



Parshas Vayigash

For the week ending 11 Teves 5757
20 & 21 December 1996

Overview

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so, he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother Yosef. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of Hashem's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov, with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived. Yaakov together with all his family and possessions sets out for Goshen. Hashem communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual consequences, because it is there that Hashem will establish the Children of Yisrael as a great nation even though they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption. The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring, and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Yaakov/Yisrael become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

Insights

THE POWER OF LOVE

“And he (Yosef) fell on his brother Binyamin’s neck and wept. And Binyamin wept on Yosef’s neck.” (45:14)

‘Free Love’ was a much touted slogan in the sixties. Actually, it wasn’t so much about ‘Love’ as lust. And ‘Free’ meant freedom to ‘do my own thing’ at all costs. Which meant that someone else wound up picking up the tab emotionally. That kind of ‘free’ is pretty expensive. However, ‘Free Love’ *does* exist.

When someone loves his fellow man not for any reason, but merely and purely because he is a creation of the Master of the World and a reflection of His Majesty, then this Free Love is a love which hastens the final redemption.

The *Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) was destroyed because of ‘Free Hate’ — baseless hatred. What will hasten its return is the reverse — ‘Free Love’ — love which doesn’t depend on conditions.

“And he wept” — Yosef wept about the two *Batei Mikdash* to be built in Binyamin’s portion of the land that would eventually be destroyed. “And Binyamin wept” about the *Mishkan* (Tent of Meeting) that would be erected in Yosef’s portion of the land and also would eventually be destroyed.

Why were Yosef and Binyamin crying now, at this time of consummate joy at their re-uniting, over events which were thousands of years in the future?

Furthermore, why were they crying over the *other’s* loss and not their own?

When the brothers encountered each other after 22 years of separation, they realized that what had kept them apart was ‘Free Hate’ — the hatred of the brothers for Yosef. Immediately, they saw the future destruction of the Temple which would be caused by ‘Free Hate.’ They cried, for just as Free Hate had separated them all these years, so too it would destroy the Temple in the future.

The cure for free hate is ‘free love’ — to feel such empathy that the pain of one’s fellow is as one’s own.

That’s why each cried over the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* of the other. Yosef and Binyamin were showing a path for generations unborn, teaching us the way to cure ‘free hate.’

For even though Binyamin’s *Beis Hamikdash* would not be built until Yosef’s *Mishkan* would be destroyed — its existence was predicated on the others demise — nevertheless Binyamin cried over the destruction of the *Mishkan*.

Binyamin would have preferred the *Beis Hamikdash* never to have been built, and that Yosef’s *Mishkan* would have stood forever. Such is the power of ‘free love.’

(Based on Rabbi Y. M’Kuzmir in Iturei Torah)

ALL WILL BE REVEALED

“And Yosef said to his brothers ‘I am Yosef.’ (45:3)

When we study history and we learn of wars, pogroms and holocaust; when we read of natural disasters in the newspapers, and see pictures of continents ravaged by famine and disease people ask, “Where is G-d?”

From the moment the brothers came to Egypt to buy food they encountered one disaster after another. The brothers asked each other “Why is Hashem doing this to us?”

With three small words “I am Yosef,” all the brothers’ questions were answered. In a flash, the purpose of all the heartache of the previous 22 years became blindingly clear. So too, in the future, when the world hears the three words “I am Hashem,” all the dilemmas of history will be solved in an instant.

(Chafetz Chaim)

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel
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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

THE ARTICULATE SPEECH OF THE HEART

“And Yehuda approached (Yosef) and said, ‘Please, my master, allow your servant to speak in the ears of my master..’ ” (44:18)

In Czarist Russia many harsh decrees were enacted against the Jewish People. The Chafetz Chaim once went to plead against such a decree before a high government official. Since the Chafetz Chaim spoke no Russian, and the government official spoke no Yiddish, an interpreter stood waiting.

The Chafetz Chaim spoke with the feeling and sincerity that can emanate only from a heart as pure as his, and when he finished, silence filled the room.

The interpreter started to speak. “Your honor, the Jew claims...” The Russian government official raised his hand and said “No translation will be necessary... I understood every word...” As a result of this meeting, the decree was subsequently revoked.

Until he revealed his true identity, Yosef spoke to the brothers only through an interpreter, and thus Yehuda was under the impression that he didn't understand Hebrew. Nevertheless, Yehuda approached Yosef and wanted to speak “in his ears.” He was aware that the content of his words would not be understood, but he wanted to communicate to Yosef the depth of his feelings, for ‘words which come from the heart, enter the heart.’

(Based on Growth through Torah, by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

WITH ALL MY HEART

“He (Yosef) fell on his (father's) neck, and wept exceedingly.” (45:14)

Yosef poured out his heart in a sea of tears at the emotional release of seeing his father after so many years. However, Yaakov's reaction is not mentioned at all.

In fact, at that very moment, Yaakov was reciting the Shema.

Why did Yaakov choose this, of all times, to say Shema?

A tzaddik harnesses every opportunity and emotion to serve Hashem. When Yaakov felt a supreme surge of joy and love at the sight of his beloved son, his first wish was to channel his emotions into a sublime expression of love for his Creator.

Thus he recited the Shema, the ultimate acceptance of Hashem's sovereignty: “And you shall love Hashem, your G-d with all your heart...” (Gur Aryeh)

Haftorah: Yechezkel 37 15-28

TWO CHIPS OFF THE OLD BLOCK

One of the ways that a prophecy becomes irreversible is if it is reinforced by a symbolic action.

In this week's Haftorah, the prophet Yechezkel foretells that, in the time of the final redemption, the two halves of the Jewish people, symbolized by Yehuda and Yosef, will be brought together like two blocks of wood. Hashem tells Yechezkel “Join them together [so that they] look like one. They shall be one in your hands.” (37:17)

Even though nothing could be more separate than two blocks of wood, eventually these two blocks will become one. And even though only Hashem can perform the miracle of making one block out of two, for us to deserve that Hashem will accelerate the redemption, we must “look like one;” i.e., the Jewish People must be united and free from malice and baseless hatred.

For although the redemption is irreversible and inevitable, it is in our hands to delay it or to make it happen today.

(Based on The Midrash Says)

THE SHATTERED HALVES

“Say to them ‘ Thus says my Lord Hashem/Elohim: Behold! — I take the wooden tablet of Yosef which is in Ephraim's hand, and of the tribes of Yisrael his comrades, and shall place them with it together

with the wooden tablet of Yehuda, and I will make them one wooden tablet, and they shall become one in My hand.” (37:19-20)

Throughout the centuries of exile, the eye of the prophet sees the Jewish People still divided into the two antagonistic kingdoms of Yehuda and Ephraim.

The stamp of Ephraim/Yisrael is religious nihilism —fanatical enmity towards every specifically Jewish point of view, and indiscriminate tolerance for every other point of view.

On the other hand, Yehuda/Yisrael cannot escape the reproach that he picks out which mitzvos he wants to keep, and those that he performs more or less mechanically.

When these two shattered halves of the Jewish People are again united, it will not be a sad compromise of ‘murdering the Torah:’ with Ephraim/Yisrael making superficial concessions to the right, producing a ‘Kosher-Style’ smorgasbord of glatt treif on the one hand, while Yehuda/Yisrael, the ‘fanatical ultra-Orthodox’ (as they appear to Ephraim/Yisrael), ‘moderate’ their demands to comply with the ‘modern world.’

Rather, Hashem promises that both will be refined and purified, assured of help to achieve this purity, and these “two wooden tablets” will become “one in My hand.”

(Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch)

INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

HAMAVIDIL חִסְרָו
“THE ONE WHO DIVIDES...”



Where, please, is the G-d Who created me
Who places songs in the night?

Things happen to us, which seem because of our limited vision to be misfortunes. In the end they turn out to have been for our benefit and causes for rejoicing and singing.

In this zemer that we sing as the sacred light of the Shabbat fades into the comparative darkest of the weekdays, we reflect on this aspect of Hashem's merciful relationship with us. Even in the darkness of circumstances, when it seems that our fortunes are as black as night, we must remember to sing with the confidence that everything will turn out for the best. Hashem, Who created me, places the cause for songs in the very darkness of human existence.

אִיִּה נָא אֱלֹהֵי עֹשֵׂי
הַנּוֹתֵן זְמִירוֹת בַּלַּיְלָה

Ayah eloa'ah osoy
hanosayn z'miros balaylah

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel
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