



VAYIGASH

WHEN YOU'RE IN PAIN, START YELLING

Standing Up for Your Beliefs

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayigash

Judah approaches Joseph to plead for the release of Benjamin, offering himself as a slave to the Egyptian ruler in Benjamin's stead. Upon witnessing his brothers' loyalty to one another, Joseph reveals his identity to them. "I am Joseph," he declares. "Is my father still alive?"

The brothers are overcome by shame and remorse, but Joseph comforts them. "It was not you who sent me here," he says to them, "but G-d. It has all been ordained from Above to save us, and

the entire region, from famine."

The brothers rush back to Canaan with the news. Jacob comes to Egypt with his sons and their families—seventy souls in all—and is reunited with his beloved son after twenty-two years. On his way to Egypt he receives the Divine promise: "Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again."

Joseph gathers the wealth of

Egypt by selling food and seed during the famine.

Pharaoh gives Jacob's family the fertile country of Goshen to settle, and the Children of Israel prosper in their Egyptian exile.

What is an effective way to convey our opinions to people with opposing views, and especially to critics who challenge us?



RASHI'S RULES

1. If an unusual expression, or a word that requires translation, appears in the Torah more than once, Rashi will explain it the first time it appears. After that, Rashi assumes that we know its meaning each time it appears.
2. In his header, Rashi always quotes the words from the passage he intends to explain. If he quotes words he doesn't explain, it must be that they contribute to, prove, or support the explanation that's about to come.

TEXT 1A

Genesis 44:18

וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוֹדָה וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי, יִדְבָּר נָא
עֲבֹדְךָ דָּבָר בְּאָזְנֵי אֲדֹנָי וְאַל יַחַר אַפְּךָ בְּעֲבָדְךָ,
כִּי כַמוֹךָ כְּפָרְעָה.

And Judah approached Joseph and said, “Please, my master, allow your servant to speak a matter into my master’s ears, and let your wrath not be kindled against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh.”

TEXT 1B

Rashi, ad loc.

"וַיֵּגֶשׁ אֵלָיו . . . דָּבָר בְּאָזְנִי אֲדַנִּי."
יִכְנָסוּ דְבָרֵי בְּאָזְנֶיךָ.

“And Judah approached Joseph . . .
‘a matter into my master’s ears.’”
May my words enter your ears.



The phrase “speak a matter into the ears” is unusual. What does it mean?

TEXT 2A

Genesis 20:8

וַיִּשְׁכַּם אַבִּימֶלֶךְ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל עֲבָדָיו,
וַיִּדְבֹּר אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם.

And Abimelech arose early in the morning,
and summoned all his servants, and spoke
all these words into their ears.

TEXT 2B

Genesis 23:13

וַיִּדְבֹּר אֶל עֶפְרוֹן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם הָאָרֶץ.

And he spoke to Efron into the
ears of the people of the land.

QUESTIONS

1. Rashi seems bothered by the phrase “speak a matter into the ears,” yet his commentary doesn’t seem to explain these words. What is Rashi telling us?
2. Why does Rashi only explain this phrase now, the fifth time it appears in the Torah?
3. Why does Rashi include words in his header that he does not explain in his comment?

THE PHRASE IN PREVIOUS INSTANCES



speaker addressing crowd

THE PHRASE USED IN THIS INSTANCE



one-on-one conversation

TEXT 3

*Rabbi Chaim ibn Atar, Or
Hachayim 44:18*

צריך לדעת, למה הוצרך לומר "ויגש",
אחר שקרוב אליו היה ומדבר עמו עד
עתה? . . .

אכן פשט הכתוב הוא, כי דבר ידוע הוא
כי מנהג המלכים ישבו לפניהם גדולי
המלכות ושריהם ויועציהם. והיה אם
בא איש על דבר משפט או דבר מאת
המלך, לא יעמוד בהפסק בין המלך
ושריו היושבים ראשונה במלכות, וחוז'
לעגול יעמוד ושם ידבר.

וכמו כן היה מדבר יהודה עד עתה,
ואחר כך "ויגש אליו", פירוש שנכנס
לפנים ממחיצתו ועמד בין המלך ובין
השרים, כדי שלא ישמעו דבריו לזולת
המלך.

We need to clarify: Why does the Torah tell us that Judah approached Joseph if he was already in close proximity to him, considering that they had already been conversing? . . .

It is well known that kings are customarily accompanied by their high-ranking courtiers, ministers, and advisors. When people are granted an audience with the king, they are not invited to advance past the high-ranking ministers and stand directly before the king. Rather, they stand beyond the circle of royal advisors and address the king from there.

This is how Judah addressed Joseph until this point. Then he approached Joseph, meaning he stepped past his station and stood between the king and his ministers so that only the king would hear his words.

ANSWER 3

Rashi included the words “And Judah approached him” in his header to prove that this was a quiet one-on-one conversation that was not intended for anyone else’s ears.

ANSWER 2

Rashi only explains this phrase here because unlike the other instances, here it’s used in a one-on-one conversation and requires explanation.

TEXT 4

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim 5708,
p. 252

וואס מען מיינט "דערהערן", ווייס א חסידישער
איד זייער גוט. מען האט שוין אמאל גערעדט
בארוכה דעם חילוק פון "הערן" ביז "דערהערן".

"הערן" מיינט מען אויך ניט סתם הערן מיט די כלי
השמיעה אליין. סתם הערן מיט די כלי השמיעה
הייסט נאך ניט געהערט, דאס איז נאר אין איין
אויער אריין און פון דעם צווייטן ארויס.

"הערן" מיינט מען על דרך ווי עס שטייט: "דבר
כי שומע עבדיך" (שמואל א ג, י). וואס דער
פירוש פון "שומע" מיינט מען פארשטיין. די קאפ
הערט, דאס הייסט, די פארשטאנד הערט. וואס
אויף דעם שטייט: "אזן מלין תבחן" (איוב יב, א),
מען פארשטייט דאס וואס מען הערט.

"דערהערן" איז גאר עטוואס אנדערש, ווען דער
אזן שומעת פירט אריין דעם דערהער אין אלע
איברים ממש.

A Chasid is very familiar with what we mean
when we say *derheren*. We once discussed
the difference between *heren* and *derheren*
at length.

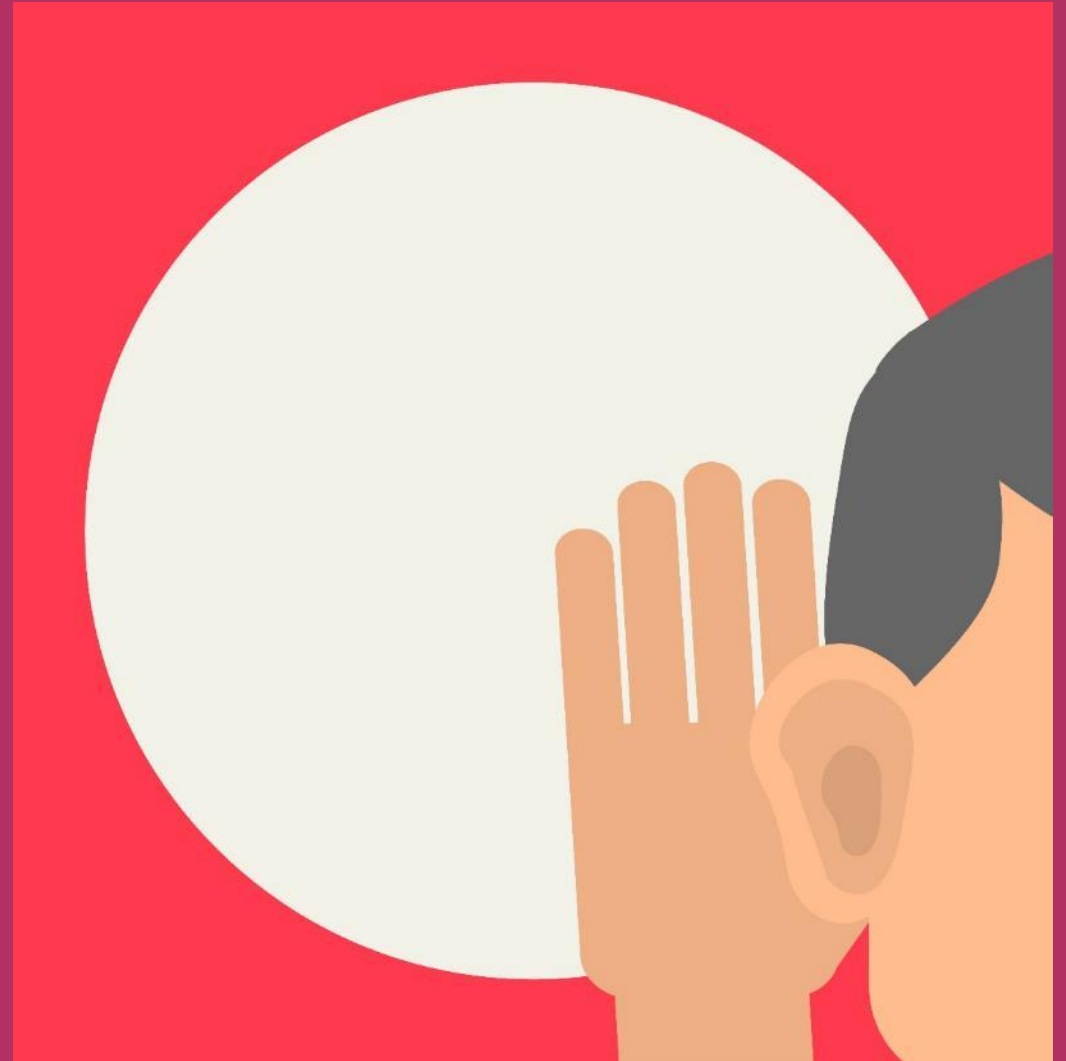
Heren doesn't mean listening only with
one's ears. Listening with one's ears is not
really listening. It goes in one ear and out
the other.

Heren is like the phrase, "Speak, for your
servant is listening" (I Samuel 3:10). The
meaning of listening is to understand. The
brain listens, the intellect listens. It is like
the phrase, "The ear examines words" (Job
12:11). To understand what we hear.

Derheren is very different. It is when the
listening ear carries the insight to literally
every organ in the body.

ANSWER 1

Rashi is not merely rephrasing the words of the Torah. Rashi explains the phrase as a request for Joseph to truly listen to Judah's words and not react emotionally.



TEXT 5

Rashi, Genesis 44:18

"וְאַל יִחַר אַפִּי". מִכָּאן אַתָּה לָמַד
שֶׁדָּבַר אֵלָיו קָשׁוֹת.

“Let your wrath not be kindled.”
From here we discern that Judah
spoke forcefully to Joseph.



If Judah wanted Joseph to listen respectfully and truly tune in to Judah's words, why did he speak harshly?

TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 20, p. 216*

כל זמן עס האנדלט זיך וועגן ענינים
חצוניים, געלט-פארדינסטן וכדומה,
פירט מען זיך לויט שכל'דיקע
חשבונות און מ'רעכנט אויס ווי עס
לוינט זיך בעסער.

בשעת אבער עס קומט צו אן ענין פון
"ונפשו קשורה בנפשו" (בראשית מד,
ל), אן ענין וואס רירט אן בנפשו של
בנימין ובנפשו של יעקב, דאן מאכט
מען ניט קיין חשבונות ווי עס לוינט
זיך בעסער און מען הויבט אן גלייך
מיטן גאנצן שטורעם, וכמאמר העולם:
אז עס טוט-וויי, שרייט מען.

So long as we are dealing with
shallow concerns, monetary
profits and the like, we approach
the matter rationally and
determine the most effective way
to address it.

When we deal with a matter of
“his soul is tied to his soul”
(Genesis 44:30), something that
endangers the lives of Benjamin
and [his aged father] Jacob, we
don’t make rational
determinations about the best
approach. We begin by making a
tumult. As the saying goes, one
screams when it hurts.

Judah found the balance between speaking urgently and not coming across as offensive. Doing so is crucial for effective communication in high-stakes matters.



TEXT 7

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Ibid., p. 217*

אין די זאכן איז אדרבה, דברי קשות
איבערצייגן דעם הערער אז דאס איז
באמת נוגע, נוגע בנפש. ניט ער מיינט
געלט, א ביינקל, כבוד, וכיוצא בזה.

דאס מאכט אז "יכנסו דברי באזניך":
ער הויבט אן גלייך מיט א שטורעם, ער
"קלאפט אויפן טיש", און רעכנט זיך
ניט מיט קיין דיפלאמאטישע חשבונות,
דערפילט דער צווייטער ווי די זאך איז
דעם מדבר נוגע אין פנימיות הנפש.
ווירקט עס אויפן צווייטן ער זאל זיך
אונטערגעבן און נאכגעבן, ביז אס עס
ווערט בנחת וברצון.

In these matters, strong words
convince the listener that the
matter is truly existential. We are
not concerned with money,
prestige, power, and the like.

This approach results in "may my
words enter your ears." When we
begin with a tumult, bang on the
table, and eschew diplomatic
niceties, others realize that this is
truly an existential matter for us.
This convinces them to concede
and grant our demands.
Eventually, they [come around to
our perspective and] grant it
happily and willingly.

TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, “The Rebbe
on How to Handle a U.S.
Secretary of State,”
www.youtube.com*

The solution to these unpleasant situations is the opposite of what was done until now. Up to now, the approach has been to compromise on vital issues, not just minor ones, to receive something in return. . . . We opened negotiations by insisting that [the subject at hand] is a matter of survival, but since we are alone among “seventy nations,” we feel we have no choice but to compromise. The problem is that once we make concessions, it is impossible to find the point at which compromises must end.

. . . The only approach that has worked with the United States until now has been to stand firmly and explain that it is not about stubbornness, but a matter of survival.



When a matter is existential, one must speak with urgency and determination, leaving no room for negotiation.

When raising our children, we must assert our values with confidence, showing that they are non-negotiable, while always speaking with love and respect.



TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 20, P. 217*

מען דארף גלייך בזריזות הכי גדולה
אנהויבן מיטן גרעסטן שטורעם אויף מציל
זיין דעם קינד פון חינוך והנהגת מצרים,
חינוך היפך התורה, וועלכער פירט צו
התבוללות — פקוח נפשות ממש.

און בשעת מען גייט מיט דער וועג,
דערפירט עס צו דעם, אזוי ווי ס'איז
געווען בא "ויגש אליו יהודה" (בראשית
מד, יח), אז דורך דעם וואס יהודה איז
ארויסגעקומען מיט א שטורעם איז ניט
נאר עס איז ניט געווען דער ענין פון
"עבדים" און עבדות, נאר אדרבה -
"ויאמר פרעה גו' ואתנה לכם את טוב
ארץ מצרים" (בראשית מה, יז-יח), און
נאך פאר דעם, "לפניו" - מאכט מען "בית
תלמוד שמשם תצא הוראה" אין מצרים.

We must make an immediate tumult, and
with great alacrity, to save our children from
an education and behaviors that were
prevalent in Egypt: an education that is
opposite to that of the Torah—one that
leads to assimilation, which imperils their
spiritual life.

This approach yields the results that were
achieved when “Judah approached Joseph”
(Genesis 44:18). Because Judah began by
making a tumult, Jacob’s family did not
suffer slavery [until much later]. On the
contrary, “Pharaoh said, . . . ‘I will give you
the best of the land of Egypt’” (Genesis
45:17–18). Even before Jacob’s family arrived
in Egypt, [Judah went ahead and]
established a Talmudic academy in Egypt,
where Halachic rulings were formulated.

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 20, P. 217*

מען איז מחנך אז די תלמידים ווייסן קלאר
ווי בני יעקב דארפן זיך אויפפירן און
ווייסן און קענען זיין בעלי הוראה.

This means that we educate our children to know precisely how descendants of Jacob are meant to behave and even to become authorities on Jewish law.



Proper education is just like communicating with people who disagree with us on existential matters: we speak frankly and tell the truth without ambiguity.

KEY POINTS

1. Judah was about to talk forcefully to Joseph, in a manner unbecoming toward a royal. Out of respect for Joseph, he did not want others to overhear. He therefore walked up to him and spoke quietly.
2. Though he was about to speak forcefully, he wanted Joseph to listen with an open mind and heart. He therefore prefaced his remarks with a plea that his words enter into Joseph's ears.
3. When we discuss matters that are not existential, it is important to talk diplomatically and show respect for both sides.

KEY POINTS

4. When we discuss matters of existential importance, we must state our views forcefully so that others realize that there is no room for negotiation: that it is a matter of critical importance.
5. At the same time, our tone must be respectful and loving. We want to be on the offense, but we don't want to be offensive. This gives the other person the best chance of accepting our message.

