

Candle Lighting

5:10

S”Z Kriat Shema

9:34

Sunset

5:29

Motzei
Shabbat

6:06



Parshat HaShavuah

ויגש

VAYIGASH

ד' טבת תשע"ד

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חלקינו מה טוב

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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Sponsored in memory of Lana (Leah) D. Goldberg

A NEW SPIN ON GOSHEN

MRS. ORA LEE KANNER

Could it be a mere coincidence that the letters on our Chanukah dreidel; gim-mel, shin, nun, and heh, spell *Goshna* (to Goshen), as in the pasuk in our parsha, “v’et Yehuda shalach lefanav el Yosef l’horot lefanav Goshna” (Yaakov sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef to prepare for him in Goshen)?


In fact, the city of Goshen where the family of Yaakov settled in the land of Egypt appears ten times in our parsha! What might be the connection between Parshat Vayigash and the holiday of Chanukah, between the s’vivon and Goshen, between Yehuda the brother and Yehuda the Maccabi? Is it a mere coincidence that the acronym for *nes gadol hayah sham* spells the word *Goshna*?

I learned long ago that there are no coincidences in Judaism. In our parsha, Yaakov is fraught with dread and in fear of the threat of assimilation of his children and grandchildren in their new abode in Egypt. With G-d’s assurance in the darkness of night that He will not forsake him, Yaakov takes the initiative and sends his trusted son Yehuda to establish a yeshiva in the city of Goshen, where he insists his family must live, separate from the juggernaut of Egyptian culture. He knows that the only way to secure the faith and values of his children is to educate them in the knowledge of Torah and provide them with an environment where Torah can be preached, practiced, and protected.

The celebration of Chanukah marks the victory of the Torah over the allure of Hellenism, essentially the triumph of the Jewish people over assimilation. The prototype for winning this ongoing battle against assimilation, confronted by the Jewish people in every exile, was established by Yaakov Avinu, in his vision and protocol of building a Torah institution and a separate community for the Jewish people in Goshen.

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Mrs. Kanner continued

The key to the survival of our people has been and continues to be Torah education and an environment, a *bayit*, conducive to Torah observance. Establishing this infrastructure of a *bayit* was the mission of Yehuda at the directive of his father Yaakov, and the mission of Yehuda HaMaccabi in rededicating the Beit Hamikdash at the directive of his father Matityahu. Hence, due to the efforts of Yehuda, the Torah tells us that the Jewish people in Egypt were initially able to retain the status of Yaakov “*ish u’beito*,” and due to the success of Yehuda Hamaccabi we were commanded to commemorate the miracle of Chanukah by lighting a menorah “*ish ubeito*.”

The spinning of the dreidel is an allegory for how we Jewish people have been spinning through history, from exile to exile, awaiting the final *geulah*. But we celebrate and rejoice in knowing that we will continue to survive and triumph as a people because we have well imbibed the lessons of *Goshna*, imprinted on the dreidels of exile.

May we merit to celebrate together in the final *geulah*.

DANGER OF ASSIMILATION

REBECCA BENSIMON (‘14)

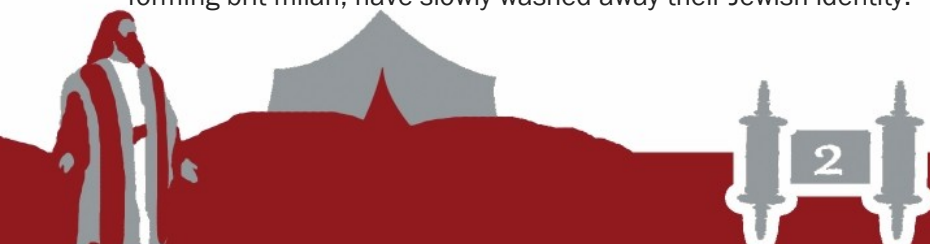
In this week’s parsha, we learn of the reunion of Yaakov with his beloved son Yosef. Yosef has become elevated to a position of leadership, second only to Pharaoh. When his brothers emigrate from Canaan with their father, Yosef knows that Pharaoh will call for them. He advises them how to answer Pharaoh, who will ask them what their occupation is. What does Yosef tell them to answer? He advises them to say that they are herdsmen. This will ensure that they will be given the grazing land of Goshen in which to live. Good grazing land for herdsmen? This sounds as if they are being given preferential treatment in their new country. In actual fact, however, the sons of Yaakov are being separated from the local population. They will be despised as herdsmen since the Egyptians worship sheep as gods and would not consider using sheep as a commodity or a food. In what way then, is Yosef’s advice beneficial to his brothers? Is he setting them up to be the victims of anti-Semitism?

Rabbi Dr. Asher Wade tells a very interesting story which sheds light on our question. Rabbi Wade's extensive Holocaust studies have made him a key lecturer at Yad VaShem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. He points out that he finds it intriguing to note the reactions many people have to his mode of dress, which is that of a Chasidic Jew. In his story, he describes how a young woman paused as she made her way past him. She looked at him with tremendous disdain and jadedly remarked, "it's people like YOU who caused the Holocaust to happen." She simply based her statement on the premise that being different makes others hate you. That, of course, makes assimilation the best defense against anti-Semitism.

He simply asked her in return: "Tell me, where did the Nazi hatred start? In Eastern Europe where so many Jews were still strongly identifiable as Jews, or in Austria and Germany where the Jews were largely assimilated?" She stood there, taking a moment longer to think than she had the first time she had spoken. She then quickly continued down the aisle saying, “Well, you just leave me alone and I'll do the same for you,” which sounds very much like: “don't confuse me with the facts, I've made up my mind!”

We learn that when the time for the exodus from Egypt comes, 210 years after Yaakov first arrives, B’nei Yisrael are barely recognizable as a separate nation. Slavery and oppression have taken their toll. The only aspects which they have retained to distinguish them from their Egyptian neighbors are their uniquely Jewish style of dress, their Hebrew language, and their continued use of Jewish names. All other aspects of Egyptian life, among them idol worship and the laxity in performing brit milah, have slowly washed away their Jewish identity.

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Through the advice to his brothers, Yosef is actually ensuring the continuity of all future Jewish generations until today. If the original tiny settlement of 70 Jews had been welcomed and settled in the heart of Egyptian culture and norms, how long would it have taken for them to assimilate completely, disappearing as Jews altogether?

Yosef, with his foresight and caring for the future of G-d's nation, sees what steps to take and follows them. Yes, his family will be separate and distinct. Yes, they will probably be hated. But they will also make it to the end of the Egyptian exile with at least the last vestiges of their identity intact. The existence of a last tiny flame of Jewish identity guarantees that there is a nation left to be taken out of bondage. That tiny flame will later be ignited into a glorious torch through the giving of the Torah. It may have appeared at the time that Yosef is the hater, yet in actuality, he has expressed the greatest love through his seemingly strange advice. Without Yosef, we would have assimilated. May we also merit arriving at the time of our redemption from exile with our identity intact. May we all assist each other, with love, to attain that goal!

WHY “SELF-PITY” IS NOT IN THE JEWISH DICTIONARY

DAVID OSTROFSKY (‘14)

One of the most dramatic scenes in all of Biblical history is presented in this week's parsha, Parshat Vayigash. The Torah explains that Yosef “fell on his brother Binyamin's neck and cried, and Binyamin cried on his [Yosef's] neck (Genesis 45:14).”

Now, such an emotional reaction is understandable—even expected—after a hiatus of over 20 years! One can only imagine the overwhelming sense of elation, coupled with pain, that these two brothers were experiencing, and thus their tears seem to be a reasonable and distinctly human response. Rashi explains, however, that in fact their emotional reactions were not due to the sensory overload of the moment that one might presume. Instead, they were prophetically crying over each other's destructions. Yosef, Rashi explains, wept over the destruction of the two Temples the tribe of Binyamin would bear and Binyamin was overwhelmed by the destruction of Mishkan Shilo, located in the land given to the tribes of Yosef. Although their sense of sympathy is admirable, Rashi's explanation begs the question: why didn't each of the brothers weep over their own future misfortunes?

I believe that the Torah is teaching us an important insight into how to deal with our day-to-day hardships. With other people's problems, our ability to help is ultimately quite limited. We can give advice, be there for support, and even try to influence the situation, but we rarely can make a direct impact. Even after we offer all we can, whether or not the problem dissipates is often dependent upon our friend's actions, not ours.

It is this frustration, I believe, that resulted in Yosef's and Binyamin's tears. They realize that they are powerless to change each other's fates; all they can offer is a sympathetic tear. The greatness of Yosef and Binyamin is their reluctance to cry at their own perils. They are shining examples of how to react to our own hardships each and every day. When it's easier to give up and “throw in the towel” we must not succumb to the tempting force of self-pity. To feel bad for one's self, to convince yourself that you are a victim, is nothing less than to deny self-determination. Instead, when confronted with difficulties we should act like our ancestors did thousands of years ago. We must understand that moaning and groaning will never have a positive impact or help in any way. Instead, if we truly want to resolve the issue, we must dust ourselves off, roll up our sleeves, and confront the problem with inner strength.

HASHEM HAS A PLAN

EMMA HARRIS (‘16)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayigash, Yehuda is pleading with the second most powerful person in Egypt, who unknowingly happens to be his brother. He is trying to make sure that Binyamin does not remain in Egypt forever. At that moment, Yosef realizes that his brothers feel great remorse for selling him to slavery. Yosef pities his brothers and cannot hold back his emotions, so he yells, “I am Yosef!”

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These words startle the brothers, and they become speechless. The Chafetz Chaim explains that the reason the brothers cannot answer Yosef is because, at that moment, G-d's bigger plan becomes evident to them. They now understand why Yosef was taken to Egypt and no longer wonder or ask questions about it. Everything that has transpired over the past 22 years now falls into place.

This parsha not only displays the reunion between the brothers and Yosef, but it also shows the reunion between the brothers and G-d. We can learn from here that when G-d will reveal himself to us in the future, our past history will become clear to us like it became to Yosef's brothers, and we too will gain a better comprehension of our destinies.

POWER OF TESHUVA LEOR LEVENSON ('16)

Parshat Vayigash continues the story of Yosef and his brothers. This story, one of the longest in the Torah, is mainly focused on Yosef's development. It describes his rise to power and eventually his reunion with his father. An interesting question arises about this lengthy Torah portion. If Yosef is clearly dominant amongst all of the brothers, why is it that Yehuda's descendants become the kings of the Jews?

According to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the answer is contained in this week's parsha. Earlier, Yehuda is described as a cruel, heartless sibling. He convinces the other brothers to sell Yosef by asking: "What gain will there be if we kill our brother?" (Bereishit 37:26). He seems to lack the basic trait of kindness—so why would he be chosen to rule the Jewish people?

However, in this parsha, a new Yehuda is introduced. He now asks Yosef to, "Please let your servant remain instead of the youth" (Bereishit 44:33). Yehuda is now a kind and compassionate leader of the brothers, willing to sacrifice himself in order to spare both Binyamin and Yaakov a lot of unnecessary pain. This transformation from an uncaring brother to a concerned leader is the reason that Yehuda's descendants merit the kingship. Rabbi Sacks suggests that Yosef specifically plans this test for Yehuda in order to discern his true level of penitence. Once Yehuda shows his selflessness by protecting Binyamin from the same evil that he forced upon Yosef, it is clear that he has achieved complete repentance. Therefore, "Yosef could not restrain himself" (Bereishit 45:1) from revealing himself to his brothers and reuniting with a new, transformed Yehuda.

Teshuva can allow an individual to reach enormous heights. In the Gemara, Rabbi Abahu states, "In the place where penitents stand, the completely righteous do not stand" (Berachot 34b). Rabbi Abahu is implying that a *ba'al teshuva* is possibly greater than a tzaddik because the former mustered the conviction to overcome his "evil inclination."

As a result of Yehuda's complete teshuva, his descendants become the greatest leaders of the Jews. The power of teshuva will some day lead us to redemption at the hand of Mashiach, possibly Yehuda's greatest descendant.

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