

Repentance is a Journey and Not a Single Event

A Brief Commentary on Parashat Vayigash

“Then Y’hudah approached Yosef and said, ‘Please, my lord! Let your servant say something to you privately; and don’t be angry with your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself.’” (Gen. 44:18)

Introduction

One of the most commonly translated words for repentance in the *Torah* is *t’shuvah*. However, the Hebrew word *t’shuvah* can more accurately be translated as ‘turn around and return.’ Thus, from a *Torah* perspective repentance is to *turn around and return* to *Adonai*. This concept was clearly understood by *Yeshua’s talmidim*: “Therefore, repent, and turn to God, so that your sins may be erased” (Acts 3:19, CJB). *Parashat Vayigash* illustrates the concept of repentance when *Yosef’s* brothers return to him. To truly comprehend repentance, we must first realize that repentance is a journey, and not a single event. The journey of repentance lead us to salvation (leads us to *Y’shua*). *Vayigash* exemplifies how in the process of returning to *Adonai* we are required to sacrifice and forgive in order to experience renewal. Scripture states clearly in Romans 12:1-2: “*I exhort you, therefore, brothers, in view of G-d’s mercies, to offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for G-d. This will please him; it is the logical “Temple worship” for you. ²In other words, do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the ‘olam hazeh.’ Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing (metamorphosis) of your minds; so that you will know what G-d wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed.*” Metamorphosis requires time!

The Journey Begins with Sacrifice

The connection between repentance and sacrifice can be seen in Gen. 44:32-34: “*For your servant himself guaranteed his safety; I said, ‘If I fail to bring him to you, then I will bear the blame before my father forever.’ Therefore, I beg you, let your servant stay as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go up with his brothers. For how can I go up to my father if the boy isn’t with me? I couldn’t bear to see my father so overwhelmed by anguish.*” *Yehudah* is willing to take *Binyamin’s* place as *Yosef’s* prisoner. Clearly this is an act of repentance for him. Recall, *Yehudah* was the brother who wanted to sell *Yosef* to the Ishmaelites. But now his heart has returned to the will of *Adonai*. As a result, he now places the needs of other individuals above his own. Because he wants to substitute himself for *Binyamin*, he is foreshadowing his descendant, Messiah *Y’shua* who substituted His life for our own! *Yehudah* is concerned about the ill effects that leaving *Binyamin* in Egypt would have on his father. He is demonstrating his repentance through his works by protecting his father from the grief of losing *Binyamin*. His desire to sacrifice his own needs shows how strong his love has grown. *Yochanan* 15:13 states “*No one has greater love than a person who lays down his life for his friends.*” Thus, as a result of *Yehudah’s* act of love, *Yosef* was able to reveal himself to his brothers.

The Journey Continues with Forgiveness

Repentance also requires forgiveness. Gen. 45:1-5 states, “*At last Yosef could no longer control his feelings in front of his attendants and cried, ‘Get everybody away from me!’ So no one else was with him when Yosef revealed to his brothers who he was. He wept aloud, and the Egyptians heard, and Pharaoh’s household heard. Yosef said to his brothers, ‘I am Yosef! Is it true that my father is still alive?’ His brothers couldn’t answer him, they were so dumbfounded at seeing him. Yosef said to his brothers, ‘Please! Come closer.’ And they came closer. He said, ‘I am Yosef, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But don’t be sad that you sold me into slavery here or angry at yourselves, because it was God who sent me ahead of you to preserve life.’”* *Yosef* was willing to forgive his brothers for all the hardship they had caused. *Yosef’s* forgiveness of his brothers made it possible to heal the division and the crack, and open the avenue that reunites his family. Healing the rift made it possible for *Adonai* to return *Yosef* to his father. As a result, all his family was able to escape the famine by living in Egypt. *Yosef’s* act of forgiveness was an essential part

of *Adonai's* plan to save the life of not only *Yosef* but also his brothers and ultimately his entire family! *Yosef's* forgiveness healed the wounds and allowed the *Adonai's* blessings to flow to his brothers and his father.

The Journey Ends in Renewal

Repentance causes us to become renewed—to become new creations. Gen. 45:9-11 states: “*Hurry, go up to my father, and tell him, ‘Here is what your son Yosef says: God has made me lord of all Egypt! Come down to me, don't delay! You will live in the land of Goshen and be near me - you, your children, your grandchildren, flocks, herds, everything you own. I will provide for you there, so that you won't become poverty-stricken, you, your household and all that you have; because five years of famine are yet to come.’*” Because *Yosef's* brothers repented and returned to *Yosef*, they are able to experience renewal. As renewed individuals the brothers were given a fresh start, and provided with new farms and lodgings in the land of Goshen. *Yosef* also guaranteed that as renewed individuals under his protection, his family would never experience poverty.

Repentance is an enduring process that takes our time and energy to complete. This is because heartfelt repentance requires, sacrifice, forgiveness, and renewal. Sacrifice is required to show the world we are willing to lay our lives down for others. Forgiveness is required so that we do not hold grudges against individuals who have wronged us. Forgiveness is also required in order that our own debts be forgiven: “*For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*” (Matthew 6:14). Renewal is also required so that we become the new creation we are intended to be: “*Therefore, if anyone is united with the Messiah, he is a new creation - the old has passed; look, what has come is fresh and new!*” (2 Corinthians 5:17) When repentance is built on the process of sacrifice, forgiveness, and renewal, it is an enduring witness of the salvation that is freely given by *Adonai* through *Y'shua* to the world. It cost Messiah *Yeshua* everything (His life) to give it to us freely!