

ספר מי השילוח - חלק ראשון - פרשת ויגש

Mei Hashiloach - Vol. I - Genesis - *Bereishith - Vayigash*

TRIUMPH

As far as the Mei Hashiloach is concerned, this week's entire Sidra is dominated by one event, the triumphant emergence of Judah from his encounter and confrontation with Joseph. As the text begins and the narrative unfolds, Judah has reached the nadir of his existence, everything he touched has turned to ashes. To cap an ignominious career as leader of the Brethren of Israel, he has given his grieving father, Jacob, a guarantee to keep Benjamin safe on the road and bring him back to his father in peace. It was solely on his advice that the brothers had originally sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, and he, Judah, had been the one who showed their father the bloodied tunic, demanding that he recognize it and abandon all hope of Joseph's return.

Now Jacob anxiously waits in Canaan for his sons to return, while they all stand, prisoners, in the presence of this unyielding Egyptian potentate (Joseph), shamed, cowed and humiliated. The last thing we heard Judah saying in the closing lines of the previous Sidra, was this defeated soliloquy:

'What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the sin of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and the one in whose possession the cup has been found.' (Gen 44:16)

It has suddenly dawned on Judah that he is completely undone. None of his much vaunted confidence is on show in this instance. It has been brought forcibly to his attention that Joseph is truly dead. The deeper the fog of confusion the brothers experience, the more impenetrable and complex their dire situation, the more obvious it is that Joseph has entirely disappeared. For this was borne upon them from the outset of the disaster twenty two years earlier, without Joseph's presence their ability to worship God was almost completely neutered and sterile. Not one of the brothers has been able to access his spiritual center or learn anything holy. They lost all desire and craving for *קרבת אלהים Kirvat Elohim* - Intimacy With God, because none of us can have it without Joseph's presence in our lives; it's a simple and awful as that.

Judah had originally calculated that Joseph would go through a leavening or purifying process in Egypt, that's why he advised his brothers to sell him as a slave in the first place. His plan was to leave it to God to teach Joseph a lesson from which he would emerge a better man, tempered and weathered, able to live amicably, without feelings of superiority or the need to be combative with his brothers. But if Joseph had failed to meet his challenges and had succumbed to temptation in Egypt, if he had been assimilated into the local culture or had adapted to its customs in order to survive, all was lost and everything was ruined. For while they had hated Joseph when he lived with them, it became obvious to them that he was absolutely crucial to the success of the family, as soon as he was gone.

All these years, Judah had clung to the hope that God would make everything turn out for the best. That Joseph was struggling but making it through in Egypt, that both he, Judah, and Joseph would be vindicated in the end.

As the famine spread into Canaan, the brothers had come down into Egypt to buy food and fodder. The Egyptian lord had accused them of being spies, and later demanded they bring their younger brother down with them as proof of their innocence. When they reached

home they discovered all the money they had spent on food hidden in the sacks of food. They were terrified and then gratified and then horrified by the treatment meted out to them by the Egyptian lord. He confused them, one moment with his kindness, the next with his cruel indifference. They could not be sure he was wicked and abusive, perhaps he was justified by his own rights. They did not know who to blame for the set-up, who it was kept interfering with their sacks of food and grain, first hiding their money in it and then hiding Joseph's ritual goblet in Benjamin's sack?

It was that very confusion which tipped Judah off to Joseph's death, for it was only Joseph's presence in the world which made everything else make sense. It was partly the reason they had hated him so much; he could only see what was in front of his eyes, in black and white. "Yes, but," was not in Joseph's phrase-book, it was not an option you could use in an argument with him. Joseph didn't deal in excuses or justifications, for him things were crystal clear.

His brothers had thought it was an affectation or mannerism, they hadn't realized that it was what was the only thing keeping the world in tune, until he was gone, and suddenly everything was muddy and impenetrable. Jacob went without any prophecy for twenty two years. It was as though God had withdrawn totally. The brothers each experienced the loss of the divine connection in his own way.

Judah could only explain all the confusion with the death of Joseph. But if Joseph was truly dead or disappeared for good, then Judah's original plan was a complete failure; in which case his recent promise to deliver Benjamin safely back to Jacob was the very worst gamble of his lifetime. His whole life was coming unravelled, everything Judah believed about himself was a fiction, all his self confidence must have been deluded from the outset!

It is against this backdrop that this week's Sidra unfolds. Something tectonic shifts inside Judah, something primal unfolds and changes from despair to prayer, to a shout, to a challenge, to a scream of defiance - echoes of which still resound inside our subconscious, to this very day.

Judah finds some central point within his heart where the fires of resistance still burn, if not brightly, at least fitfully, an ember or spark of unquenchable defiance remains alive.

"If You truly are in charge of the world," says Judah to God. "Then this is all Your doing. From beginning to end, You had to have been involved, intimately, down to the smallest detail. Even in the midst of the worst sin I ever committed, You were there; for how could You have been absent, when the whole world and everyone in it are Your creation, and You are God?"

Judah is done trying to fix anything or make things work out. He is out of his depth, drowning in the mess he has wrought.

All Judah is conscious of is a cry in his heart. And Judah knows for sure, certain and positive that it is God crying in his heart. This is Judah's deepest genius, he trust himself when all others give up hope. Judah trusts himself when we all have succumbed to the profoundest and heaviest certainty of our failure. Judah knows that if there is still a cry in his heart then the cry itself is a gift from God. And if God has gifted him with the power to cry then surely this whole drama has been scripted by God, from start to finish. If that's so then why isn't God doing more to save them all from disaster?

This week's Mei Hashiloach opens with a quote from the Second Book of Samuel, a verse almost impossible to parse into the English language without inserting a number of virtual phrases.

'And these are the final words of David: the oracle of David son of Jesse, and the oracle of a man raised up, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet singer of Israel.

"The Spirit of God speaks through me, And His word is on my tongue.

The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: Ruling a saintly man, ruling fear of God.

Like the light of morning at sunrise, a morning without clouds, from the gleaming, from the rain, grass from the earth.” (II Samuel 23:1-4)

There’s more of David’s final peroration, but the rebbe focuses on one verse. ‘The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: Ruling a saintly man, ruling fear of God.’

Now the Talmud learns something very interesting from the verse, something the rebbe refers to without elaborating, but which underpins the entire Torah.

R. Abuhu explained the meaning of this verse. 'God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, ruling a saintly man, ruling fear of God.' “I rule man,” says God. “But who rules Me? - The *Tzadik* - Saint rules Me. I make decrees while the *Tzadik* annuls them.” (Moed Katan 16b)

Why would the opening words of King David’s final prophecy be a reference to man ruling God? The answer according to Izbicy lies in another phrase in this prophecy which began thus: ‘And these are the final words of David: the oracle of David son of Jesse, and the oracle of a man raised up.’ the Talmud interprets that last phrase ‘the oracle of a man raised up’ to mean the man who established the emergent process of *T’shuvah* - Penitence.

By becoming the man who first established T’shuvah as a spiritual path and legitimate evenpreferred mode of Jewish worship, David also became the saint who annuls God’s decrees.

Judah and David are two ends of the same fabric, whose pattern is being woven into it through the interactions we read in our Sidra.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

[1:1]Judah approached him.

‘The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: Ruling a saintly man, ruling fear of God.’ (II Samuel 23:3) And as the sages have explained this verse in the Talmud, (Moed Katan 16b)

ויגש אליו יהודה, זש"ה אמר אלה"י ישראל לי דבר צור ישראל מושל באדם צדיק מושל ויראת אלהי"ם: (שמואל ב' כ"ג ג') וכמו שביארו ז"ל [מועד קטן ט"ז:]

The rebbe sets out to parse and analyze the verse from David’s final prophecy, phrase by phrase.

Throughout Izbicy we find an emphasis on the distinction between the *Klal U'Prat* - Children of Israel and the Individual Jew, the General Rule and Particular Detail; between inclusive and exclusive Torah. While the 613 Precepts of the Torah apply equally across the spectrum, to every Jew at large - there is but one Torah, one set of commandments, one text and one God whom we all worship together as one people, nevertheless every person has their own gestalt. And because we are all different and unique, the Torah allows for every

individual to forge a path toward God in their own language and style. When the individual clashes with the group it may be up to God to justify the individual, because the law is incapable of setting itself aside, it's simply not equipped to dispense with itself.

This is one of the areas where Izbicy clashes with all classic texts and approaches. The Mei Hashiloach is not afraid to state the primacy of individual worship even when it is against the law, as we read:

And this sort of behavior will mean that from time to time, Judah has to act against the law because 'It is a time to do for God,' (Ps. 119:126, see Berachoth 54a). That's why these two tribes are constantly in conflict. But in the future, it is written, 'Ephraim will not envy Judah and Judah will not oppress Ephraim.' Ephraim will no longer rail against Judah for occasionally working outside the boundary of the *Halacha*, and will not be pained by it, because God will show Ephraim how Judah's *Kavanah* - Intent was always for the sake of heaven, and not for his own profit or pleasure. And so, there will be peace among them. (Mei Hashiloach - Vayeshev 1:1)

Articulating the concept of being permitted by Torah law to work outside the law has earned the Izbicy the grudging respect of some and the horror of others. Some have accused the Mei Hashiloach of being Antinomian, but that shows a profound misunderstanding of both doctrines. Antinomianism is the name given to a sect that arose in Germany in 1535, preaching the belief that Christians are freed from the moral law by virtue of grace as set forth in the gospel. The Izbicy merely tells us what everyone already knows, that every law has an exceptional circumstance in which it has to be set aside.

At the beginning of the quote above the rebbe refers to the verse, 'It is a time to do for God,' (Ps. 119:126) but the quote is incomplete. The full verse says 'It is a time to do for God, they have violated Your Torah,' which one might be tempted to read as a reason or invitation to defend the Torah by use of force. If it is 'a time to do something for God', because people have violated the Torah, I might be pardoned for thinking what I am being called to do is defend the Torah, but I would be wrong.

The Talmud reads the verse as a call to defend the violator.

'It is a time to do for God, they have violated Your Torah,' Rava explained it thus: Sometimes the verse must be read from beginning to end, while sometimes it needs to be read backwards, from the end to the beginning.

There are moments when we have to do something for God - why? Because they have violated Your Torah. And there are moments when we have to violate Your Torah, why? Because it is a time to do for God.' (Berachoth 62a)

Perhaps the sharpest distinction between Izbicy and other teachers is that the Izbicy sees every individual as being capable of deciding for himself if he or she has reached a moment when it is appropriate to violate the Torah because of a time to do for God. While everyone else is afraid to provide such a blank permit, preferring to hedge everything about with caveats and 'ask-your-rabbi-first's. Nevertheless, this is clear, the Izbicy did not invent the concept of permission to violate the Torah out of necessity.

What is unique is the way in which the entire concept is adapted to explain the path from Judah to David. As has been said previously, God has His ways of making *Birurin* - Clarification, overturning everything we know about an event and making it the right thing to have done, post-facto. God is constantly rewriting events and circumstances to give different meaning to what has already happened. When Judah acknowledged the pregnant Tamar as the woman carrying his baby, a voice came out from heaven saying, 'From Me, these events all

came out, by force, from Me', in effect turning Judah's sordid act into one of redemption and prophecy, the birth of the Light of the Messiah.

Izbicy sees this all as part and parcel of the power given to the saint to rule God. By doing *T'shuvah* - Repentance a penitent in effect forces God to rewrite history to remake every event a מצוה *Mitzvah* - Virtuous Deed instead of the עבירה *Aveirah* - Sin it started out as.

Thus we find the rebbe expounding on each line from David's final prophecy, finding it a proof text for his general thesis. Here is where Judah comes back into his own, to find the strength at his core, which is his genius, Izbicy weaves all the threads into one seamless tapestry of thought. All David's greatness is going to be seen to have its source in Judah's genius.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

'The God of Israel said,' refers to everyone, because the Torah in general, with its 613 precepts (248 commandments and 365 prohibitions) was given to every Jewish soul equally.

אמר אלהי ישראל היינו הכללים של ד"ת והם הרמ"ח מצות עשה ושס"ה מצות ל"ת אשר
ניתנו בכל נפש מישראל שוה בשוה,

The next phrase is very direct, 'The Rock of Israel spoke to me,' to me in particular; quite different from the phrase above which has God speaking in very general way, 'The God of Israel said,' to everyone at large. The Mei Hashiloach uses the two phrases to emphasize the difference between the individual and the group. To the Jewish people as a group, the Torah is monolithic and non-individuating. Its laws apply across the board to everyone without exception. The next directed phrase is talking to the *Ba'al T'shuvah* - The Penitent for whom the Torah has a distinctly individual and tailored message.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

'The Rock of Israel spoke to me.' 'To me' hints at the *Ba'al T'shuvah* - Penitent, because God speaks directly to the penitent as an individual, to give him confidence and fill him with resolve after having committed the sin, when he might think all hope is lost. When he repents and returns to God, that's when God gives him confidence.

לי דבר צור ישראל, לי היינו להבעל תשובה לזה מדבר הש"י בפרט ונותן לו תקופות אחר
חטאו שנדמה לו כי אפס תקוה ממנו, וישוב אל ה' אז נותן לו הקב"ה תקופות,

King David in his last prophecy refers to himself, saying, 'The Rock of Israel spoke to me,' because David is the original *Ba'al T'shuvah*. As the Talmud says 'Not that David was

worthy of such a deed, (as adultery with Bat-Sheba) but why then did it happen? To teach repentance to the individual.' (Avoda Zara 4b)

Next the rebbe points to the two expressions of speech, אמירה *Amira* and דבור *Dibbur*. *Amira* is saying, while *Dibbur* is speaking. In the Hebrew way of talking, *saying* is much softer and gentler than *speaking*. In general a person has to be flexible and bend to the Torah's demands. That's why when talking to everyone together the verse uses the *Amira* - Saying form, indicating the need to bend and bow to the demands of the Torah. But when talking to penitents God tells them not to flinch but to be bold and unyielding.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

This explains the difference in the two expressions. First the verse speaks in the soft, *Amira* - Saying mode. Then, in referring to the *Ba'al T'shuva* - Penitent the verse speak in the harder *Dibbur* - Speech mode, hinting at the need to be firm, unflinching and assertive.

In addition we see the verse first refers to *Elokim* - God, while in speaking to the *Ba'al T'shuva* - Penitent the verse uses the phrase the Rock of Israel. Rock also suggest great confidence and a powerful resolve.

ולזה נשתנו הדברים כי בתחילה נאמר אמר היינו לשון רכה, ואצל הבעל תשובה נאמר דבר היינו תקיפות, גם בתחילה נאמר אלקי ואח"כ נאמר צור אשר היא ג"כ לשון תקופות וחיזוק,

There is a reference to the צדיק *Tzadik* - Saint in the next phrase to be examined. *Tzadik* is a difficult word to translate properly. In Kabbalah it is associated with the penultimate Sefirah of *Yesod* - Fundament and personified by Joseph. Yesod is represented by the *Brit* - Covenant. There is the covenant between the ten toes we refer to as the *Brit Milah*, and the covenant between the ten fingers we refer to as the *Brit Halashon*; covenants of penis and tongue.

As was discussed in the Mei Hashiloach - Vayeshev, Joseph had to prove himself blameless in one *Brit* in order to establish his innocence in the other *Brit*, so his sexuality was tested by Potiphar's wife in order to prove that the things he'd said about his brothers, to their father, had not been evil-speech.

Thenceforth the *Tzadik* and his Sexuality were forever linked, and with the passage of time a *Tzadik* grew to be understood as someone whose sexual behavior is free of sin, deviance, dishonesty or other blemish, with Joseph the paradigm and paragon.

With the publication of the Zohar at the end of the 13th century, and the supplementary Zoharic texts in the 14th and 15th centuries, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai took on the role of *Tzadik*. Not least because the Zohar itself stresses sexual purity as the highest ideal and value for which the Jew must strive in his physical body. Avoidance of masturbation is emphasized as the highest necessity for everyone, without exception. The Zohar distinguishes masturbation as the sin for which there can be no atonement, because the seed once spilled and wasted can never be retrieved, therefore the cosmic damage caused by loss of the sperm,

which carried something divine and potent, can never be truly fixed.

The Izbicy cannot argue with R. Shimon about the gravity of the sin, but he can dismiss the Zohar's claims concerning its irreparable consequences out of hand.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

'Ruling a saintly man,' suggests someone who has sinned and transgressed against a rabbinic decree. Concerning him the verse says, Ruling a saintly man, because the *Ba'al T'shuva* - Penitent dominates them, for there is nothing that can stand in the way of *T'shuva* - Penitence.

מושל באדם צדיק היינו אם הי' החטא בדבר בגזרת חכמים ע"ז נאמר מושל באדם צדיק
היינו שהבע"ת מושל עליהם כי אין לך דבר שעומד בפני התשובה,

The rabbinic decree over which the Penitent rules and dominates, is none other than the decree of the saintly man, R. Shimon bar Yochai!

So writes R. Tzadok Hacoheh of Lublin, in his work *Pri Tzadik* on this week's Sidra (*Vayigash* 3). He says he heard this Torah that we are studying, from his rebbe the Izbicy himself, in which the saint was identified as R. Shimon, and the sin referred to is that of spilling seed. Because it doesn't matter whether the holiest man ever to walk planet Earth said so - even if he was the most powerful judge-adjudicator in rabbinic history, he still had no right to slam the door in the face of the penitent.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

'Ruling fear of God' refers to someone who sins in direct contravention of a biblical decree. About this King David also says that the Penitent rules over fear of God; even in this area the *Ba'al T'shuva* is dominant.

מושל יראת אלקים היינו אם הי' החטא נגד תורה שבכתב על זה נאמר מושל יראת אלקים
היינו שגם ע"ז ימשול,

In other words, as R. Tzadok reports in the Torah just mentioned above, the Izbicy said, 'Even if God Himself tells you that the Gates of Repentance are locked against you; pay no attention!'

Sinning in direct contravention of a biblical decree would mean someone breaking one of the Ten Commandments, or going against another *Mitzvah* in the Torah. The *Ba'al T'shuvah* mustn't concede the right to repent and be forgiven, and even to have the sin become a *Mitzvah* - Virtue.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

This is why the prophecy refers to itself as **‘The oracle of a man raised up,’** about which the Talmud says, **Raised Up?** It must be referring to **David** who raised up and established the very concept of *T’shuva* - Penitence. (Avoda Zara 5a)

For although the Torah was given with exaggerated fearfulness, added to which, the sages of blessed memory frightened us concerning various laws, it was all only applicable in anticipation of sinning. Nothing stands in the way of *T’shuva* - Penitence once the sin has been committed. If a person happens to have stumbled he must never despair or give up hope of fixing it with *eshuva* - Penitence. For in the future not the least sin will remain upon upon the soul of any Jew.

על הכל נאמר [שם וע"ע עבודה זרה ה.]. נאום הגבר הוקם על שהוקם עולה של תשובה, כי אף שד"ת ניתנו ביראה מופלגת ועל כמה דברים שאיימו חז"ל כידוע, זאת אינו רק לפני החטא נאמר, אבל נגד תשובה אין לך שום דבר שעומד, ולאחר שיארע לאדם מכשול לא יתיאש עצמו כי לא ישאר לעתיד שום חטא על נפש מישראל,

To be able to stay focused on repentance, in the face of all the voices asserting that *T’shuvah* - Penitence will not help in this case, remains a big challenge. It requires ignoring those authoritative arbiters of the law and its consequences. To say to God, ‘I don’t care what You say, I’m going to worship You anyway!’ Which is what the Ba’al Shem Tov is recorded saying after receiving a message from Heaven telling him he had no place in the World to Come.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

The source of this confidence and resolve is rooted in the tribe of Judah. That’s why the Torah opens this week’s Sidra telling us that **Judah approached him**. There’s nothing new or novel in Judah’s speech to Joseph, he’s simply reiterating the facts, nevertheless he is displaying his tremendous confidence and resolve, because it shows how utterly convinced he is that something is happening to save the situation, that salvation is burgeoning.

ועיקר זאת התקופות נמצא בשבט יהודה, ע"כ ויגש אליו יהודה אף שלא נראה עתה חדשות בדבריו אך שמראה בדבריו גודל תקופתו אשר בלי ספק נמצא עתה צמיחת ישועה.

The rest of this Torah is an attempt to explain how Judah thinks and how he explains his own behavior. Originally Judah had justified his sale of Joseph into Egypt with the following.

- The faults Joseph sees in us, his brothers, must be those he has, for one always notices one's own blemishes in others, as the Talmud states, 'Whoever invalidates someone else does so because he has that very blemish himself.' (Kidushin 70b)
- Joseph told our father that we have our eyes on the Daughters of the Land, suggesting we are sexually incontinent. If Joseph himself has that blemish then he must be treated as a slave. Let us take a lesson from Ham, father of Canaan, who was cursed to be a slave for sexually assaulting his grandfather Noah, as is reported in Genesis (9:25).
- By selling him into slavery we are giving him an opportunity to work through his karma and break out of his sexual incontinence, for if he manages to transcend the slavery and break free then he will also have broken through his personal sexual problems, into freedom.

So Judah, as leader among his brothers had decided, instead of killing Joseph, to give him the ways and means to redeem himself from his deep personality flaws, through a period of slavery. But Judah soon found himself acting out the very flaws and blemishes of character and sexuality which Joseph had accused him of in the first place, when reporting to their father.

By the time Judah acknowledged to the world at large that he had had sex with his daughter-in-law on a public highway in broad daylight he had few illusions left about his own sexual continence. His sons Er and Onan had made names for themselves with their sexual deviance, as was taught in Vayshev. But things only grew steadily worse.

He committed the primary blunder of guaranteeing his brother Benjamin's safety to their father, without having the least power to protect him from the Egyptian lord. In essence, Judah shot his mouth off, which only went to prove the point that he had so forcibly and violently made to Joseph, that anyone who cannot control his speech can most definitely not control his sexual behavior, and vice versa.

And this is where we find him as the Sidra opens, standing in front of the Egyptian lord in the complete and naked awareness that he was everything Joseph had accused him of being. That Joseph had been right all along about him, and there was no way to redeem himself but to allow himself to be used as a slave, precisely as he had sentenced Joseph.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

This is the meaning of the verse, 'Fear God, my son and king and do not get mixed up with Repeaters.' (Prov. 24:21)

'Fear God, my son', the word בן *Ben* - son hints to בינה *Binah* - Understanding, because the fear of God has to be weighed with *Binah* - Understanding, so that it be clear and honest.

וזה פי' הפסוק [משלי כ"ד, כ"א] ירא את ה' בני ומלך עם שונים אל תתערב, בני היינו לשון בינה והוא שיהא יראתך מבוררת ואמיתיות,

One of the first precepts a Jew is taught is the duty to Fear God. Fear of God, or Fear of Heaven as it sometimes referred to, is considered the most crucial tool for the worship of God, without which no spiritual work has value or permanence. Fear of God can manifest as fear of sin, or fear of offending God or fear of being punished by God. It may be experienced as a fear of damaging one's relationship with God, like the fear of hurting a beloved. Fear of God is a many faceted idea.

But the Mei Hashiloach often warns against false fear. Fear of loss, fear of pain, fear of fear itself; if any of these enter into the relationship with God, they poison it irreparably.

Judah standing before Joseph asks himself, 'What am I afraid of? Who am I afraid of? Why am I afraid?'

When it is clear to him that he has no fear of the Egyptian lord, that he has no fear of slavery, humiliation, pain or death; that he has nothing to lose and nothing to gain, he begins speaking from his heart.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

The word מֶלֶךְ *Melech* - king in the verse 'Fear God, my son and king', refers to the need to be powerful, bold and self-confident in one's faith in God.

ומלך היינו שתהי' מלך ותקיף כבטחון גדול בהש"י,

A king rules, it's his reason for being. A king who vacillates and shows fear endangers his kingdom. A king who refuses to lead or make decisions will lose everything.

In your Fear of God it is perfectly respectable and permissible, and sometimes even advisable, to tell God what you need from Him in order to Fear Him properly, because you are king of your Fear, you own it, you rule it and you must lead it and with it.

Next comes the rather obscure, final phrase in the verse quoted above, 'Fear God, my son and king *and do not get mixed up with Repeaters.*' The Mei Hashiloach quotes a Talmudic exegesis on the Hebrew word *Shonim* which we have translated a Repeaters. The Talmudic reading of the word utilizes that aspect of *Shoni* cognate with the word *Mishna* - Learning.

But the Talmud in the end has to the use of translation 'Repeaters' in order to justify the use of the word 'Mishna'. So both meanings of the Hebrew *Shonim* are true. For readers unfamiliar with Talmudic literature, it should be noted that this particular Talmudic exegesis is a fairly typical sample, and a perfect example of why the Talmud can appear so obscure and impenetrable to the non Aramaic speaking visitor. It's a mind-twister of a play on words. Basically it all boils down to this. The verse is a warning against getting involved with those who make decisions based on insufficient knowledge and decide laws based on simplistic readings of legal texts.

However, the Talmud asks, that cannot be the simple meaning of the text because the lesson is too simple, we all know that already. I don't need the exegesis of a verse in the Book of Proverbs to teach me such an elementary lesson. Everyone knows it's stupid to pretend you know how to decide *Halachah* straight from a reading of the Mishna. It would be like hiring a lawyer who has no more than two weeks of Law School experience to represent you in a matter of grave importance. That cannot be the meaning of the phrase '*and do not get mixed*

up with Shonim - Mishnaists.'

At which point the Talmud reverts to the original translation of the word *Shonim* - Repeaters. Don't follow the advice of someone who decides cases on the basis of a Mishnaic reading even if they are repeaters, which is to say, *even if they've done it more than once*. For, as we have learned, when you do a sin more than once - when you become a repeat offender - the prohibition is lifted, or at least seems to be lifted.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

'Do not get mixed up with Repeaters.' The Talmud explains this word **שונים** *Shonim* - as Learners, Repeaters or Neophytes of Mishna who grant themselves permission to decide case-law after insufficient study of the text; students who have only studied the Mishna and not Talmud. The Talmud asks, but surely it's obvious that one should not mix with such people? The Talmud answers that the text refer to those (*Shonim* - Repeaters) who have repeated their sin so often it has become permissible to them, because once a sin is repeated sufficiently it is no longer sinful. (Sotah 22a)

ועם שונים אל תתערב, ואיתא בגמ' [סוטה כ"ב.] אלו המורים הלכה מתוך משנתן, ומקשה פשיטא ומשני מ"ד כרב הונא דאמר כל העובר עבירה ושנה בה הותרה לו קמ"ל,

The Mei Hashiloach finally explains the reason he brought this verse as a source text in this teaching. Because it ends up talking about a repeat offender. A cursory reading of the Talmud gave us the impression that repeating an offence to the point where it becomes a habit, may reduce its severity, but remains reprehensible. That's why the verse warns us against mixing with Repeaters. But the Izbicy deduces a new insight, that the Talmud would not have warned us against such an idea if the idea had no merit whatsoever. Because there are situations in which repeat offending is the only way through the fog of confusion. Precisely by repeat offending a person can clarify what their intention was with the first offence. As the Mei Hashiloach teaches in the Sidra - Ki Tetze [1:8];

We find that Moses rebuked the Jewish People, as narrated in the Book of Numbers, calling them 'rebels', for which he was severely criticized. Although the Midrash makes a number of excuses for his behavior, it was considered a sin on Moses' part. But when later he rebuked the people saying, 'Have you allowed all the [Midianite] women to live?' he fixed the first rebuke. By showing clearly that he was without anger in the later instance, he proved that the original rebuke had also been without anger at them, God forbid.

So, Judah, by engaging hotly with Joseph, and repeating his earlier error of jumping in to guarantee Benjamin's safety, will both repeat and fix his earlier blunder. Judah will prove that his intuition is working properly, that he does know when to jump in and act, and when to shoot his mouth off and speak.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

The truth is that this also has a place. This was Judah tremendous self confidence. Even after going through all that had happened to him, after telling his father, ‘I guarantee him (Benjamin), from my hand you may demand him...’ and after transgressing the rabbinic prohibition against making promises one cannot keep, as we learn, ‘Stay far away from making guarantees.’ (Yebamoth 109b) nevertheless Judah went right back and did it again, in the sublimest confidence that salvation was going to sprout just for him.

היינו שבאמת נמצא איזה מקום גם לזה כמבואר על פסו' ויד תהי' לך. וזה הי' תקופות יהודה אחרי אשר אירע לו שאמר אנכי אערכנו, ועבר על מה שנאמר [יבמות ק"ט]: הרחק מן הערבות ואעפ"כ הי' בטוח שיוצמח לו הישועה:

As has been said in discussion of the previous Torah, Judah and King David evolve as part of the same fabric of *T'Shuva* - Penitence. Judah is the progenitor, but King David is the king of *T'Shuva*, he has power to command it, to command the Sanhedrin of Sages against their decrees, and to command God against His commandments, because nothing stands in the way of *T'shuva*, nothing. The *Ba'al T'shuva* - Penitent has all the power; he has all the בעלות *Ba'alut* - mastery and ownership. That's why he is the *Ba'al T'shuva* - Master of Penitence.

It's difficult to say what the Izbicy sees as the cause and what is effect of *T'shuva*. Is Juda's seemingly reckless self confidence the secret source of his ability to master *T'shuva* or is his humble and heartfelt *T'shuva* the source of his kingly and sublime self confidence?

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

[1:2] Judah approached him, saying, “In me, my master.”

This is a particular strength given by God to the Tribe of Judah, that they never ever despair of salvation, no matter what may have occurred.

In the previous Sidra we read how Judah exclaimed, ‘We will be slaves to my lord,’ which seems to indicate a level of despair. It may also have appeared as though Judah was regretting ever making himself responsible to his father for the return of Benjamin, thereby jeopardizing his place in either world. Judah was realizing that it had all been a huge blunder.

But in this Sidra he takes courage and stands up for himself before God. ‘Even though I may have done wrong from start to finish, God still has the ability to save me.’

ויגש אליו יהודה, הנה זה הכח נתן הש"י בשבט יהודה שאינו מיאש עצמו לעולם, אף כי

יראה שיעבור עליו מה, והנה בפרשה הקודמת אמר הננו עבדים לאדוני והי' נראה שהתחיל ליאש א"ע והי' נחשב בעיניו כשגיאה מה שהתחייב א"ע לאביו בשתי עולמות על בנימין, ובזאת הפרשה התחזק עצמו מאד לפני הש"י, שאף שעשיתי שלא כהוגן מ"מ יש יכולת ביד הש"י להושיע לי,

The speech may appear directed at Joseph, the Egyptian lord, but Judah is speaking to God. Which is to say, Judah confronts Joseph, walks up to him and speaks vehemently into his ear, but he is trying to speak to God inside Joseph. He is addressing God while speaking to the Egyptian lord, because God is listening; Judah is sure of it. He feels it in every fiber of his being.

In kabbalistic terms what is actually happening is that the powerless *Shechina* - Divine Presence in exile is talking out of Judah's throat, in his deepest anguished penitence, addressing Almighty God in the person of Joseph.

The Izbicy makes the following point. Judah is moved to address some part of the Egyptian's soul, to penetrate his cold, cruel and indifferent exterior with words coming from Judah's heart. Because words that come from the heart touch the heart. Judah is sure now that the cry he feels is coming from his true heart, not his ego, not his brain or mind or his emotions, but from his heart of hearts, from the King of the Body. Because Judah is the Lionhearted King.

Judah's speech doesn't have to contain anything new or persuasive to work its magic on Joseph. Its power lies in the source from which it flows. Judah knows his words are going to penetrate Joseph and make a big impression because he's not even talking to Joseph, he's addressing God with an argument that will remain true for the remainder of the six thousand years.

'God, You brought us down here. We didn't want to come. You forced us and made it happen. No one asked to be brought here. We were all minding our own business, doing what we do, getting along as we were, when You ordered things in such a way that we now all find ourselves in the direst peril. We blame ourselves as much as we can and try as hard as we are able to fix stuff, but the ultimate responsibility for all this mess, God, is not ours. We didn't start it. You did. If Benjamin is a thief it's because he was born with the propensity for theft, for grabbing and snatching and carrying things off home, things that don't belong to him. A propensity which would never have shown itself or been acted out if You hadn't dragged him away from his father and stressed him out in Joseph's clutches. This is all Your doing, and You must fix it and make everything right again. It's Yours and Yours alone.'

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

This is the meaning of the phrase **Judah approached him**. Approached him, that is to say into the deepest depths of Joseph's heart, to where Joseph was forced to make himself known to them. Because all these verses are really arguments with God. Judah thought he was standing arguing with a gentile king.

וזה ויגש אליו יהודה, אליו היינו במעמקי לבו של יוסף עד שהי' מוכרח להתודע להם. כי

כל הפסוקים הללו הם טענה נגד הש"י ויהודה הי' סובר שעומד לפני מלך גוי ומתוכח עמו,

This is the purest Izbicy Torah. When the salvation comes, when God open our eyes and we wake as though from a nightmare, it is perfectly obvious that we were never in any danger. Developing the metaphor of Judah speaking to Joseph, while really the *Shechina* addresses her Lord, the Izbicy makes the bold statement that what was true for the brothers is true for the individual. When God opens our eyes we will realize that we were never in any spiritual jeopardy, that we had never sinned.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

When God sent them the salvation it became obvious to them that even prior to that moment they had never been in any real danger. In truth they had always been arguing with their brother. And thus it will be in the future when God saves us and redeems us, the God will show us that we were never in Exile; that no nation ever ruled us, it was always only God alone.

וכאשר שלח להם הש"י הישועה אז ראו שגם למפרע לא היו בסכנות, כי באמת היו מתוכחים עם אחיהם, וכן לעתיד כאשר ישיענו הש"י ויפדנו אז יראה לנו ה' כי לא היינו בגלות מעולם ולא משל עלינו שום אומה רק ה' לבדו,

It was all a bad dream, an illusion. It's not merely that the wicked people will have disappeared, but evil will reveal itself to have been an illusion - it never was.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

And this is the meaning of the verse, 'And yet a short while, and the wicked is not, And you meditate upon his place, and it no longer exists.' (Ps. 37:10)

In a short while evil will have disappeared, but 'when you meditate upon it', meaning, when you think about it with *Binah* - Understanding of the Heart, trying to comprehend what place evil has in the world, 'it no longer exists', meaning, you will find that it never had any power over you.

וזה פי' הפסוק ועוד מעט ואין רשע והתבוננת על מקומו ואיננו [תהילים ל"ז י'], היינו בעוד מעט יתבטל רשע, והתבוננת היינו בכינת הלב באם תרצה להבין על מקומו, ואיננו היינו תראה כי לא הי' בו שום כח ממשלה עליך.

The third Mei Hashiloach teaching spells out some of the arguments from the previous Torah's in more explicit terms.

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

[1:3] My master interrogated his servants, saying, “Have you a father or brothers?” And we answered that we do have an aged father and a brother... And you you said, “Bring him down here to me.”

There doesn't appear to be anything new or mitigating in Judah's defense of Benjamin against the accusation of theft, that Joseph had brought. So what was the purpose of the speech?

Judah's argument is really this. No one deserves be punished for their character flaws and shortcomings so long as they aren't acted out.

So, even if Benjamin has this fault and is prone to stealing, had he remained at home it would never have been acted out like this. It was only the journey and the resulting stresses which brought it from latency to actuality.

If that's the case, then he shouldn't be held responsible and certainly does not deserve to be punished. He didn't choose to come down to Egypt.

אדני שאל את עבדיו לאמר היש כו' ונאמר כו' ותאמר כו' הורידהו כו', והנה אף כי לא נמצא בזה שום תירץ נגד טענות הגניבה שטען יוסף, אך באמת זאת הי' טענות יהודה כי באמת אין האדם נענש על החסרון הנמצא בו באיזה ענין עד שיוציאו לפועל אל המעשה, והנה אף אם באמת נמצא ח"ו איזה חסרון בבנימין בענין גניבה, מ"מ אם הי' יושב בביתו לא הי' בא לכלל מעשה כזאת ורק קטרוג הדרך גרם לו, וא"כ לא עליו האשם בדבר הזה שיענש עליו, כי ברצונו לא הי' לילך לדרך מצרים,

According to the Izbicy, this argument Judah has just made, can be used against Joseph, but is best directed straight to God.

'God, the faults may be our faults, but responsibility for all this mess is surely Yours, is it not?'

***** Mei Hashiloach Text *****

This argument is really an argument with God, because Judah believed that though Joseph may have been the instrument instructing them, it was God's desire that Benjamin be brought to Egypt.

וזאת טען נגד הש"י כי האמין שאף מה שאמר יוסף אליהם שיביאו את בנימין לא הי' בלתי רצון הש"י.
