Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

תורת אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshat Vayigash: Prayer Despite Sin

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Parshat Vayigash begins, "Vayigash elav Yehuda." Yehuda approached Yosef. Chazal say, "Ein hagasha eleh lashon tefilah." By using the word approach, the Torah implies prayer. Yehuda whispered a silent prayer to G-d, begging for assistance as he approached Yosef.

Yehuda started his speech with the words "Bi adoni." Please, my master. The Netivot Shalom explains that the word bi can be translated as "with me." Yehuda meant to say, "Adoni, the Master of the universe, is right beside me." Sin creates barriers between us and Hashem. When Yehuda began to pray, he felt blocked. He knew that he and the brothers faced eternal slavery in Egypt as a direct punishment for selling Yosef. Therefore, he endeavored to strengthen himself by affirming, "Bi adoni," no matter how much I've sinned, Hashem is still with me.

The Torah describes G-d as "Hashochen itam b'toch tumotam." Hashem rests among the Jewish people within their defilement. Rav Soloveitchik explains that in the Thirteen Attributes we mention the Name of Hashem twice. He is with us before we sin and after we sin. Every person, at his core, has a holy soul which G-d gave to him, and this remains forever no matter how low a Jew may fall.

A verse in Tehilim says, "Gam ki eilech b'gei tzalmavet lo ira ra ki ata imadi." Though I walk in the valley of death (and sin), I will not fear evil, for You are with me. This is hinted to in the first commandment, "Anochi Hashem," I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt. In Egypt, the Jews were at the forty-ninth level of impurity, yet Hashem redeemed them. He listened to their prayers though they had sinned. He had faith that the Jews would repent, and indeed they ultimately reached the forty-ninth level of holiness.

This is what Yehuda meant when he said, "Bi adoni." He could pray with confidence because Hashem was still there with him.

Kings and Kinsman- Parshat Vayigash

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

Parshat Vayigash begins with Yehudah approaching Yosef in what appears to be a high-level summit meeting. It is easy to understand Yosef as the royal representative of his nation, but why is Yehudah representing Bnei Yisroel in what is meant to be high-stakes negotiations for Binyamin's freedom? In Tehilim it says, "Behold, the kings assembled, they came together" (Psalms 48:5). These kings refer to Yosef and Yehudah, two royal dynasties that would play important roles in the history of Bnei Yisroel.

It is an accepted maxim that two kings cannot rule simultaneously. How can we understand that both Yehudah and Yosef were kings over Bnei Yisroel? Further, what were their inherent characteristics that made them royalty? Ben Melech notes that even in the animal kingdom there appear to be two "kings." The lion is king over the wild beasts, while the bull reigns supreme over the domesticated animals. In Yaakov's blessing to his sons, Yehudah is compared to a lion while Yosef is compared to a bull. When we enumerate the seven "Shepherds" of our people on Sukkot, Yosef is included. In fact, Yosef's descendants did indeed shepherd the nation. Yehoshua, who led Bnei Yisroel into the Promised Land, was a descendant of Ephraim, and Yeroboam ben Nevat was king of the Northern Kingdom when the Davidic dynasty split. As we see from our history, while the Davidic dynasty is eternal and will reemerge with the coming of Moshiach, the Yosef reign is temporary.

Rabbi Reiss notes that in Tehilim 81, Yosef is called YeHosef, the "Heh" of Hashem's Name being added to his original name. In contrast, Yehudah contains all four letters of Hashem's Name with the addition of a "Daled." Yosef, the son of Rachel who kept her silence, sanctified God's Name in private, while Yehudah, whom Leah named as a public testament of gratitude to God, was destined to sanctify God's Name among the masses.

Yosef, although publicly viceroy of Egypt, manifested his nobility in private through his personal restraint against the wife of Potifar. On the other hand, Yehudah's acceptance of responsibility was public in the story with Tamar. Yosef relates that in his dream, kamah alumati—"my sheaf rose up." But almah also means silence, indicating that this trait of silence inherited from his mother was the source of his rise to greatness.

Bnei Yisroel is like one body with multiple limbs, explains the Mima'amakim quoting the Maharal. In this analogy, Yosef represents the heart of desire, while Yehudah represents the head that leads to action. In human psychology, desire and ideation precede action. As Jews, we are asked to turn both toward Hashem's service—to elevate both desire and action—and thus coronate Hashem. When the two are not aligned, we need the outer structure of kingship to move us in the right direction. This explains why our first king, King Saul, had to descend from Rachel, who epitomized the inner heart of our people.

Saul's mission was to prepare the hearts of Bnei Yisroel to accept a king who would act in full accordance with Hashem's will. Had Saul succeeded, his dynasty would have ruled alongside the Davidic dynasty. Unfortunately, by bowing to the desires of the people and failing to eradicate Amalek—to control his own heart—sovereignty was torn from him, and David's would be the only eternal dynasty.

While the ten tribes followed Yeroboam, the Tribe of Binyamin remained with Yehudah. Their destinies were interwoven. The Beit Hamikdash, the "heart" of Bnei Yisroel, was in Binyamin's territory, which itself was like a finger protruding into Yehudah's territory. Further, Binyamin felt tremendous gratitude to Yehudah for risking his life to save him from the disguised Yosef.

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Yosef, or more generally Rachel—the heart—always had to precede the practical head. Thus, Yehoshua had to lead Bnei Yisroel into the Promised Land, and Saul had to be the first king of Israel. But in the future, the two will be united. This is alluded to in the words, "And Yehudah approached [Yosef]." When Moshiach comes, the power of the heart and the power of the mind will unite to lead Bnei Yisroel in revealing God's glory. The roles of Malchut Yosef and Malchut Yehudah are not parallel, but rather represent sowing versus reaping. Yehudah's humility is a foil for the haughtiness of Edom, while Yosef's control of his inner world is a foil for the wild animal that characterizes Yishmael. When the two unite, they will have the power to vanquish all enemies, and this will be realized at the end of days.

As Yosef and Yehudah conversed, the brothers stood in awe, observing these two giants in full control over themselves. We need to understand that we too must be king and ruler over ourselves, writes Rabbi Mordechai Ezrachi. Rather than allowing circumstances or desires to dictate our actions, we must focus both our minds and our hearts toward doing what is right in the eyes of God. This is the essence of true royalty, explains Rabbi Bloch. Yosef became viceroy through the integrity others recognized within him, and Yehudah demonstrated his integrity through his willingness to be humiliated for the sake of truth. Thus, Yehudah and Yosef—who both exemplified the traits of self-control, humility, and forethought—could indeed approach each other.

Shaarei Derech suggests that the title Melech is an acronym for the requisite traits of a true king: M = Moach (mind), L = Lev (heart), C/K = Kaved (liver, symbol of physicality). One must first control one's mind, then turn one's heart to desire that which is correct, and finally allow the physical manifestations to follow through action. As Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz notes, one's thoughts have the power to elevate—or lower—a person, so that a person will move only in ways consistent with his thoughts. If we have the thought, we can will ourselves to do things we would otherwise not feel like doing, adds Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv. Focus your thoughts and desires on doing the right thing, and then follow through.

Yaakov Avinu, in blessing his sons before his death, recognizes the unique traits of each. Yosef was a man of truth, seeing things in absolute truth—the quality of angels. Yehudah took this one step further. He allowed the truth to penetrate his heart so that he recognized his errors and accepted full responsibility even at great personal risk. Dovid Hamelech carried on Yehudah's legacy, admitting his sin and doing teshuvah, exemplifying how truth must be practiced on earth. Yosef knew the truth of angels—beings who never sin. At the end of days, these two paths will merge.

Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 17 Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Most people don't think loshon hara is so terrible—"I just said something. I didn't do anything." But Chazal say it is worse than the three cardinal sins. The first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of those sins, and the exile lasted seventy years. The second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred, which is expressed through loshon hara, and that exile has lasted close to two thousand years and still has not ended. This is clear evidence that correcting the sin of loshon hara is not simple.

If we look back at Jewish history, we can see that loshon hara was the root cause of many of our troubles. The sin of the first man was loshon hara. The snake spoke evil against Hashem, and when Adam and Chava listened and ate from the Tree of Knowledge, reality changed from living in Gan Eden to struggling in exile. When the Jewish people worshipped the Golden Calf after Matan Torah, there was still a possibility that they would enter Israel and complete the rectification needed before the times of Mashiach. But the sin of the spies, when they spoke evil against the Land of Israel, brought about the suffering of exile and delayed the coming of Mashiach.

The prohibitions of false testimony and speaking loshon hara are connected to the power of speech, indicating that speech has both positive and negative potential. Speech can create and destroy worlds. Shlomo Hamelech said, "Death and life are in the hands of the tongue." The sin of the first man was caused by loshon hara and brought death to the world, while the power of speech can also bring life to the world. Chazal teach that the Ten Commandments correspond to the ten utterances with which the world was created. If we work on refining our power of speech, we can restore eternal life to mankind. We see this concept reflected in the process of galut and yetziat Mitzrayim.

In Mitzrayim, the power of speech was corrupted. The Midrash alludes to this in the story of Moshe killing the Egyptian by uttering the Divine Name of Hashem, demonstrating how speech can take away life. The next day, Moshe saw two Jews fighting and rebuked them. One of the men asked him whether he planned to kill him as he had killed the Egyptian. Moshe responded, "Now it is known to me." Chazal explain that Moshe meant he now understood why the Jewish people were suffering in Egypt—because they spoke evil of one another.

The commentators teach that until the point of redemption, the Jewish people's speech was in exile; they spoke loshon hara. In order to accept the Ten Commandments and commit themselves to Torah, the power of speech had to be redeemed. This occurred on the night of Pesach. Pe sach—"the mouth speaks"—symbolizes a mouth capable of proper speech, and this is how their redemption is described. At Har Sinai, when they declared, "We will do and we will listen," they overcame the decree of death. Had it not been for the sin of the Golden Calf, they would have lived forever, returning to the state of Adam before the sin. We see that when the power of speech is used correctly, it brings eternal life.

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