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San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5786 Parshat Vayigash

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**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.**

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the
rich
legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and
guidance
for many who have, until now, lacked
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participating so that we may grow
together as
a community.**

תשפ"ו Parshat Vayigash

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, had two consecutive baffling dreams, which even his wise men could not satisfactorily interpret.

The situation, though, prompted Pharaoh's butler, who had been in prison two years earlier with Yosef, to recall that Yosef had accurately interpreted his dream and that of the baker. The butler came forward and told Pharaoh how Yosef had accurately interpreted their dreams, and that he would surely know the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams. Sure enough, Yosef, unlike Pharaoh's wise men, interpreted the dreams in a way that made sense to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh was so impressed with Yosef that, on the spot, he made him, second in command in Egypt.

Pharaoh's first dream concerned seven healthy, beautiful cows that ascended from the Nile followed by seven scrawny, ugly cows. The scrawny cows devoured the healthy ones yet remained as scrawny as before.

In Pharaoh's second, parallel dream, seven healthy ears of grain were consumed by seven thin and beaten ears of grain. Once again, the thin and beaten ears looked the same despite having just eaten the healthy ones.

Yosef explained to Pharaoh that the two dreams were really one, and that the seven healthy cows and the healthy ears of grain together symbolized seven years of plenty. Egypt would experience unprecedented prosperity for the next seven years. Next, however, would come seven years of extreme famine, so severe that the seven years of plenty would be forgotten. The reason for the "double dream" was, that these events were imminent.

Having the king's ear, Yosef advised him to store all the extra bounty during the plentiful seven years so that it would be available for sale during the seven years of famine. Because Pharaoh did not know how to preserve grain for so long without it rotting or being eaten by mice, he would need to rely on Yosef to do so. The Midrash tells us that Yosef knew the secret of mixing some of the earth in which the grain grew with the grain, which would preserve it for many years.

Realizing that Yosef possessed knowledge that neither Pharaoh nor his advisors had, Pharaoh placed him in charge of storing and selling the wheat.

This miraculous turn of events symbolizes Jewish history. In a split second, Yosef went from a forgotten prisoner to a ruler, second to the king, over the world's greatest empire. Hashem's salvation can happen in the blink of an eye. This is possible with the nation as a whole, and with each of us.

The Midrash gives us an insight into the process.

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה פט פסקה א

קץ שם לחשך זמן נתן ליוסף כמה שנים יעשה באפילה בבית האסורים.
ביון 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; 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 when sunrise will be and when Hashem's salvation will come, but we do know that Hashem has put a limit to our suffering and that, ultimately, the sun will come up at the end of the night, even as it gets darker just before the sun rises.

The stage was now set for Yaakov and his family to come to Egypt for the slavery that had been foretold to Avraham.

Yosef had become Egypt's de facto ruler, and the seven-year famine had begun. Egypt now had enough food stored up to sustain the entire region thanks to Yosef. And because Yaakov and his family were going to need food at some point, they would have to venture 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 amiss. In his dream (that we read two weeks ago), Yosef saw 11 stars bowing down to him; but there were only ten brothers here. Binyamin was missing. To bring him to Egypt, and complete the information in the dream, Yosef accused his brothers of being spies. To prove to him that they were not, he demanded that they must bring their brother Binyamin back with them to Egypt when they next came. To guarantee their return, Yosef imprisoned Shimon, and sent the rest of them home with food and, unbeknownst to them, the money that they brought with them to purchase the food..

During the seven plentiful years, Yosef stored the grain in government warehouses, where it was carefully guarded and rationed. All food in Egypt was under government control. No individual, especially foreigners, could access the food without permission and payment. When one came to purchase food, he would deposit his donkeys with the officials, see Yosef, pay his money, and receive the donkeys back loaded with the purchased food per Yosef's instructions. For his brothers, however, Yosef commanded those in charge of loading up the donkeys to secretly return the brothers' money to their saddle bags with the food. The

brothers were dumbfounded when they discovered the money, and on their next trip to Egypt to purchase food, they brought the money to give back, thinking that it had been a mistake.

They returned home without Shimon, reporting to Yaakov how the difficult ruler of Egypt had accused them of being spies. To prove their innocence, they would need to return to Egypt with Binyamin. Hearing this severely distressed Yaakov. He had only two children from his beloved wife Rachel. Yosef was gone, and now, Binyamin, her remaining son, would be in danger, something unthinkable to Yaakov. But after much difficult deliberation and discussion with his sons, when they were desperate for more food, Yaakov ultimately relented to let Binyamin go, but only after Yehuda took full responsibility for his safe return.

The brothers returned to Egypt with Binyamin, and everything went well with the ruler. Soon they were on their way home with Shimon and Binyamin and their new ration of food. But they didn't go very far when they heard the sound of horses galloping after them. Who was this chasing them? None other than the king's men! "What could they possibly want from us?" they said. They quickly found out. The king's horsemen had a very serious allegation against the brothers: "How did you have the gall to steal the king's goblet?"

"The *what?*" came the response. "We would never do a thing like that! The one with whom you find the goblet 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 sure enough discovered in Binyamin's. The brothers were brought back to Yosef who scolded them for stealing something so precious and dear to the ruler. "How could you think that I wouldn't notice that it was missing?"

Something is very perplexing here. The brothers knew that they had no control over their donkeys. They were deposited and retrieved with whatever the Egyptian workers put into their saddle bags. They knew that from their money that they found in their bags the first time that they came. So how did the brothers so passively just accept the guilt and agree to be slaves to Yosef? It would seem that they would be able to easily prove their innocence. They had no access to their donkeys! They were completely under government control!

The brothers were prepared to accept the idea that they would be slaves for a crime that they did not commit, because they understood that nothing could happen to them if Hashem did not want it to happen. Even though someone had falsely framed them, it was Hashem's will, and there must be a valid reason for it. It must be a punishment for a crime that they had committed.

The brothers 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,

הֲאֵלֶּקִים מָצָא אֶת עֹן עֲבָדֶיךָ *"Hashem has found the sin of your servants."*

Yehuda acknowledged that they are guilty of a crime. "We understand that it is not you who is doing this to us. It is our problem because we are in need of atonement for not having had mercy on our brother. You are just the stick that Hashem is using to punish us."

Yehuda 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. Binyamin 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.”

Yosef’s not responding to the logic of Yehuda’s argument, insisting that only Binyamin remain as a slave, threw a monkey wrench into their thinking. Binyamin was not a party to Yosef’s sale! He could not possibly need 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.

At that moment the brothers realized that Hashem was giving them the opportunity to correct the sin that they had so many years ago committed with Yosef. Here they were being given the chance to save Binyamin and restore him to his father, the antidote to 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 that they would have to fight against the entire country.

This is where our parshah Vayigash begins, and it begins with the words (Bereshit 44:18):

(יח) וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה

And Yehuda approached him.

Yehuda is the brothers’ leader and spokesman whom they all recognized for his superior leadership qualities. Even when Yaakov later 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 הוּדָאָה, 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 things seemed impossible, 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 is why his mother named him Yehuda. When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she said (Genesis 29:35):

(לה) וַתְּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפְּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת יְדֹד עַל בֶּן קְרָאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֵד מִלְּדוֹת:

35. She conceived again, and bore a son and declared, "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem." She therefore named him Yehuda; then she stopped giving birth.

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

Our Sages ponder this statement's meaning. 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 זצ"ל (1908-1995) presents the following explanation.

Yaakov saw Rachel as his soul mate, his *bashert*. Lavan tricked Yaakov into marrying Leah, but she was only wife number two. Leah was always striving to become more beloved to her husband Yaakov. This is clear from the names that she gave to her children. When Leah gave birth to her first son, she was convinced that Hashem had seen her plight and therefore blessed her with a child to remedy the situation. Surely, after giving Yaakov his first son, he would love her more. The name Reuven that she gave him, comes from the two words ראה and עניי which mean "Hashem saw my affliction."

Leah named her second child Shimon, which derives from the two words שמע and שנואה, which mean "Hashem heard that I am hated." Apparently, nothing had changed in her status after her first son, but now, that she had given Yaakov a second son, this, she hoped, would remedy the problem.

She named her third son Levi, from the word ילוה, which means "*become attached to me.*" Leah thought that now that she had bore Yaakov three sons, Yaakov will have to help her with them. This would attach him to her and bring forth the love that she was seeking from him. We see that Leah is still hoping that this third son will accomplish what the first two did not.

When Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she realized that if after giving Yaakov three sons nothing had changed, the likelihood is that it never will change. Thus, Leah made peace with 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 thank Hashem for it. This was not the life she wished for herself, but it was the life that Hashem wanted her to have. 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 that 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 he 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 what equipped him to be the leader of his brothers and the 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; rather, it is the exact prescription that Hashem has prescribed for the next step of growth.

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

The Sfas Emes (d. 1905) explains that this is why we are called יהודים *Yehudim*- Jews. We all inherently have this trait. He then quotes his father the Chidushei Harim who provides the strategy for someone in trouble to approach Hashem about it.

. שמעתי מא"ז מו"ר זצלה"ה שנקראו יהודים על שם שמודין להשי"ת על כל דבר קטן וגדול שיודעין שהכל ממנו ית' 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 sit in the darkness. The source of the light is the darkness.

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

As it says in the verse 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 Yehuda’s strategy when he approached Yosef to release Binyamin and accept Yehuda as a slave instead. He accepted Hashem’s decree and appealed to Him to bring forth the light from the darkness.

And this is exactly what happened. Yosef was so touched by the brothers’ efforts on Binyamin’s behalf that he was convinced that they had properly repented for having sold him. He could not hold back, and, with flowing tears, revealed himself to his brothers.

A woman who was married for 10 years, but could not conceive, attended a lecture by Rabbi David Ashear. The topic of the lecture was that one must put their trust in Hashem and have

complete confidence in Hashem that what He is doing to you is for your benefit and welfare.

After the lecture, the woman approached the Rabbi and asked him if he had any advice for her. She and her husband had tried everything to have children and they had not succeeded.

The Rabbi said, "Yes, there is something that you can do, but it may be too difficult.

"What is it?" asked the woman, "there is nothing I will not do to have a child."

"OK," said the Rabbi. "Here is what you must do. You must thank Hashem from the depths of your heart for not giving you children for 10 years."

"What?" screamed the lady. "I am so angry at Hashem for putting me and my husband through this terrible curse!"

The Rabbi calmly explained to her that nothing is coincidence, and that her situation is the best thing for her. If she acknowledges that and thanks Hashem for it, having learned this invaluable lesson, she may merit a child. A short time later, the woman was expecting a child.

This concept also applies to the Chanukah holiday that we just celebrated. When the Greeks sought to make us forget the Torah by darkening our eyes with their decrees, and all looked lost, a handful of holy people took on the powerful Greek armies. Through their miraculous victory, they revealed Hashem's hidden light 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 that 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, while the Greeks are nowhere to be seen. Once again, the darkness was the source of the light.

May we merit, in our own moments of darkness, to respond with Yehuda's courage and Leah's gratitude, trusting that even what we do not yet understand is part of Hashem's precise plan for our growth. And may we soon see the hidden light emerge clearly, transforming struggle into clarity, and pain into redemption.