



Parshas Vayigash

For the week ending 7 Teves 5759
25 - 26 December 1998

Overview

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are 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 selflessness, Yosef has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and he now reveals his identity. 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 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 Israel 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. Seventy souls in total descend to 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 slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

Insights

"I'M ALL RIGHT, JACK!"

"Yosef sustained his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food according to the children" (47:12).

One of the less pleasant aspects of survival in the corridors of power is "protexia." It's not *what* you know it's *who* you know. Protexia is totally contradictory to the way a Jew behaves in public life. We learn this from Yosef in this week's Parsha.

Yosef is the archetypal "court Jew." He is respected and needed by the state. He commands tremendous power. But he never uses his power to feather his own nest. When Yosef's father and his brothers come down to Egypt in the midst of a ravaging famine, he could quite easily have cut through the red tape and given them a disproportionate amount of food. However, he gives them only *"according to the children,"* according to their number and no more. Yosef's family received no more than anyone else in the country despite their protexia.

At a time when your community is suffering, how can you go home and say "Sling a steak on the grill; *I'm all right, Jack!*"?

A Jew in public life has a G-d given obligation to sanctify the name of his Creator just as Yosef did, by feeding his family *"according to the children."*

JEWISH DISTINCTION

"Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there." (46:3)

It's said that over 25% of Nobel Prize nominees are Jewish. If that's true, it's a remarkable statistic seeing as the Jews are but one-half percent of the world's population. Jews have a history of

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Parshas **Vayigash** - 7 Teves 5759, 25 - 26 December 1998

distinguishing themselves in all the societies to which they have contributed.

But there's another kind of Jewish distinction.

In the Passover Haggada we read that in Egypt we were "a nation there," meaning that we were a *distinctive* entity. The Egyptians would not break bread with the Jews; it was distasteful to them. But it was this very antipathy which allowed us to become a nation in Egypt. If we had stayed in Canaan where there was no similar repugnance, we may have totally intermarried and been lost.

When we apply to the local golf club and get turned down, we could feel slighted because "the Egyptians" won't break bread with us. However, it is precisely this "distinction" which has helped us to remain a nation throughout two thousand years of exile. That's real "Jewish distinction."

HISTORY LESSON

"He sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef, to teach ahead of him in Goshen" (46:28)

Yaakov's descent into Egypt is the paradigm of the descent of the Jewish People into every exile in history. The actions of the fathers are a roadmap with which their children navigate their way through every exile. What does Yaakov do before he enters the land of Egypt, before he arrives in exile? He sends Yehuda "*ahead of him to teach.*" He sends Yehuda to Egypt to open a house of study. Yaakov was sending a message to all his children until the end of history: The survival of the Jewish People in exile, whether that exile is in Egypt or Spain, Babylon or Brooklyn, is secured only by creating a spiritual home for the Jewish People before their bodies arrive. Not the reverse.

ALL FOUR ONE

"He sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef, to teach ahead of him in Goshen" (46:28)

Yehuda is a very special name. The name Yehuda, spelled "*yud, hey, vav, dalet, hey*" contains the Tetragramaton, the ineffable four-letter name of G-d. But it also contains another letter, the letter *dalet*. No name in Hebrew is merely conventional. Name defines essence. What is the essence of Yehuda that is represented by a combination of the Tetragramaton and *dalet*?

Dalet is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It equals four. There are four points of the compass, four directions. Four connotes movement away from a central point, deviation. The mystical writings tell us that G-d created this world with the letter *heh* and the next world with the letter *yud*. What does it mean that G-d created this world with the letter *heh*?

If you open up a Torah scroll you'll notice that the letter *heh* is really made up of two other letters. *Dalet* and *yud*. Look at the *dalet*. The *dalet* is like two lines at right angles to each other. One line travels north/south and the other east/west. The *dalet* represents the idea of movement in four directions. Now look at the *yud*. In its simplest form, the *yud* is no more than a dot. A dot has no direction. In order for us to write a *yud* we have to give it some form of

substance. To the naked eye, a dot seems devoid of substance, of direction. It's no more than a point. However, if you magnify that dot under a microscope you'll see that however small you write that dot, it still occupies space. It is still contained within the parameters of length and width; of direction. The ideal dot cannot be drawn in this world. A point which occupies no space is something that can only exist in a world which is above space — the World to Come. That's why the *yud* represents the World to Come.

The ideal form of this world is encapsulated in the letter *heh*. A *dalet* — the epitome of direction, of dimension — whose focus is the *yud* — the point which is beyond this world. The very shape of the letter *heh* teaches us what we are supposed to be doing in this world: To take all the multiplicity of this world, all its direction and variety, to take the four corners of the world and make them revolve around that *yud*, that ineffable point outside of space and time. The purpose of this world is to center itself on that which is beyond this world.

That's the ideal incarnation of this world. However, when the *dalet* "forgets" the *yud* and focuses only on itself, when this world seeks to become all of existence, then it denies the Creator and becomes a travesty of existence.

The Jewish People were destined to be exiled by four kingdoms: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. It's no coincidence that there are four kingdoms and four exiles. Those four kingdoms epitomize separation from the center of all creation, from G-d.

Yaakov sent Yehuda to Goshen. If you look at this verse in Hebrew, you'll see that Goshna ("to Goshen") consists of four letters. Each letter hints to one of the exiles of the Jewish People.

It was not by coincidence that, of all the brothers, Yaakov sent Yehuda to Goshen. Yaakov was pre-figuring the journey of the Jewish People into the four exiles that are contained in the word Goshna. Yehuda carries in his name the very spiritual DNA of the Jewish People's mission in this world: To center the *dalet* of this world on the *yud*. Yehuda's name contains the antidote to those four exiles: To take the four directions, the four corners of the world, and focus them on that which is above the world, the point that can never be seen, the still point at the center of this turning world.

It's also no coincidence that the fulfillment of this task will come through the *mashiach* (gematria Goshna), who is the scion of Yehuda. He will take the four corners of this world and make them one. When that day comes all the apparent separation and fragmentation of this world will vanish. On that day, G-d will be One and His name One.

Sources:

I'm All Right, Jack! - *Sforno, as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer*

Jewish Distinction - *Sforno, as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer*

History Lesson - *Bereishis Rabba 95:3; Rashi*

All Four One - *Maharal, B'nei Yissaschar, (see also The Secret of the Dreidel*
<http://www.ohr.org.il/special/chanukah/chan95.htm>)

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Haftorah: Yechezkel 37:15-28

CHIPS OFF THE OLD BLOCK

One of the ways that a prophecy becomes irreversible is when 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." 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.

THE SHATTERED HALVES

"Say to them 'Thus says my L-rd Hashem/Elokim: Behold! - I take the wooden tablet of Yosef which is in Efraim's hand, and of the tribes of Israel 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 Efraim.

The stamp of Efraim/Israel is religious nihilism: Fanatical enmity towards every Jewish point of view, and indiscriminate acceptance of every non-Jewish religious point of view.

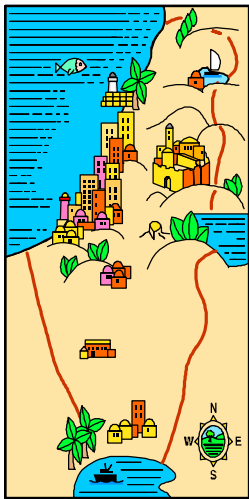
On the other hand, Yehuda/Israel cannot escape the reproach that he picks out which *mitzvos* he wants to keep, and those he keeps more or less mechanically.

When these two shattered halves of the Jewish People are again united, it will not be a sad compromise. 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."

Rabbi Mendel Hirsch

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



HAIFA

Haifa, home of Israel's largest port, is first mentioned in the Talmud in an unusual context which may shed light on the history of a community whose source is otherwise obscure.

The residents of ancient Haifa, say our Sages (*Megillah 24b*) could not lead the services in the synagogue nor could its *kohanim* bless the congregation. This was because they were unable to differentiate between the guttural sounds in Hebrew, and their mispronunciation could turn a blessing into a curse. Some historians suggest that this language defect was the result of the exposure of Haifa's Jews to the many foreign merchants who settled on the coast for commercial purposes.

These historians also suggest that the name Haifa is a contraction of two Hebrew words: *Hof Yafe* — beautiful coast. A major feature of its beauty is Mount Carmel, site of the famous showdown between the Prophet Elyahu and the idolatrous prophets (*Melachim I, 18*). A major part of the modern city has developed on this mountain.

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