



בס"ד

**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego**

**Study Guide &**

**Take home Dvar Torah**

פרשת ויגש

***Parshat VaYigash - Chanukah***

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## **Partners In Torah San Diego**

### **Mission Statement:**

**Partners In Torah San Diego is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees, thinking is shared, and hearts are inspired.**

**Partners in Torah San Diego has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.**

**Welcome. Thank you for coming. Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

## **Parshat Vayegash: Light from Darkness**

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, had two consecutive dreams that baffled him and his wise men. None of the interpretations they presented, satisfied him. Pharaoh's butler had been in prison with Yosef, and had a dream which Yosef interpreted accurately, and he remembered this. He told Pharaoh about Yosef, and told him that Yosef would surely know the meaning of his dreams. Sure enough, Yosef interpreted the dreams in a way that made sense to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh was so impressed with Yosef, that he made him his second in command.

Pharaoh's first dream was about seven healthy beautiful cows that came out of the Nile river, followed by seven scrawny ugly cows. The scrawny ugly cows then devoured the healthy beautiful ones, and you couldn't even tell that the scrawny cows had eaten the healthy ones.

Pharaoh's second dream was about seven good and healthy ears of grain that were consumed by seven thin and beaten ears of grain. Once again, you couldn't tell that the thin and beaten ears had just consumed the healthy ones.

Yosef explained that the two dreams were really one, and that the seven healthy cows and ears of grain, symbolized seven years of plenty. Egypt would experience unprecedented prosperity for the next seven years. However, after that would come seven years of extreme famine, so

severe, that the seven years of plenty would be forgotten, as if they never happened. The reason why Pharaoh had the dream twice is because these events were imminent.

While Yosef had the king's ear, he advised him to store up all the extra bounty during the seven years of plenty, so it would be available for sale during the seven years of famine. This seemed pretty obvious, however, Pharaoh did not know how to preserve grain for so long without it rotting or getting eaten by mice. Yosef knew the secret of mixing some of the earth in which the grain grew with the grain. This would preserve it for many years.

Pharaoh realized he was speaking with a very wise person, and made him the second in command, and in charge of storing and selling the wheat.

This miraculous turn of events is symbolic of events surrounding the Jewish people. In a split second, Yosef went from a forgotten prisoner to a ruler, second to the king, over the greatest empire. The salvation of Hashem can happen in the blink of an eye. This is possible with the nation as a whole, and with each and every one of us as individuals.

The Midrash gives us an insight to how this works.

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה פט פסקה א  
קץ שם לחשך זמן נתן ליוסף כמה שנים יעשה באפילה בבית האסורים כיון שהגיע  
הקץ חלם פרעה חלום

The Midrash quotes a verse in Job 28:3, ***Hashem sets a limit to the darkness.*** Yosef was to be in prison for a limited

*time, and when that time was up, Pharaoh had his dreams.* Before the darkness even sets in, there is a limit to how long it will reign. We may not know exactly what time sunrise will be, but we do know that the sun will come up at the end of the night. Additionally, it gets darker just before the sun rises. Similarly, when Hashem puts us in a difficult situation, there is a limit set beforehand as to how long it will last.

The stage was now set for Yaakov and his family to come to Egypt in preparation for the years of slavery prophesied by Avraham three generations earlier. Yosef was the ruler of Egypt, and the seven year famine had started. Egypt had enough food stored up to sustain the entire region thanks to Yosef. Yaakov and his family were going to need food at some point, and they would have to go to Egypt to get it.

When Yosef's brothers came to Egypt to purchase food, he recognized them, but they did not recognize him. Yosef immediately saw that something was not right. In his dream, he saw 11 stars bowing down to him, but there were only ten brothers here, Binyamin was missing. In order to bring Binyamin to Egypt, he accused them of being spies. They would prove to him to him that they were not spies by bringing their brother Binyamin with them to Egypt next time they came. Yosef imprisoned Shimon, and sent the rest of them home with food, and their money.

During the seven years of plenty, Yosef had stored it up in government warehouses, and it was carefully guarded and

rationed. All food in Egypt was under government control. No individual, especially foreigners, could access the food. When one came to purchase food, they would deposit their donkeys with the officials, see Yosef, pay their money, and receive their donkeys back loaded with the food they purchased, as per Yosef's instructions. In the case of Yosef's brothers, he commanded those in charge of loading up the donkeys to return their money to their saddle bags along with the food. This was a concern to them, and the next time they went down to Egypt to purchase food, they brought the money back, thinking it was a mistake, in addition to new money for the new purchases.

They returned home without Shimon, and reported to Yaakov how the difficult ruler of Egypt accused them of being spies. The way they would prove their innocence would be to return with Binyamin. Upon hearing all of this, Yaakov was very unhappy. He had only two children from his beloved wife Rachel. Yosef was gone, and now, Binyamin, her remaining son, would be in danger. This was unthinkable to Yaakov, but after much deliberation and discussion with his sons, when they were desperate for more food, Yaakov finally agreed to let Binyamin go, but only after Yehuda took responsibility for his safe return.

The brothers returned to Egypt with Binyamin, and everything went well with the ruler, and soon they were on their way home with Shimon and Binyamin and their new

ration of food. They didn't get very far when they heard the sound of horses galloping towards them. Who was this coming after them? None other than the king's men! What could they possibly want from us? When they finally caught up to them, they had some very serious allegations against the brothers. "How did you have the gall to steal the ruler's goblet?"

"The what?" came the response? "We would never do a thing like that! The one you find the goblet with, will be put to death, and the rest of us will be slaves to your master!"

After a thorough search of their saddle bags the goblet was discovered in Binyamin's saddle bag. The brothers were brought back to Yosef who scolded them for stealing something so precious and dear to the ruler. "How could you think I wouldn't notice it missing?"

There is something very perplexing here. The brothers knew that they had no control over their donkeys. They were deposited and retrieved with whatever the workers put into their saddle bags. They knew this from their money which they found in their saddle bags the first time they came. So why did the brothers just accept the guilt and accept to be slaves to Yosef? It would seem that they would be able to easily prove their innocence. How could they have gained access to their donkeys? They were under government control! Yet, the brothers were prepared to accept the idea that they would be slaves for a crime they did not commit because they understood that nothing could happen to them

if Hashem did not want it to happen. And even though someone falsely framed them, it was the will of Hashem, and there must be a valid reason for it. It must be a punishment for a crime they committed. They did not have to look far for the source of the problem, they had already identified it. Yehuda explains this to Yosef when he said,

הָאֱלֹקִים מָצְאָ אֶת עֲוֹן עַבְדֶּיךָ *“Hashem has found the sin of your servants.”* What Yehuda was saying is that we acknowledge that we are guilty of wrong. We understand it is not you who are doing this to us. This is our problem because we are in need of atonement for not having mercy on our brother when we threw him into the pit. You are just the instrument Hashem is using to afflict us.

Yehuda, the leader and spokesperson for the brothers, tried to clear Binyamin of the crime by telling Yosef that if Binyamin had stolen it, he would not have put it in his own saddle bag, but rather someone else’s. He is the least likely person to have stolen the goblet, so he should go home to his father and the rest of us will remain as slaves to pay out the sentence.

Yosef would not hear of it saying, “That would be unjust! Just the one who stole it will be my slave and the rest of you can go home to your father.”

When Yosef did not respond to the logic of Yehuda’s argument and insisted that only Binyamin remain as a slave, this threw a monkey wrench into their thinking. Binyamin was



not a party to the sale of Yosef! He could not possibly be needing atonement for not having mercy on Yosef. How is it possible that he is the only one being targeted? There must be a different idea at work here.

The brothers realized that Hashem was giving them the opportunity to correct the sin they committed with Yosef. Here they were being given the chance to save Binyamin and restore him to his father as atonement for what they did to Yosef. They would not squander this opportunity. They would spare no efforts to secure Binyamin's release, even if it meant they would have to fight against the entire country.

This is the point at which our parshah Vayegash begins, and it begins with the words

ספר בראשית פרק מד  
וַיִּגַּשׁ אֶלְיוֹ יְהוּדָה

*Beresheet 44:18 - And Yehuda approached him*

Yehuda is the leader and spokesperson for the brothers. He was recognized by all for his superior leadership qualities. When Yakov blessed each of his sons, he singled out Yehuda as the king of Israel, stating that all royalty must come from his lineage. What characteristic of Yehuda qualified him to all as a natural leader?

The secret to his special quality lies in his name *Yehuda* which comes from the word - הוּדָא - which has two meanings- to *acknowledge* and to *give thanks*. Yehuda had

the innate ability to acknowledge Hashem's goodness and thank Him for it, even under the most difficult conditions. When difficulties arose Yehuda would inherently acknowledge that this was the Divine plan, and that the situation is exactly what it needed to be to bring forth the next step in his growth.

This was the intention of his mother when she named him Yehuda. When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she said:

ספר בראשית פרק כט  
וַתֹּאמֶר הַפֶּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת ד' עַל כֵּן קָרָאתָ שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֵד

*She conceived again, and bore a son and declared, "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem"; therefore, she called his name Judah; (Gen. 29:35)*

Rabbi Yochanan quoted Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai in Talmud Tractate Berachot 7b to say:

ואמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי מיום שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו לא היה אדם שהודה להקדוש ברוך הוא עד שבאתה לאה והודתו שנאמר הפעם אודה את ה':

*From the day Hashem created the world, no one praised Hashem until Leah came and praised Him when Yehuda was born.*

Our sages ponder the meaning of this statement. We know that Noach, Avraham, and Yaakov all praised Hashem. What could be the meaning of the statement that Leah was the first person to praise Hashem?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab of Blessed Memory presents the following explanation.

Yaakov saw Rachel as his soul mate, and his *bashert*. Lavan tricked Yaakov into marrying Leah, but she was wife number two. Leah was always striving to become more beloved to her husband Yaakov. This is clear from the names she gave her children.

When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she realized that even after giving Yaakov three sons nothing had changed, and therefore the likelihood is that it never will change. Thus, Leah made peace with the fact that this was her fate; she would always be wife number two. And then, after realizing that, Leah gave heartfelt thanks to Hashem for the undesirable situation she was in. Leah suddenly realized that this was her lot in life and that she needed to accept it and thank Hashem for it. This was not the life she wished for herself, but the life Hashem wanted her to experience. Therefore, she accepted that this was the very best thing for her and gave forth a heartfelt thank you to Hashem.

Explains Rabbi Schwab, this is what Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai meant when he said no one thanked Hashem before Leah came along. It is normal to thank Hashem when all is going along swimmingly well, but no one had ever thanked Hashem when things were not the way they wanted them to be. Leah was the first person to do that, and that was the source of the name for her fourth son Yehuda.

This special ability to thank Hashem for every situation no matter how dire, became the essence of Yehuda and equipped him to be the leader of his brothers and future king of the Jewish people. This ability stems from the realization that each situation, no matter how difficult, is not the product of chance or someone else's mistake but rather is the exact prescription that Hashem has prescribed for the next step of growth and progress.

(1) ספר שפת אמת - בראשית - פרשת ויגש - שנת [תרל"א]  
ויגש אליו יהודה. מלשון הודאה והוא כל איש ישראל

The Sfas Emes explains that this is why we are called יהודים *Yehudim*- Jews; this trait is inherently within us. He then quotes his father the Chidushei Harim who provides us with the strategy for troubled moments.

. שמעתי מאא"ז מו"ר זצלה"ה שנקראו יהודים על שם שמודין להשי"ת על כל דבר קטן וגדול שיודעין שהכל ממנו יתי כו'. ועי"ז יכולין ליגש. וזה עצה בכל שעה צר והסתרת פנים לכל איש ישראל. העצה להתבטל לרצון השי"ת ע"י שמברר האדם אצלו שגם בתוך ההסתר יש חיות מרצון השי"ת.

*I heard from my father that we are called Yehudim because we acknowledge Hashem in every matter, big or small, understanding that everything is from Him. And with that understanding, we can approach Hashem. This is the best advice in times of difficulty and when Hashem is hiding Himself from us. The idea is to humble oneself to the will of Hashem, and to bear in mind that within this darkness you will find the will (the light) of Hashem.*

There is a very deep concept hidden here. The light is hidden in the darkness, and the only way to discover the light is to first accept that there is meaning to be found within the darkness.

ילקוט שמעוני תהלים - פרק ה - המשך רמז תרכח  
כי אשב בחשך ה' אור לי אלולא שישבתי בחשך לא היה אור לי

As in Mica 7:8: ***Though I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light unto me.*** On this the Midrash comments, *Had I never sat in the darkness, I would never have seen the light.* The darkness is the source of the light.

This was the strategy Yehuda used when he approached Yosef to release Binyamin and accept him as a slave in his stead. He accepted the decree of Hashem and appealed to Him to bring forth the light from the darkness.

This is exactly what happened. Yosef was so touched by the efforts of the brothers on behalf of Binyamin, he was convinced that they had properly repented for having sold him. He could not hold back, and he revealed himself to his brothers, understanding that a moment of full reconciliation had arrived.

This concept also applies to Chanukah. When the Greeks sought to make us forget the Torah by darkening our eyes with their decrees, when all looked lost, a handful of holy people took on the powerful Greek empire. Through their miraculous victory a hidden light of Hashem was revealed in the world. This hidden light was eternalized through the

miracle of the oil of the menorah which miraculously lasted for eight days. Had we never had this battle with the darkness we would not have experienced the light of Chanukah which illuminates the darkness of our exile and represents the eternity of the Jewish people. Thousands of years later, we the Jews are still here lighting our menorahs and singing about how the Greeks tried to destroy us. Here too, the darkness was the source of the light.

We need to always remember that the dark and difficult times are not designed to defeat us, but rather provide us with an opportunity to bring forth from the darkness a greater light.

Happy Chanukah!