

Providence, Proxy and Pardon: Parshat Vayigash

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

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The first half of Parshat Vayigash recounts the confrontation between the brothers and Yosef, and Yosef's subsequent revelation of his identity. While the brothers are overwhelmed, Yosef enters into a long speech intended to placate the brothers. However, in reality his words provide tremendous insight both into his essence and into the proper interactions between a penitent wrongdoer and his victim.

From Yosef's words, it is evident that he bears them no grudge. Rabbi Frand points to Yosef's deep faith in Hashem. Three times in the course of his speech, Yosef speaks of Hashem sending him to Egypt as part of His master plan. Recognizing this as Hashem's will rather than the brothers' choice allowed Yosef to forgive them unconditionally. Further, adds Rabbi Wolbe, Yosef realized that these steps were necessary for him to actualize his prophetic dreams and become a king.

Rabbi Ochion recognizes in Yosef a lesson for our own lives. Someone who remains steadfast in his belief in the goodness of Hashem in spite of challenges he is facing will ultimately get his reward. Even when we don't understand our difficulties, like Yosef, we must hold onto our faith and consider these challenges the means that will enable us to grow toward the potential Hashem sees in us.

Yosef says, "I am Yosef your brother – it is me whom you sold into Egypt." At first, this seems to be a strong rebuke. Yet it is followed by strong words of reconciliation. The Dorash Mordechai explains that Yosef was thanking his brothers, for if it were not for their selling him to Egypt, he would not have become viceroy to Pharaoh. The Leavdecha b'Emes adds that Yosef's words indicate the positive ripple effect of his coming to Egypt, to become the support of his family and of the world in general. Further, Yosef's fortitude in repelling the advances of Potifar's wife set the example for Bnei Yisroel to remain chaste even in the depraved culture of Egypt. Yosef repeats every detail as proof that each step of his experience, not just the final result, was orchestrated by Hashem.

Yet, just as the Egyptians were judged on their motivation and their inhuman cruelty, so too were the brothers judged on their motivation. So too must we keep our motivations pure, even when performing *mitzvot*, notes Rabbi Shach. Sometimes the actions and certainly the results may be out of our control, but our thought processes always remain in our control, and this is what the brothers were punished for, writes the Ohr Gedaliah.

The Tiv Hatorah notes that the perpetrator of a

wrong still must accept responsibility, while the victim of this wrong must attribute what happened to him as coming from Hashem. When we internalize that everything comes from Hashem, writes the Nefesh Chaim, we eliminate negativity from our thinking.

The Birkas Mordechai adds that Yosef is implying that he embraces his mission and would have chosen these challenges himself to do the will of the Creator. Yosef chose to do his best in the mission Hashem set for him, just as we must do our best in whatever mission Hashem sets for us.

Usually, observes the Letitcha Elyon, the wrongdoer tries to minimize his action while his victim plays it up. Yosef does the opposite. Hashem ignores our wrongdoing against Him even when we use His gifts in His disservice instead of in His service. Similarly, we also have the ability to ignore slights to our person and continue to love our neighbor.

Yosef's appellation as a *tzadik*, is well deserved not only because he resisted physical temptation, not only because his faith in Hashem never faltered, but also because he retained sensitivity to others, and treated them with love and dignity.

The First Prayer: Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The *Shemone Esrei* or the *Amidah*, the standing prayer, is the most important of all the prayers. All of the preceding prayers and the prayers afterwards help to integrate it. The first blessing is by far the most important and one should make sure to have *kavana* (intention) at least during this first paragraph.

There are three methods to stay focused. The first method is looking at the words one by one so that they keep you on track. This requires self-discipline. Another way is to question – "Why was I going there, what does it have to do with what I started saying?" And then bring it back to Hashem. When you do that, you bring Hashem into areas of your life where you might have excluded him. The

principle is- take Hashem with you wherever you go. Most people find it easy to take Hashem with them into the painful moments but including Him in the good moments is a lot more difficult. Noticing where your mind is going gives you the skill throughout the day to take Hashem with you wherever you go. The Baal Shem Tov would say that after you notice your mind wondering, ask yourselves where you were going? Were you going towards your job, your life review, to planning time? That's telling you that there are areas of your life that you're not taking Hashem with you. Is He with you in your daily life? Are you ready to accept His will?

The third method is exactly the opposite and is

prescribed by both the Baal HaTanya and Rabbi Nachman. If you notice your mind wandering, command it to stop. Don't give up on your prayers. If you've lost two sentences it doesn't mean you have to lose the third sentence. If you catch yourself wondering at the word *Baruch*, be there for *Atta*. By doing that you surrender your ego, telling Hashem- "This is my time for you." The more you can submit your ego to Hashem, the bigger your cup becomes and the more spirituality you can bring into your life.

The first blessing is called *Avot*. If it's about Hashem, why is it called after people? Our access to Hashem came through the teachings of the forefathers that were experien-

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tial and hereditary. Most people don't question what they are accustomed to seeing. Yet Avraham didn't take existence for granted. He looked at the world and saw so much intricacy, power, and beauty, that he had to question where it came from. If nothing makes itself where is it all from? He so to speak discovered Hashem. Hashem was there all along, but Avraham developed consciousness of it. He was the cup that could hold the water. Before he left this world, Hashem told him, "You lived a life bigger than life, and therefore something of you will be transmitted to your

children." Our extreme sensitivity to life having meaning because it was created with intelligence and intricacy and comes from one source is intrinsic to every Jew. This we inherited from Avraham.

Yitzchak started where Avraham left off. He could look at this world which he already knew from the start was created, and ask himself, "Who should I be in this world, what's my role, what should I say yes and no to?" In nature everything does what it was created to do. All birds that can fly, fly, all insects that can crawl,

crawl. However, humans who were given free will have the ability to choose. The desire to struggle and meet challenges, are founded on our ability to say no. Yitzchak achieved heroism. In turn, our capacity for self-sacrifice is founded on Yitzchak's strength.

We know Hashem not only through creation but by becoming a more divine like person, by standing strong in the face of difficulty, and by aiming for goals that have meaning.

Shir Shel Yom- Yom Sheini: Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

On the second day Hashem created division. We can see what is below, but we cannot see or comprehend what is above. The ability to recognize that everything that happens on this world is all coming from the same source reveals *kavod shamayim* (honor of Hashem). Those who were able to sanctify the name of Hashem under the most difficult circumstances, when Hashem's presence was concealed, reached higher levels than they could have reached under normal circumstances.

On the first day we speak about a *shalit* and on the second day about a *melech*. A *shalit* refers to an individual. Every man rules his household. *Melech* refers to kingship over a nation. The divisions that were created on Monday created different entities and made boundaries for each one and created the individuality of each creation. There was one body of water which became two bodies, each unique in its own way. The body of water below is physical, while the one above is spiritual. Hashem created many people, each one unique. There are many physical manifestations that show this, such as fingerprints, teeth, appearance, voice, and smell. We also differ in our way of thinking. All these differences create disparity and

disputes and makes us question why we were created in this way.

Avraham corresponds to the first day when there was oneness. His attribute was kindness. A kind person wants to share with everyone. *Chesed* is a uniting force. Yitzchak who corresponds to the second day, represents *gevura* (strength). If he would have followed in the ways of Avraham he would have been as great as him and perhaps he could have gone further in the attribute of *chesed*. Yet he chose a different way of connecting to Hashem. Avraham was inclusive while Yitzchak separated. *Gevura* is creating boundaries for one's desires. It may involve withdrawing oneself from society, at least for a while. Yitzchak did not start to share his knowledge of Hashem, till he felt ready. For a long time, he worked on himself to reach perfection so that he could then give to others. And in fact, there were great *tzadikim* throughout history who did the same such as the Kotzker Rebbe and the Saba of Novordak. The attribute of Yitzchak was *tzimtzum*, creating boundaries in a very clear way. Every one of us was created for the same purpose and although we are different, we are all working to reach the same goal of revealing *kavod shamayim* in this world.

We say in the *shemone esrei*, Elokai Avraham, Elokai Yitzchak... each of the avot developed their unique relationship with Hashem. The specialty of Yitzchak was to create boundaries. When the whole world was filled with water there was no reason for boundaries. Then the upper and lower waters were divided and given each their own place and uniqueness which could not be changed, but could be channeled to relate to Hashem in their particular way.

"*Sod Hashem l'yereiav*-The secret of Hashem is given to those who fear him." Every person who fears Hashem has a unique relationship which no one knows about. Even if you will try to describe it to other people, they won't be able to experience it because its unique to who you are and to what you invest in the relationship. A mother can have 10 children and her relationship to each one will be different, based on who the child is. There is a unique relationship each of us can have with Hashem. And that is our contribution and why we were created. We all have a unique potential that can create closeness with Hashem. We are equal in terms of what we can achieve. But the path we take to get there is individual to each person. That is the attribute of Yitzchak and what the second day of creation teaches us.