

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

VAYIGASH

Yosef sent his brother on their way to their father. As they were leaving, he told them: AL TIRG'ZU BADERECH - "Do not quarrel on the way" (45:24).

Rashi suggests that his concern was that each might accuse the other of having been crucial in selling Yosef some 22 years earlier and thus cause a fresh round of family upsets and suffering.

On arriving back in Canaan:

They broke the news to him: "Yosef is still alive. He is the ruler of all Egypt." [Ya'akov's] heart became numb, for he could not believe them (45:26).

Only after they gave the details of Yosef's words:

He saw the AGALOT - the wagons - that Yosef had sent to take him. The spirit of their father Ya'akov revived... saying "It is enough; my son Yosef is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (45:27-28).

Rashi quoting Bereishit Rabba 94:3 brings the following tradition. Yosef asked his brothers to remind his father that the last topic that they had been learning together was the EGLA ARUFA. It was the password of authenticity from Yosef to his father

that he was still alive. It would form a continuation to their way of life that abruptly broke 22 years previously. It was the prospect of that continuation that caused Ya'akov's spirit to revive.

The Rashbam translates AL TIRG'ZU BADERECH differently: not "do not quarrel on the way", but, quoting texts in support, "do not fear on the way". Travel home with confidence. It could hardly be because they didn't know the way: they'd travelled it more than once before and they were hardly lone and vulnerable travellers. Possibly, Yosef was warning them about the end of the journey: the need to approach their aging father Ya'akov Avinu with confidence when updating him on the family situation. For, as is well-known today, it is not just extremely bad news that is highly stressful. Extremely good news is also highly stressful. Moreover, their father might ask awkward questions, probing into why Yosef went missing and presumed dead in the first place. And it is not as though they didn't have anything to hide.

Yet Yosef knew his father's nature very well, despite their 22-year separation. He knew his father's way of dealing with good fortune. It was to accept the good fortune gracefully and then move on. That is what he did after meeting Eisav and his 400 men. he conducted the meeting pragmatically and then confidently travelled

forward. No questions about Eisav's change of attitude, no remarks revealing his intense fear of meeting up with him. The same, he reasoned, would happen here. As long as the brothers behaved confidently and authoritatively, Yosef knew that their father would take the wonderful news at face value and then move on.

This, as the Rashbam explains, was the purpose of the AGALOT, the wagons. To impress on his father that the good news was real. Indeed, when he saw the AGALOT complete with the royal insignias, he knew that his son Yosef had 'made good' in great style. Twenty-two years ago, he rebuked his son when he told of his dreams about the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him. But, the Torah tells us, Ya'akov Avinu took those dreams seriously, keeping them in mind for when they would play out in the future. As they were doing now. Viewing the convoy of royal transport all set to take him down to Egypt in person, explains the Rashbam, would be, and was, enough to convince him that all was genuine and that the dreams of his son achieving royalty were indeed coming to full realization and full fruition - for the good.

Perhaps the reason for this is to teach the following lesson to both his children and those who came after him, even to this day. Sometimes it is better not to ask questions. Some-

times it is not good to know too much. Relationships can easily be ruined by asking too many questions. Two relatives or friends who lost touch with each other suddenly meet at a wedding. One starts asking lots of personal questions: Why didn't you keep in touch? What have your children been doing? Where do you daven? Where do you work? And so on. The other person senses that he's facing an inquisition, not taking a friendship forward. It would be much better to take the sudden meeting at face value, enjoying the present scenario of where they're suddenly meeting, and, like Ya'akov Avinu, moving forward to future plans stemming from the realities of the present rather than bringing up the past. With the view that if the past needs to come out, it will do so in due course... 