considered by the Torah as 'chukim'?

In your answer, relate to the use of the word 'chok' in regard to the offering of the Korban Pesach in future generations, based on Shmot 12:14 and 12:24-26.

[Based on your answer, would you say that certain 'chukim' could be logical, or by definition do all 'chukim' have to be laws that don't make sense?]

Note especially the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Seforno on Breishit26:5 in regard to the meaning of the word 'chukotai'! Based on the above, how would you now define a law that the Torah refers to as a 'chok'?

[See also TSC shiur on Parshat Chukat re: Para Aduma]

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PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)

1. When Yosef invites his family to 'move' to Egypt (see 45:5-11), is his intention that they now should settle in Egypt permanently, or is it just to survive during the remaining five years of famine (after which they would return 'home')?

When the famine is over, do Bnei Yisrael return to Eretz Canaan, or do they remain in Egypt (in Eretz Goshen)?

To the best of your recollection, does the Torah explain why they stayed? Can you suggest a reason?

[Were they permitted to leave at that time?]

2. Based on 45:25-28, when Yaakov decides to go down to Egypt to visit Yosef, what was the stated purpose of this journey, and for how long does Yaakov originally plan to stay in Egypt?

[Relate as well 46:30-47:4!]

Does Yaakov (and his family) have any reason for staying in Egypt any longer than during the years of the famine?

Based on 45:5-11 and 46:31-47:4, what does Yosef's original plan appear to be?

For how long does he expect his family to stay in Egypt?

3. With this background, review 46:1-7. Do these psukim provide an answer to any of the above questions? Explain.

In what manner does God's answer to Yaakov relate to both Breishit 12:1-3 and 15:13-18?

4. Review once again 46:1. In your opinion, why does Yaakov stop specifically at Beer Sheva in order to offer sacrifices? Furthermore, why does he offer sacrifices at this time? And finally, why does he offer them specifically to the God of his father Yitzchak

In your answer, relate Yaakov's present situation to the predicament that Yitzchak faced in 26:1-5 (noting 26:25 as well), and Yaakov's own predicament in 28:10-18. [In regard to why he offers korbanot specifically to the God of his father YITZCHAK (and not Avraham), see the Parshanut section - question #1.]

5. What is God's response to these korbanot that Yaakov offers? See 46:2-4. Does God's response imply that Yaakov was scared; if so, why?

What is surprising about God's 'affirmative' answer, allowing Yaakov to travel to Egypt? In your opinion, do you think that it surprised Yaakov?

According to God's plan, now revealed to Yaakov, for how long are Yaakov and his family supposed to stay in Egypt?

Does God provide an explicit reason? [Is there an implicit reason, based on these psukim?] Relate once again to Breishit 15:13-18 & 12:1-3.]

How does God's plan, as now revealed to Yaakov, relate to Yosef's perception of these events (as he explained to his brothers in 45:5-8)? Relate as well to Breishit 48:21 and 50:24.

6. Compare the style of 46:5-7 with Breishit 11:31, 12:5, and 31:17-18. In what manner is this significant?

Relate this to the theme of 'bechira' in Sefer Breishit.]

7. Note how 46:1-7 is followed by 46:8-27. Compare these psukim (note that they form their own 'parshia') with Shmot 1:1-7.

How (and why) are 46:8-27 and Shmot 1:1-7 similar, and in what manner are they different?

Can you explain why Sefer Shmot opens with these psukim? Relate especially to Shmot 1:7.

In regard to 46:8-27, have we found lists of names before in Sefer Breishit? If so, have these 'lists' [or genealogies] been referred to as 'shmot' or as 'toladot'?

Can you explain why the list is now called 'shmot'? [Relate once again to the 'bechira' process and its connection to the overall theme of Sefer Breishit.]

8. Note that 46:1-5 is the last 'hitgalut' of Sefer Breishit.

First, verify this statement.

Then, find the FIRST 'hitgalut' in Sefer Shmot.

[If you give up, scan Shmot 3:1-10.]

What is God's message in that 'hitgalut'?

How does that first 'hitgalut' in Sefer Shmot relate to this last 'hitgalut' in Sefer Breishit? [Relate to this parallel at both a textual and thematic level.]

Try to explain the thematic importance of this final 'hitgalut' of Sefer Breishit, and its connection to the 'parshia' that follows with "eileh shmot..." (in 46:8-26).

PART III - PARSHANUT

HOW YAKKOV DESCRIBES GOD

1. Review again 46:1, make sure that you understand the major problems in the pshat of this pasuk (i.e. why does Yaakov offer korbanot at this time, why specifically to the God of Yitzchak, and why specifically in Beer Sheva).

See Rashi - how does Rashi answer these questions, or doesn't he? [In other words, is Rashi explaining the pasuk, or is he learning something from it?]

Now, see Ramban. What bothers Ramban in regard to Rashi's interpretation. [Explain what Ramban means by his statement that Rashi's peirush 'is not sufficient' / "ve-eineno maspiik..."]

Next, see Rashbam. How is his approach different from Rashi's? Does Rashbam attempt to explain simple 'pshat'?

Does Rashbam base his peirush on 26:1-2 or on 26:25? Can you explain why? What assumption does Rashbam make in regard to korbanot that Yitzchak offered in Beer Sheva? Is there support for this assumption in the psukim?

Now, see Radak! In what manner is his approach similar to that of Rashbam, and in what manner is his interpretation totally

different? What psukim does Radak base his peirush on?

In your opinion, which peirush (between Radak & Rashbam) is more thematic, and which is more textual?

[See also Seforno and Chizkuni.]

Finally, return once again to Ramban. Read his answer carefully. [Just the first ten lines, you don't need to read the entire section concerning 'zevachim'.] How is his approach to the explanation of this pasuk different than Rashbam and Radak?

How does Ramban's interpretation relate to the overall theme of Sefer Breishit? Would you consider Ramban's peirush as 'pshat'?

A SPECIAL TIME / A SPECIAL PLACE

2. Why do you think that Yaakov offers specifically 'ZEVACHIM' at this time? Is there any other example of someone offering a "zevach" to God in Sefer Breishit? When (later on in Chumash) are 'zevachim' offered? [Relate to Shmot 24:3-9, especially 24:4-5!]

[For the technical difference between an 'olah' and 'zevach', you should review Sefer Vayikra chapters 1 & 3.]

Now [if you have lots of time and patience] you can see the lengthy Ramban on this topic (on 46:1 / "ve-amar ha-katuv zevachim..."). It is quite complicated, but it gives you a tiny glimpse of Ramban's understanding of 'kabbala'.]

3. Re: why Yaakov stopped specifically in Beer Sheva, see also a very interesting discussion concerning this in middle of the lengthy Ramban on Breishit 28:17, where he quotes Breishit Rabba 68:6.

[In Torat Chaim edition, by footnote 22; in Chavell edition by footnote 27.]

Note how that Midrash explains how Beer Sheva serves as the 'exit' gate for those who wish to leave Eretz Canaan, and how it relates to Breishit 46:1-3 as well as 28:10-17.

WHO'S LISTENING?

4. Review 45:1, noting the phrase "le-chol ha-nitzavim alav" - i.e. Yosef was not able to 'restrain himself' from - all that stood around him. In your opinion, what group is this pasuk referring to? In other words, who are these people gathered around who Yosef later (in this pasuk) expels from the room?

Once you determine WHO they are, explain how this phrase relates to this pasuk and why he wants to expel them from the room before he reveals himself. First see Rashi on 45:1, most likely Rashi's approach is what you answered. [See also Rashbam and Radak who are quite similar.]

Now (to your surprise) see Ramban. Note how he explains who these 'nitzavim' were, and why they 'bothered' Yosef. Can you explain why he provides an alternate interpretation? Note how (and why) he disagrees with Ibn Ezra as well.

Finally, see Seforno. Note how he provides a totally different (and very creative) interpretation! Can you explain how his interpretation relates to Ramban's?

WHO'S TALKING?

5. Review 45:12. As a proof that he is truly their brother, Yosef tells them "... ki pi ha-medaber aleichem - see, it is my mouth that is speaking to you". In your opinion, what does this phrase mean, and how is it a proof? Is Yosef proving them who he is by the fact that he knows Hebrew? Was this the 'secret language' of Yaakov's family that the brothers spoke, that no one else knew?

First see Rashi. Note his approach (as usual, the one that we are most familiar with). [Note as well Ibn Ezra.]

Next, see Rashbam. Does he agree or disagree with Rashi? In either case, what does Rashbam add to Rashi's explanation? How does this relate to the context of the psukim that follow?

Finally, see Ramban. Note his very strong questions explaining why the 'classic interpretation' is not sufficient. Then pay careful attention to how he explains this pasuk. As usual, note how comprehensive Ramban is in his peirush, and how he

relates to the realities of each situation!

BIBLICAL ADDITION

6. Review 46:8-27, and while doing so, see if the math works out to total up to seventy. If not, where specifically are there problems in the totals, i.e. where doesn't the total match the itemized list of names?

First, see Rashi on 46:15 & 46:26. Which problems does he deal with, and what answers does he provide?

In your opinion, does Rashi's interpretation (regarding when Yocheved was born, etc.) make sense? If not, what is the problem?

Then, see Rashbam on 48:8 & 26. How does he solve the math problem?

Next, see Chizkuni, how does he solve the math problem?

How is his approach different from Rashbam's?

Now, see Ibn Ezra on 46:27.

Note how and why he disagrees with the various Midrashim.

How does he explain pshat? [Like Rashbam or Chizkuni?]

Review this Ibn Ezra, noting his approach.

[It is a classic example of his methodology and his approach to 'pshat' in contrast to 'drash', and the connection between them.]

Finally, see Ramban on 46:15 (it's long, but worth your while).

Note how Ramban supports the Midrashic approach, as presented by Rashi, and totally disagrees with Ibn Ezra, and seems to take issue with his entire approach to Midrashim. Be sure to read this Ramban carefully, for he explains his approach - and why he feels it is important to look for miracles 'between the lines' of the Bible!

be-hatzlacha,
menachem