

MORASHAH
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Rabbi Martin J. Berman

Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Vayigash

When Judah approaches Joseph to plead for his brother Benjamin, he says to Joseph, “for you are like Pharaoh”. Rashi explains that both Pharaoh and Joseph issued decrees without fulfilling them. Rav Moshe Feinstein wrote: “It is hard to believe that Judah would have insulted the all-powerful Pharaoh in such a way, especially since there was no need to do so. So what did Rashi mean by this comment?”

He suggested that this is what was meant: “If you make decrees you do not fulfill, people will think that your master Pharaoh does the same thing, since a servant usually emulates his master.” The servant follows in the same path as the master; similarly the child follows in the path of the parent. If a child acts in wrong manner, we might assume that the child is merely aping the ways of the parent.

We live in an age in which the individual is paramount. What I do is my business and no one else’s. The standard modern ideal is that I can do as I please as long as no one gets hurt. But we do affect those around us. We do not live on an island, isolated from the rest of humanity. We all come from families, from communities, from religious groups, or just some social circle. Our actions will be a reflection upon them. If they care for us, even if we think that we are causing injury only to ourselves, we cause injury to them.

For you are like Pharaoh. The truth of the matter is that what we do always affects others. You can cry foul and say it is not fair, but who ever promised that life would be fair?

Shabbat Shalom!

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