



How the Missing Son was Returned

Parshas Vayigash

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

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The cold Canadian nights of December were well felt. No one ventured outside as a snow storm raged. Only one righteous man, a man of education, traversed the storm to see me. The man dedicated his life to saving lost youth and setting them back on the proper path.

When he arrived at my door he was drenched through and through. "Why did you not tell me you are coming? I would have sent a cab," I said. He explained that the issue at hand was an emergency. After drying himself off he shared his painful story.

The issue involved a youth who came from a good family, but the parents split after a crisis. The mother maintained a religious home, while the father abandoned his religious way of life and encouraged his children to do so as well.

The son followed in his father's footsteps, while his mother lamented the change. I was upset by the story and offered my help. "I want you to meet the father and ask him to leave his son alone," the educator asked of me.

I could not turn down the request. I phoned the father and asked to meet with him. He refused my request in a vicious fashion, and so I responded in kind – I told him that if he didn't meet me within the hour, I would file a complaint with the police and tell them that he was holding his son against his will.

The father backed down and agreed to meet me.

I prepared myself for a peaceful meeting or a possible battle, and I prayed. We prepared a beautiful siddur for the father, as a gift. We prayed that the meeting with the father would be a positive one, but also braced for a possible clash.

The father had a rich record of run-ins with law enforcement authorities. The local community had battled with the father, and I decided to put an end to this saga, while bringing the child back into the life of light and sanctity. The educator, who saw my resilience, asked how I was not fearful of the pending encounter.

I answered by quoting a verse from our weekly parsha. "Then Yehudah approached him [Yosef] and said, "Please, my lord, let now your servant speak something into my lord's ears, and let not

your wrath be kindled against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh."¹Yehudah addresses Yosef, the ruler of Egypt, in a brash fashion. How does he dare to do so? Yehudah later states: "For

your servant assumed responsibility for the boy from my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him to you, I will have sinned against my father forever.'"

Yehudah has given his personal guarantee that he would return Benjamin to the Land of Israel, even at the risk of losing his own life.



"We are all responsible for each other," I said. "Of course, we are responsible for the tortured soul of a boy, and such responsibility requires a great sacrifice from us, just as Yehudah did."

The father was late. He called me after an hour and a half and said he was stuck in traffic and requested to postpone the meeting for two days time.

I weighed my options – he may be trying to avoid me, but on the other hand I had to give him another chance. On the other hand – I had to be at event in Migdal Ohr in two days.

I made my decision and told the father: "You should know that I am giving you a golden opportunity to meet me and do right by the boy. However, if you fail to show to the meeting, I will find any means at my disposal to come after you."

After a short pause, the father said he would try to come. In the meantime, I postponed my flight back to Israel.

The father appeared to the meeting with a video camera to document the encounter. I told him I was not afraid of the camera or any other device and that he was the one who should be fearful. "I have volumes of material on you, prepared by the community. If you act out of line – it could harm you."

The father turned off the camera and sat by me. I spoke to his heart for several hours. The next day the lost son flew with me to Israel and enrolled in Migdal Ohr.

I won the war.

¹ Beresheit 44:18-34.