**Vayigash 5776: Building the Future**

By Rabbi Joshua (structurally known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

*Thanks to all those who responded to our urgent call for prayers for R, Hoffman last week. Thank G-d his condition has stabilized and improved somewhat since. However, he remains in a difficult situation. Prayers are therefore still requested for him, Yehosha ben Yonina, בתוך שאר חולי ישראל, among the ill of the nation.*

The pivot of the confrontation between Yosef and Yehudah was the suffering that Yaakov was enduring over the absence of Binyamin. This anguish was in addition to his mourning over the disappearance of Yosef, as we learn in Parshas Vayeishev. Moreover, even after the family is reunited, Yaakov, in response to Pharaoh’s question of how old he is, tells him that his life had been bad. The rabbis tell us that Yaakov was punished with the loss of one year of his life for each word in Pharaoh’s question and for each word in his response. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that he was punished for Pharaoh’s question because he generated it through his appearance, which evoked suffering.

Rav Chaim Mordechai Katz, in his Be’er Mechokek, asks why Yaakov should feel such anguish, especially in light of the teaching of the Sforno, in his explanation to the verse (Devarim 14:2) “You are children to the Lord your God, do not cut yourself” (lo sisgodedu). The Sforno explains that it is not appropriate to express extreme mourning over one’s dead, when one still has a close relative, namely, God. Why then, did Yaakov express such anguish?

Rabbi Katz answers that Yaakov’s concern was not for himself as an individual, but as a father of the Jewish nation. The ultimate purpose of the Jewish nation is to teach mankind to accept God’s rulership, and to do this, it was necessary for there to be twelve tribes, each contributing its unique element to the nation’s teaching. Any deviation in this respect would have vast implications for the future, and that is why Yosef’s absence caused him so much suffering.

We may add to Rabbi Katz’s explanation the comment of the Netziv that we mentioned in our message to Parshas Vayeishev. He says that the term “ben zekunim”, usually translated as “a child of his old age,” describing Yosef, refers, more specifically, to Yaakov’s personality. Yaakov was friendly with all people, even with idolaters, and he discerned that trait in Yosef as well. In order for all the tribes, with their various elements, to function properly, they had to be able to work together. Yaakov saw Yosef as the one who could bring the brothers together, and, therefore was particularly anguished over his disappearance.