



## Parshat Vayigash – Dual Flames

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Torah tells us that when Yaakov and his family went down to Egypt, he sent Yehuda ahead to prepare for them a place in Goshen. Rashi explains that he sent him to set up a *beit midrash*, a place to learn or a place to live. The Midrash Tanchuma writes on the verse, "And Yehuda he sent ahead of him," that the blessing on the *havdala* candle is not said until we get pleasure from its light. We learn this from Hashem. First, He saw the light was good and then He made a distinction between light and darkness. Similarly, after we benefit from the light, we say *hamavdil* making the distinction between *Shabbat* and the rest of the week. How does this relate to Yaakov sending Yehuda ahead?

The Daat Sofrim explains that the idea of *havdala* is seeing the difference between two things. Yehuda's mission was to separate the light and holiness of Torah from the darkness of the outside world. This too is the *havdala* we make on *motzai Shabbat*. The Beer Yosef echoes this idea. Yaakov was worried that the young children shouldn't be exposed for even one moment to the impurity of Egypt. Therefore, he sent Yehuda ahead to prepare a separate place for them to live. *Havdala* is the clear distinction between the ways of Egypt and the ways of Yisrael. Wherever we are, we have to have the foresight and sensitivity that as Yaakov separated himself from the Egyptians, we should separate ourselves and our youth from the negative environment around us. We must be sensitive to how much of the outside world we let in, and at the same time invest effort to make the light of Torah and *mitzvot* bright enough to overshadow the darkness.

The Midrash says that on the first *motzai Shabbat* Adam encountered darkness. He was afraid that evil would overcome him. Hashem gave him prophetic insight to take

two stones and rub them together to create fire. He then made the blessing *Borei meorei ha'aish*. Another Midrash in Pirkei d'rav Eliezer notes that fire was not Adam's initiative. Hashem sent down a pillar of fire to light his way and protect him from evil. When Adam saw that Hashem hadn't left him, he said the blessing *Beorei meorei ha'aish*. What actually happened? The Shvilei Pinchas says both *midrashim* are correct.

The Gemara in Yoma says there cannot be an awakening above unless there's an awakening from below. We have to create fire from below so we can draw down fire from above. Adam took the initiative. He rubbed two stones together and was met with fire from above. Every *motzai Shabbat*, we too create fire and Hashem responds. The Ramak says when we say *borei meorei ha'aish*, four angels come down, Michael, Gavriel, Rafael and Uriel. They bring the great light of the *Shechina* to guard and illuminate our way throughout the week. The custom to bend our four fingers before the *havdala* flame hints to these four angels. We say *beorei meorei ha'aish* on two wicks symbolizing the intertwined fires, our fire below and Hashem's fire from above.

The *yetzer hara* is called *tov meod* because when good overcomes evil, good takes on a higher dimension. Struggling with and overcoming the *yetzer hara* brings us to greater heights. Adam did not comprehend the repercussions of his sin until *motzai Shabbat* when darkness overwhelmed him. His negative side, the part he had never met before, stood before him and he was overcome by terror. Then Hashem in His great mercy taught Adam how to create fire by rubbing two stones together. The *lev ha'even* (heart of stone) is the *yetzer hara*. Hashem hinted to Adam, instead of being frightened by the evil inclination take both inclinations and rub them together. Once engaged in struggle,

the *yetzer tov* will overcome the *yetzer hara* and create light. The Zohar says the greatest light emanates from darkness. If we invest all our strength and effort to fight evil, Hashem will help us emerge victorious.

We face two battles in our *avodat Hashem*, the inner battle of Yosef and the outer battle of Yehuda. Maharal explains that evil is everything that conceals Hashem. Goodness is a manifestation of Hashem, who is the ultimate reality. The *yetzer hara* can be defeated by bringing Hashem into the picture just as Yosef did when he saw the image of his father. If one feels on the edge of sin one can simply say, "Hashem is here now," and make that truth real. If one realizes that evil is an illusion the battle is over. Yehuda's philosophy was to struggle with darkness head on and create a *kidush Hashem* in public. In contrast Yosef said, "I'm not getting involved in this world." He wouldn't eat with the Egyptian people. He maintained his Judaism despite all odds in a hidden way. Yosef is called *Tzafnat Paneach*. The Sefat Emet explains that Yosef's hiddenness was his strength that allowed him to unravel what was concealed. When Yaakov sent Yehuda ahead he was teaching us that there are two ways to make *havdala* between good and evil, the hidden and public way. When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers there was a reversal of roles. Yosef entered into the arena of the outside world while Yehuda was silent.

The ultimate goal is not one or the other, but appreciating both. Yaakov sent Yehuda ahead so that he would meet Yosef. The uniting of these two opposite paths was like Adam rubbing the two stones together. When Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Yehuda will come together and take on the quality of each other, it will inspire the ultimate light of redemption.

## Class 2 – Shema Yisrael Declaration of Faith

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

We say in Shema, "*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad*." Why do we call Hashem, *Elokeinu* (Our Master)? Doesn't Hashem rule the entire world?

Hashem interacts with the world in two ways: *hashgacha klalit* and *hashgacha pratit*. *Hashgacha klalit* is generalized divine

intervention. Nature makes no choices. There's no real inner difference between the varied species of flowers. They're all part of one kingdom with its own rules designed by the Creator. Therefore Hashem doesn't relate to each flower differently.

In contrast, humans, who have free choice,

can have varying levels of relationship with Hashem. Those who draw closer to Him, become more like Him, and draw Him more intensely into their lives. Those who take the divine and corrupt it, who turn giving into taking and kindness into cruelty, become progressively more distant from Hashem. The forces of evil are the choices we make that

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block goodness and light. The more a person chooses good, the closer he draws to Hashem. The more he distances himself from Hashem the less Hashem reveals himself to him. We have enormous power to change ourselves and the world.

In our own life there are times we are closer to goodness and truth and times we are far away. In response, there's a reciprocal level of energy from Hashem manifested through *hashgacha pratit* (individual divine intervention). But it isn't always visible to us so that we don't lose our free choice. When a person does a good deed the external side of it may have a defined end, but the internal side of it affects our soul and our relationship with Hashem. While a Jew by nature is open to *hashgacha pratit*, a non-Jew's relationship to Hashem depends completely on his individual efforts.

The Torah begins with the words, "*Bereishit bara Elokim*," to teach us that the world was created for the Torah and the Jewish people who have a unique and a specific place in the

world. You can't put together a puzzle if you don't know what the picture will be. The Jews and the Torah provide that picture. The nations of the world and all of creation are analogous to the puzzle pieces. Each one has its place. Yet the actual form is meant to come via the Torah, which is the world's blueprint, and the Jews who actualize its commandments. The reward and punishment of the non-Jews are mystically entwined with the fate of the Jewish people. No one's deeds are irrelevant. But our closeness to Hashem and the level of intervention we receive is unique as the verse says, "*Karov Hashem l'chol korav*." (Hashem is close to those who call out to Him.)

When we say Hashem is *echad* (one) we mean that He is the source of everything and nothing is outside of His realm. Hashem is far beyond our intellectual reach, yet still very much with us. This is analogous to the base of a tower that stands below while its tip reaches the sky. In that sense there's no difference between Hashem's capacity to relate to the highest possible level of spiritual reality while still being conscious of the smallest occurrence below. When we view the world as

a manifestation of Hashem's energy and creativity, and at ourselves as a part of that giant spectrum, our picture of ourselves, the world, and Hashem changes. The Jewish people are one. This is hinted at in the word *echad*. *Aleph* refers to *shevet Levi* who is unique among the tribes. Chet are the eight tribes who descended from the matriarchs. *Daled* are the four tribes who came from the handmaidens. We are all interwoven and share a unique capacity to know Hashem's oneness.

Each of us has a special purpose. How do we know what it is? We have to ask ourselves, "Where is my point of conflict? Where do I need to proactively choose?" For one person it may be overcoming his natural selfishness, for another it may be straining to be honest. The place where a person faces conflict tells him, "Here is my role." Happiness doesn't come from retreat but from moving forward and doing and being. Living life with Hashem brings one to the exhilarating awareness of one's unique purpose in the world and the choices which will ultimately shape us.

## Hashivainu – The Loyalty As King And As A Father

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In the blessing of *Hashivainu* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we ask Hashem to help us repent. In the previous blessing of *daat* we prayed for intellect. After attaining the necessary abilities to know Hashem, we plead to come closer to Him. The Ramchal says cleaving to the Creator is the reason for creation. Hashem blew into us a divine spark so that we could attach ourselves to Him. The Ramban notes that Hashem put us in this world to connect to Him with praise and prayer. Discovering Hashem and developing a relationship with Him is the primordial purpose of every Jew.

We begin the blessing of *Hashivainu*, "Our Father, return us to your Torah. Our King, bring us close to your service." We have a dual relationship with Hashem, of a Father and a King. We speak of Torah and *avodah*, our intellectual connection and emotional connection with Hashem.

Life is meant to test us. We face incessant choices daily. The greatest Jews, including the *avot* and Moshe, failed on occasion and

the Torah emphasizes this. Failure is a part of the human condition and we shouldn't let ourselves be depressed by it. We must learn from our mistakes and move on to make better choices in the future.

*Hashiveinu* connects to the previous blessing of *daat*, which asks for full faculties to face our daily challenges. We ask that our thinking and emotional faculties be healthy so that we can use our *daat* to make the right choices. If our way of thinking is not trained by Torah, it will be flawed and we will inevitably go down the wrong road. That is why we ask right at the start of the blessing, "Return us Hashem to your Torah." Let it be the light that will guide us on the path of life.

The blessing of *Hashiveinu* is reminiscent of the blessing of *Ahava Rabbah*. First we relate to Hashem as a loving Father who accepts us as we are. Then we can approach Him as the King. We ask Hashem, "*Avinu ...v'sen bilebenu binah ...*" Our Father, give our heart understanding to know your Torah. The

*mitzvah* of studying Torah is that a father must teach his child. Hashem is our ultimate father and teacher. When we understand Torah and know how to live it, then we can ask, "*V'keiravtanu Malkeinu l'avodescha*," Our King, bring us closer to your service.

In the first level of *teshuvah*, we ask for Divine help to repent and rectify our failings. This can be accomplished through learning Torah and doing the *mitzvot*. Once our mistakes have been fixed, we can ask to go even higher. We can ask for *teshuvah sheleima*, complete *teshuvah*, to merit to bask in His presence and embracing love.

The blessing of *Hashiveinu* encompasses fundamental life challenges: success, failure, repentance, building on past mistakes, and getting things right. When we can walk hand in hand with Him, when we can sense His closeness and cleave to Him, we will have fulfilled the fundamental purpose of human existence.