

## Parshat Vayigash Assessing Aging

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

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

When Yaakov and his family arrive in Egypt, Yosef introduces his father to Pharaoh. Pharaoh asks him how old he is and Yaakov answers, "Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life..." What prompted Pharaoh's unusual question and what meanings are alluded to in Yaakov's convoluted reply? Why, according to the Medrash, did Yaakov lose thirty three years of his life, one year for each word of this dialogue which seemed to imply Yaakov's complaining about the hardships of his life? Even so, asks Chochmat Hamatzpun, this seems a very harsh punishment for what seems to be an honest response.

Rabbi Pam z"l asks, why did Yaakov also lose years for the number of words in Pharaoh's question? In all his years on the throne, Pharaoh had never seen anyone who looked as old as Yaakov. In his reply, Yaakov implied, "I'm not as old as I look. I've turned gray from the stresses of my life..." If this was in fact a logical response, why was Yaakov punished? Rabbi Pam z"l cites Rav Salanter in explaining that while Yaakov had indeed experienced a difficult life, that pain should have remain private, in his heart. A person's countenance is public, and should always appear pleasant. Since Yaakov's face mirrored the inner challenges of his life, he was held accountable for Pharaoh's question as well as for his response.

While Yaakov remembered his troubles, he neglected to mention the tremendous chessed Hashem showed him. All his challenges were eventually reversed and returned to him. His face should have reflected the joy of rejuvenation in Hashem's chessed instead of remaining dark and old. As Rabbi Chasman notes, the gift of life is so great that its challenges pale in comparison.

Therefore, we should joyously thank Hashem for every breath we breathe.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz z"l proves this point by citing the Medrash about the three advisers to Pharaoh who were asked how to handle the "problem" of the Israelites. Yitro, who ran away was rewarded and eventually became Moshe's father in law. Bilaam, who gave the advice to kill the baby boys was punished with instantaneous death. Iyov who remained silent was forced to suffer many tragedies in his life. Why did Bilaam who was more evil die so quickly while Iyov was forced to suffer so greatly? Rabbi Shmulevitz points out that the value of life is so great that it outweighs all the misfortunes one may endure while living.

The Oztrot Hatorah teaches that we should thank Hashem with joy for the challenges as well as for the good in our lives, for the challenges provide a path for growth. The carpenter needs to saw and "break" the wood to create a beautiful table. Similarly, we cannot judge what is truly good or bad in our lives until the process is complete and we see the result.

Although Yaakov called the troubling years when Yosef was lost "bad," continues the Oztrot Hatorah, it was from those very years that Hashem transformed Yosef into the Prime Minister of Egypt with the ability to sustain not only his family, but the world. We must acknowledge that everything Hashem does is ultimately for the good, even though the process may appear challenging. When we feel pain, we cry out to Hashem, unlike the serpent who never has a need for anything. Our trials in exile are meant to bring us closer to the Almighty and hasten the redemption and should be re-framed in that context.

We do not see the full picture and can therefore not understand what Hashem does. Therefore, when we say the blessing of the New Moon, we ask that Hashem fulfill our requests for the good, writes Rabbi Pam z"l. We see only the present and cannot know why a particular event is necessary for the future. Only if Hashem reveals the entire picture to us can we understand the importance of everything that has happened, just as Yosef's brothers could make no sense of Yosef's actions until he told them, "Ani Yosef/I am Yosef." We do not understand this long and dark exile, continues Rabbi Pam z"l, but as we read Parshat Vayigash, usually in the darkest days following Chanukah, we must remember that Hashem is always with us, and will redeem us.

The Chochmat Hamatzpun explains that while Yaakov was truthful about his suffering, he should also have remembered Hashem's chessed. Because he allowed the suffering to suffuse his entire being until he did not appreciate the good, Hashem punished him. Similarly, when we are going through difficult times, we must also remember the good times and allow for the proper perspective.

Rabbi Gifter z"l explains that Yaakov examined his years and was affected by his shortcomings. He felt he would never be able to live up to his potential. In this context, the loss of these years was a consequence of his own making rather than a punishment. Rabbi Biederman tells us that the energy of renewal that Chanukah brings extends to the Shabbat immediately following. It should be a time of re-dedication and training in the ways of Hashem, to again begin living, not merely existing.

## Parshat Vayigash: Hidden Tzaddikim

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The gemara says that Yosef's name is spelled with an extra hey in Tehillim. This hey, which is one letter of the four letter name of Hashem, was given to Yosef because he sanctified Hashem's name in private. In contrast, Yehuda's name contains all four letters of Hashem's name because he sanctified Hashem's name in public.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that this Gemara makes a profound statement about the character of Yosef and Yehuda. Yosef was the epitome of "hatzne'a lechet," he walked modestly with Hashem. He was a hidden tzaddik. Chazal say that he would groom himself because he wanted his outside appearance to deceive people into thinking he was not righteous. He was so private that his own family did not know who he truly was. He was an exceptional tzaddik, who stood firm in his faith and remained loyal to the Torah throughout the long years of suffering in Egypt. Yehuda's righteousness, however, was well known. He confessed in public to the sin he had committed with Tamar. Both tzaddikim had special roles to play in the destiny of Klal Yisrael.

Yosef would not be deceived by the outside

blandishments of Egypt. Even though he spent many years among the finest pleasures that Egypt had to offer, he did not join their way of life. He searched for the essence.

This is an important model for us. The culture around us has such incredible attraction. It is so tempting for us to submit to the bad and rationalize it as good. The power of Yosef gives us the strength to withstand this difficult trial.

Yehuda was the leader of the Jewish nation. When he rose, the nation rose with him. The Jews need someone who can lead them along a clear path. This is the revealed tzaddik.

The Shem Mishmuel cites a saying of the Zohar, "The Jewish people have fallen never to rise again." This refers to our present exile. How will the Jewish people return? The Rambam says the revival of the Jewish people will come through their repentance. This repentance will be a movement led by the descendants of Yosef and Yehuda, respectively.

In the future there will be a Mashiach ben Yosef and a Mashiach ben David. Mashiach ben Yosef will come first. Mashiach Ben

David, from the family of Yehuda, will come later and bring us into the final Messianic era. Mashiach ben Yosef will follow the model of Yosef, who brought down spiritual energy mi'lemala l'mata, from above down into the physical world. He will connect heaven with earth. This will be the first stage, because the Jewish people will be so worn out from exile that they will not have the strength to repent on their own. They will need that extra inspiration to give them new life. After this rebirth, Mashiach ben David will come. He will be a part of the people, someone who will live with the Jewish nation and show them how to live a spiritual life once again.

Yosef taught us how to survive through difficult times. He taught us to believe in the power of a dream. Yosef maintained his emuna and simchat hachaim because he knew Hashem had a mission for him. He saw his dreams come true. We too must have dreams and believe in them. We should not be deceived by the seeming dangers of the outside world. Hashem is with us and will protect us come what may. Let us try to emulate the model of Yosef by keeping our dreams alive as we navigate the challenges of life.

## Parshat Vayigash – Confrontation of Kings

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

When Yosef imprisons Binyamin, Yehuda attempts to arouse the compassion of Yosef by depicting the unbearable pain their father would experience upon hearing the news. Yosef then reveals himself by declaring, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" The verse reads, "His brothers could not answer him because they were disconcerted." Why did Yosef ask if his father was still alive if Yehuda had just spoken of him? The Midrash says, "Woe to creation on the day of judgment. Woe to creation on the

day of admonishment."

The Bait Halevi explains that there are two distinct days, the Day of Judgment and the Day of Admonishment. When the soul reaches the world to come after 120 years, he will be shown a film of his life split in two screens. One screen will ask him why he did not give charity. The soul will answer he did not have any money. The other screen will show him buying a fancy chandelier and flying away on an expensive vacation. The

soul will be pitted against itself. You may be able to answer anything in the world but you cannot justify your own self. This is what happened with the brothers. They attempted to arouse Yosef's mercy out of concern for their father but when Yosef confronted them they had nothing to say. They realized the magnitude of their misdeed and how they had hurt their father with the sale of Yosef. It was a moment of truth. Our moment of truth awaits us too. Let us be sure to repent before it is too late.