

A Closer Look- Parshas Vayigash

The Text:

Judah's humble plea for mercy towards Benjamin is accompanied by an attempt to shake Joseph's confidence in his position of power:

Judah said to Joseph, "Upon whom do you place your trust? Do you place your trust on Pharaoh? Pharaoh himself makes decrees and does not keep them – for it says in the laws of Egypt that a slave may not rule [and Pharaoh appointed you, a former slave, as ruler of Egypt]."

The Question:

Judah claims Pharaoh is unreliable, since he appointed Joseph ruler in contravention of his own laws. But Pharaoh did it to save Egypt from starvation! Whether or not we agree with his actions, it hardly seems to show that Pharaoh is a liar. On the other hand, it *does* show Pharaoh's esteem for Joseph; he disregarded his own laws because he considered Joseph such an asset. Wouldn't Judah's emphasis of these facts therefore *increase* Joseph's confidence in Pharaoh's appreciation for him?

The Answer:

Pharaoh may have seen the appointment of Joseph as critical for the survival of the country – but he could have annulled his previous decree, instead of simply violating it; at the very least, he should have expressed some remorse at the inconsistency involved, however necessary. By his total lack of concern, Pharaoh demonstrated a disregard for truth. An unreliable friend is no friend at all. Pharaoh may have valued Joseph, but a true relationship is founded on loyalty and integrity.

The Message:

One of life's most difficult challenges is the temptation to compromise our standards in favor of those we love. But honesty and integrity are the true basis of love; when we bend the truth, we damage those very relationships we hold so dear, ultimately hurting our loved ones far more than we help them. Our greatest service to those we care about is to maintain our commitment to truth.