

## Dramatic Disbelief: Parshat Vayigash

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles  
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Parshat Vayigash brings the Yosef Hatzadik saga to a climax. Yosef instructs his brothers to tell their father that he's still alive, and that he is the ruler of all Egypt. Instead of being overjoyed, Yaakov's reaction is disbelief. Only after the brothers relate the full conversation with Yosef and show Yaakov the wagons Yosef has sent does he finally accept the news. How can we understand Yaakov's incredulity?

*Chayei Moshe* suggests that Yaakov did believe Yosef was alive, but he couldn't believe that he was the ruler of all Egypt. He knew the prophecy given to Avraham, that his descendants would go into exile in a strange land. How could *Bnei Yisroel* be going into this exile in pomp and honor? So, although he heard the words intellectually, adds Rabbi Grosbard, he could not accept them emotionally. But Hashem's providence made even going into exile honorable.

Using this idea, the *Chazon Ish* instructs us to train ourselves and our children to ask Hashem for everything so that we begin to internalize that Hashem maintains personal care and concern over each of us. Then we can take that sense of faith in security in Hashem's providence and infuse our *mitzvah* observance with joy. If we observe *mitzvot* only with a sense of obligation, then we lose the heart of *emunah* and open up ourselves and our children to the materialistic lures of society, ready to abandon the untasted sweetness of *Yiddishkeit*. Once the emotion is there, one can attempt intellectual understanding of the *mitzvot* as well.

*Yaakov Avinu* was so emotionally blocked that the message of Yosef's survival could not penetrate his heart. For 22 years he'd been deluded into thinking Yosef was dead, yet he could not be comforted. Our tradition tells us that a mourner can be comforted only if his loved one has truly died. Yaakov should have believed the information. Rabbi Kram suggests that Yaakov knew that Yosef was indeed physically alive but he continued to mourn the probability that he was no longer spiritually alive. How could Yosef remain spiritually pure in the corrupt Egyptian society?

Rabbi Dunner explains, Yosef told his brothers- Go tell my father that I am still *Yosef Hatzadik*, that Hashem has made me master over [the enticement of] *Mitzrayim*, that I have kept the Name of Hashem in my speech and made Hashem Master in Egypt. It was with this reassurance that Yaakov was appeased.

Yosef offered two proofs that he was indeed who he was. He showed them that he was circumcised, and he spoke Hebrew to them. A Jew shows his connection to Hashem through the *brit milah* by dedicating all his passions to Hashem's service, writes Rabbi Lopiansky. Hebrew, *Yosef Hatzadik's* second sign, is called *lashon hakodesh*/the holy language. By lying to their father that Yosef had been torn by wild animals, the brothers corrupted the holy language. In contrast, Yosef's tales to their father, however ill- advised and misconstrued, were nevertheless true, as were the dreams he related. Additionally, his withstanding the seductions of Potifar's wife proved his passionate commitment to the morality of Hashem's words. It was not merely the Hebrew language, but rather the ring of truth,

the hallmark of Yaakov, that convinced both the brothers and Yaakov, of Yosef's identity. We, as descendants of Yaakov, must work on strengthening our passionate commitment to Hashem and in honestly evaluating our middos so that we can perfect ourselves.

Rabbi Zweig cites Rabbi Nosson in saying that a liar is not believed even when telling the truth. However, there are two different words for a liar in Hebrew. A *shakran* is one who knows he is lying for whatever motive he may have. A *badai* is one who fabricates a story and convinces himself of its truthfulness, often the result of rationalizations that present him as righteous. A skilled listener can usually tell when a speaker is lying but may not spot an untruth when the speaker himself believes what he is saying.

The brothers convinced themselves that Yosef would not be able to survive slavery in Egypt. Therefore, he must be dead and they fabricated that untruth to their father who could not discern the lie. Now when the brothers came to tell their father that Yosef was still alive, Yaakov had no way of knowing which narrative was truth and which was a lie. Only the proof provided by Yosef himself who had remained true to his father's teaching throughout his ordeal finally convinced Yaakov that he was alive.

By looking uncompromisingly within ourselves with the powerful light of glaring truth, we can overpower our human frailties and grow as human beings reflecting Hashem's seal of truth and carrying forth Yaakov Avinu's legacy of truth.



## Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 15 Part IV

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

In Devarim, the obligation to be *tamim* with Hashem follows another obligation not to go to magicians or soothsayers. The desire to know the future comes from a lack of *bitachon*. One who has faith in Hashem believes that all that happens is for the best. There's no reason to need to know the future. Hashem has His ways. If He wants us to know He'll let us know what will happen. If we don't know, it means He doesn't want us to know. The first commandment of *Onochi Hashem* corresponds with *Tamim ti'hiye*. The more we have faith in Hashem, the more we

can grow in our *temimut*.

The following story illustrates *temimut* at its peak. During the Holocaust, a *tzadik* stood in front of the gas chamber. It was a matter of minutes before he would die. In his hands, he clutched bread, the key to life. Realizing he would no longer need it, he threw it backwards towards the people who were slated to live, hoping someone would catch it. He then said, "Until now I served Hashem with-'*Poteach et yadecha...*- Hashem opens His hand and sustains every creature.' As long as I had

bread and Hashem provided for me under these terrible circumstances, my mission was to thank Him. Now, I don't need food anymore, so my purpose now is to recognize, "*Tzadik Hashem b'chol derachav*- Hashem is righteous in all His ways." A test is His will. It's a springboard for growth. *Temimut* expresses itself by dedication to *Torah* and *mitzvot* and never feeling any contradiction in our lives. It's understanding that our life circumstances come from Hashem and are perfectly designed to help us perfect ourselves and accomplish our mission in this world.

## Mishlei: Raising Children

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

In Mishlei, Chapter 4, it says, "*Shema beni mussar avicha*-Listen my son to the reproof of your father..." We want our children to listen to the *Torah* of their father - Hashem. Every child instinctively wants to find favor in their parent's eyes. It's up to us to let our children know what really pleases us. Let them see that what we want most is to let the words of Hashem sustain their hearts and that they not abandon *Torah* even when they have *nisyanot*. When we take pride in their moral behavior and in their obedience to *Torah*, it will leave a lifelong impression on them. But it has to be clear that we're on their team and that we love them.

The Likutei Maharan says a Jew must see Hashem's wisdom in every person and situation. The nature of seeking wisdom is to look for what's new and different and where one could find Hashem in reality. This is why being the *bechor*, the first child in the literal sense, the first one to see, was important to Yaakov.

"Take my words, and years of life will increase for you." Because He cares about us, Hashem will sometimes grant great *Torah* leaders extremely long lifespans. But we also see that many of them died young, such as the *Arizal* and the *Ramchal*. It's not just about biological years but about *shenot chayim* -years that one is really alive. Even when one is doing good things, one can be either be alive, connected, and full of vitality, or not. The Gemara tells us that when a person dies, they are called before the heavenly court by their

name and age. The only days that are counted are the days they were really alive. It says about Avraham, "*Bah b'yamim*-He came with his days." Every day had arrived at its destiny. There were no lost days that couldn't be accounted for.

"In the way of wisdom I instructed you." It says in *Pirkei Avot*, "Who is a wise person, one who learns from every person." Teach your child to learn from every person and situation. People aren't invisible. When your child sees you treating the bagger at the supermarket or the taxi driver with respect because every person has something to teach us, your child learns to seek wisdom from everyone.

"I led you in the path of uprightness." *Yosher* means fairness. There's a *mitzva* to do *hayashar v'hatov*-that which is right and good in Hashem's eyes. There are areas in *halacha* where what's *yashar* isn't stated outright. It needs to be figured out. For example, if you want to sell your home, the *halacha* is that your neighbor gets the right to the first bid.

This is because he'll gain more from having an adjoining place than someone else will. Don't dig up old complaints against him and try to get back at him now. Your children have to see you being fair if you want them to do the same. The way to being fair isn't exactly straight. It isn't always what's written in the law books. The *Torah* wants us to use our spiritual elastic to move into the space where we learn uprightness on our own.

"When you walk your steps will not be narrow,

and when you run you won't stumble." If you know where you want to go, you'll get there. You won't let yourself be destroyed by all the petty ins and outs that come up.

Let me give you an example and tell you about the worst day in my life. Believe me, I've had serious things happen in my life, but this puts everything in the shade. I was in a New Jersey train station waiting for the train. There was me, a black guy, an older woman, and a fashionable young woman waiting at the other end. All of a sudden, the older woman collapsed. The black guy called for help, but it didn't come immediately. We had no idea what to do. The young woman ambled over and told us to do CPR. She directed us how to do it. We kept working on her until we got her pulse back. Then the train came, and the young woman got on leaving us to our own devices. I felt that now the woman's life was in my hands. All the other terrible things that happened to me, I knew it wasn't in my hands. I had done what I could.

If you know where you're going, you'll take steps and get there. Obviously, this young woman had no idea where she was going. I don't know why she got on the train. But one day she will have to account for thinking that her job or her social life was more important than a human life. I don't think she was evil but rather unthinking. You have to teach your children not to constrict their steps, to know where they're going and to keep going towards it.