Parashat Vayigash: Silence from Shame

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Bereishit 45:3	
וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יוֹסֵף֙ אֶל־אֶחָ֔יו אֲנִ֥י יוֹסֵ֖ף הַעוֹד֙ אָבִ֣י חָ֔י וְלֹא־יָכְל֥וּ אֶחָ֛יו לַעֲנ֥וֹת אֹת֖וֹ כִּ֥י נִבְהֲל֖וּ מִפָּנָֽיו׃	Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still well?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dumbfounded were they on account of him.

1. ***Niv’halu M’Panav***

Modern Translations of נִבְהֲלוּ מִפָּנָיו	
The Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*	Dumfounded
Rabbi Joseph Hertz, “The Hertz Chumash”	Affrighted
Rabbi Charles Kahane, *Torah Yesharah*	Confused
ArtScroll Publications, *Rashi Commentary on the Torah*	Disconcerted
ArtScroll Publications, *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*	Disconcerted
Professor Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*	Terrified
Professor Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible With Sources Revealed*	Terrified
Professor Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*	Dismayed

Rashi on Bereishit 45:3	
מִפְּנֵי הַבּוּשָׁה׃ **נבהלו מפניו.**	**They were amazed at his presence:** Out of shame.

Hizkuni on Bereishit 45:3	
כי נבהלו מפניו יראו ודאגו על אשר עשו לו.	**They were frightened of him:** They were afraid of what he might do to them as reprisals for what they had done to him.

Radak on Bereishit 45:3	
נבהלו, לפי שמכרוהו בשו ונבהלו.	**They were dumbfounded**, remembering that they had sold him and now utterly ashamed, unable to face him.

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

Rabbeinu Bahya on Bereishit 45:3	
ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו. לבשם חרדה ואשתקל מלולם מפני שמכרו אותו לעבד והיו רואים אותו כמו מלך, ועוד נבהלו כי יראו לנפשם שמא יגמלם רעה, וכענין שכתוב (שעיה יג) ונבהלו צירים וחבלים יאחזון.	**His brothers were not able to answer him because they had become frightened of him:** They were dumbstruck realizing that they had sold him into slavery, and now he wielded the authority of a king. They were also scared that he would take revenge on them now. The expression נבהלו occurs in that sense in Isaiah 13,8 ונבהלו צירים וחבלים יאחזון, "And, overcome by terror, they shall be seized by pangs and throes."

Sefat Emet on Bereishit 45:3	
בפסוק ולא יכלו אחיו כו' כי נבהלו כו' אני יוסף אחיכם אשר מכרתם אותי כו'. וקשה כי בזה הוסיף עוד לבייש אותם בהזכיר את מכירתם אותו. אך בודאי השבטים הרגישו אז קדושת יוסף הצדיק. וז"ש נבהלו מפניו דייקא. והשיב להם יוסף כי בא למדריגה זו על ידי מכירתם אותו למצרים ושהם גורמים בצדקתו. ובזה סר מהם הצער אשר חשבו כי אם היה אצל אביו היה גדול בצדקו יותר אבל לא כן הי' כנ"ל.	In the verse (Bereishit 45:3-4), "And his brothers could not answer him because they were afraid of him...I am Joseph your brother whom you sold to Egypt," there is a difficulty. If Joseph was trying to console them, why did he mention the sale, which would embarrass them more? However, there was a deeper consolation here. The brothers definitely felt Joseph's holiness, as indicated by their fear of his countenance. Joseph was telling them that he reached this high level of righteousness because they sold him to Egypt. This realization alleviated their guilt, as they thought he would have been greater had he stayed with their father, but this was not the case at all.

2. Silence and Shame

Bavli Haggigah 4b	
רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר כִּי מָטֵי לְהַאי קְרָא, בָּכֵי: ״וְלֹא יָכְלוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהֲלוּ מִפָּנָיו״, וּמָה תּוֹכֵחָה שֶׁל בָּשָׂר וָדָם כָּךְ, תּוֹכֵחָה שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא — עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה. רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר כִּי מָטֵי לְהַאי קְרָא, בָּכֵי: ״וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל לָמָּה הִרְגַּזְתַּנִי לְהַעֲלוֹת אוֹתִי״, וּמָה שְׁמוּאֵל הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מִתְיָירֵא מִן הַדִּין, אָנוּ — עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה!	The Gemara similarly relates: **When Rabbi Elazar reached this verse, he cried: "And his brethren could not answer him, for they were affrighted at his presence"** (Genesis 45:3). He said, in explanation of his emotional reaction: **If the rebuke of** a man of **flesh and blood** was **such** that the brothers were unable to respond, when it comes to **the rebuke of the Holy One, Blessed be He, all the more so. When Rabbi Elazar reached this verse, he cried: "And Samuel said to Saul: Why have you disquieted me, to bring me up"** (I Samuel 28:15). He said: **If Samuel the righteous was afraid of judgment** when he was raised by necromancy, as he thought he was being summoned for a Divine judgment, **all the more so** that **we** should be afraid.

Amos Harel and Yael Friedson, "I Asked Him How He Isn't Ashamed," *Haaretz*, 29 November 2023

"Sinwar was with us three to four days after we arrived. I asked him how he is not ashamed to do such a thing to people who have supported peace all these years," [Yoheved] Lifshitz told the Hebrew-language Davar newspaper, as she demonstrated in Tel Aviv for the return of the rest of the hostages on Tuesday evening.
"He didn't answer. He was silent."

Big Question: Pretend you are one of Joseph's brothers. What is the first thing that goes through your mind immediately after Joseph reveals himself to you?