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Moshe *ben Shlomoh a"h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## Equal Value

## PARSHAS VAYIGASH 5778

This week's *parshah* features the long-awaited reunion between Yosef and his brothers. After he revealed himself to them and the dust began to settle (so to speak), Yosef set about distributing gifts. As the Torah recounts: לְכֹלֵם נָתַן לְאִישׁ חֲלָפוֹת שְׂמֵלוֹת וּלְבִנְיָמִן נָתַן שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת כֶּסֶף – “To all of (the brothers), to each of them, he gave sets of clothing; and to Binyamin he gave 300 pieces of silver and five sets of clothing” (*Bereishis 45:22*).

### Repeating History?

The Gemara (*Megillah 16b*) is somewhat mystified by Yosef's behavior here. After all, he had just been separated for many years from his father's house, suffering exile, servitude, and hardship, all on account of the *middah* of jealousy. The favoritism the brothers perceived as directed by their father toward Yosef had set off the myriad troubles that befell him. Yet, here he was, seemingly displaying the very same behavior toward Binyamin! Why, indeed, would he risk stirring up such jealousy again by bestowing upon Binyamin five times the number of gifts he gave to his other brothers?

The Gemara answers that by providing Binyamin with five outfits, Yosef was actually alluding to a future historical event regarding one of Binyamin's prominent descendants: when Mordechai, from the tribe of Binyamin, would eventually emerge triumphant, he would be clothed in five royal garments. As the *passuk* states: וּמֵרָדֵיכִי יָצָא מִלְּפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלְבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת – “And Mordechai went out from before the king, in royal raiment of *techeiles* and *chur*, with a great golden crown and a cloak of linen and *argaman*” (*Esther 8:15*).

However, the Vilna Gaon adds an important note to this explanation. It is still somewhat difficult to understand why Yosef would take this great risk simply for the purpose of presaging a future event. Thus, the Gaon explains that, in truth, Binyamin's gift was no more expensive than that of his brothers. In other words, the overall value was the same; the single outfits received by each of the brothers were of a much higher worth than each of the five that Binyamin received. And so, in the end, the gifts were indeed of equal value, as Binyamin's garments were much less costly. Why, then, did Yosef follow such a seemingly unusual course, giving each of the brothers a single article of great value and singling out one brother to receive five articles of lesser value? This is where the Gemara's teaching comes in, relating that Yosef did so for the purpose of signaling the future.

While this may all be well and good, there still seems to be one factor that has been overlooked: in addition to the clothing, Yosef imparted to Binyamin yet another something extra: “To all of them... he gave sets of clothing; and to Binyamin he gave **300 pieces of silver** and five sets of clothing.” How may we account for this sum of money that the brothers did not receive?

## A Penny Saved...

The Beis Halevi, R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, is renowned as one of the most erudite and accomplished Torah scholars of more recent times and the progenitor of the famed “Brisker” dynasty. It is related that this very question was addressed by him in his youth, on the occasion of a Chanukah celebration hosted at his father’s house. As the matter was being hotly debated by the participants, the young R' Yosef Dov arose and offered the following incisive answer.

His explanation is based on a *halachah* emanating from a Mishnah in Gittin (4:6), which deals with the subject of the unauthorized sale of slaves:

המוכר עבדו לגוי או לחוצה לארץ, יצא בן חורין.

“If one sells his slave to a gentile or to (a master residing) outside of the Land – that slave is automatically set free.”

The Sages were concerned for the slave’s spiritual welfare in these cases, and as such, ordered his immediate release. The issue, of course, is that this might be easier said than done; in the instance of the gentile buyer, he might not be so willing to part with his acquisition. Thus, the Gemara explains (*Gittin 44a*) that money must be provided to compensate and convince the new owner into releasing the slave. In fact, even up to ten times the amount of the slave’s true value must be forwarded for this purpose.

Now, this *halachah* would seem to have been applicable in the case of the brothers, who sold Yosef as a slave to Mitzrayim. According to the letter of the law, they really should have been obligated to redeem him for up to ten times his value. Elsewhere, the Torah places the value of a slave at the price of thirty *shekalim*. (This we find in the section dealing with the laws of damages; when one’s ox gores someone’s slave, the owner of the ox must pay this sum to the slave’s owner [*Shemos 21:32*].) What emerges, then, is that the brothers were in fact obligated to pay ten times this sum in order to redeem Yosef from the sale – a total of 300 *shekalim*, the exact amount presented to Binyamin.

As matters turned out, of course, the brothers did not end up having to pay. They never redeemed Yosef, but he himself was eventually freed and rose to prominence as ruler over Egypt. In terms of pure economics, then, they thus saved and effectively received the amount of 300 *shekalim*. Of all the brothers, however, it was only Binyamin who had not participated in the sale of Yosef. As such, he had never owed the 300 and did not gain anything by its forfeiture. So it is, that while the brothers had effectively earned 300 *shekalim*, Binyamin received nothing.

And therefore, concluded the Beis Halevi, when Yosef now offered Binyamin the 300 pieces of silver in addition to the clothing, it in fact was not “extra.” On the contrary, with this monetary gift, Yosef was simply “evening the score,” placing Binyamin on equal financial footing with the other brothers (*Peninim Mi’shulchan Gavohah, Parshas Vayigash*).

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