


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש


Friday 10 December 2010 - 3 Tevet 5771  
 Sedra Vayigash

**THE WIDER STORY**

**A** BASIC CONCEPT IN JUDAISM IS THE DIVINE SUPERVISION OF THE UNIVERSE. THE Hebrew term for this is *Hashgachah Pratit*, which means ‘Detailed Supervision’. Every detail of existence is guided and controlled by G-d. This applies to a blade of grass, a tiny fish deep in the sea, or a leaf blown in the wind. G-d’s Will makes the leaf turn this way or that. This implies that somehow, in the context of a vast network of spiritual forces, the movement of the leaf is significant. It contributes in some way to the goal of creation.

If this is true for a leaf, how much more so for a human being! Everything that happens to a person is from G-d, and every detail of his or her life is an important step in the Divine plan<sup>1</sup>.

In the Sedra<sup>2</sup>, Joseph refers to this concept. The brothers had sold him as a slave. Now he is revealed to them as Viceroy of Egypt. They are disconcerted and feel guilty, but he comforts them. He tells them it was all part of a Divine plan to provide food for the family of Jacob during the famine. Due to Joseph’s position he will be able to arrange for his father and brothers to live in Egypt and to be supplied with food. Had they remained the Land of Canaan, they might have starved to death.



לזכרון נצח מרת טוי-ה בת פרחיה ע"ה  
 In Loving Memory of Mrs Victoria Menashy ע"ה  
 1 Tammuz 5770

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Trust in the power of Divine Providence guiding every detail of life has given Jews - and many others - confidence and an optimistic view of life. A strong feeling of trust in G-d, despite temporary upset, adversity and even tragedy, has been an important factor in the continuity and strength of the Jewish people.

What then does one say at a time when this Divine Providence seems inexplicable? How does one respond to the tragedies of the world?

The point of the story of Joseph is that before the denouement described in the Sedra, everything seemed totally meaningless. Joseph was hated, sold into slavery, unjustly accused and flung into prison. Why?

Now in our Sedra, suddenly Joseph's power to help his family is revealed, and all the mysterious events can be seen as elements in G-d's plan. Yet this point too is only part of a wider story. When Jacob and his family came to Egypt, to be cared for by Joseph, it was a step leading towards the suffering of slavery. This itself would lead to the Exodus, and the receiving of the Torah at Sinai.

The story becomes wider and wider. There are many turns and falls, including events like the destruction of the Temple and the Holocaust. At many points a person may well wonder - does our national history have meaning?

If one looks at any one sequence of events, a person may feel confused. But our Sages teach us to look at the wider picture, the full story. We cannot yet see how all the details fit together. But we can trust that they all have meaning in terms of the Divine plan to bring the Messiah, bringing goodness and healing to all humanity.

Yet again, a person may ask: 'does my own *individual* story have meaning? The details of *my* life?' The account of Joseph in the Torah tells us: Yes. All the ups and downs are part of the mysterious personal journey towards individual fulfilment and, ultimately, Redemption.

1 . See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *From Day to Day*, 28 Cheshvan. 2. Genesis 44:18-47:27. See 45:3-13.

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### SEDRA VAYIGASH

#### **HEBREW SCHOOL**

"Michael! Wake up! You're going to be late for Cheder!" Every Sunday morning, Michael would go with some other Jewish children and study with Rabbi Levy about their Jewish heritage. They would learn to read and understand Hebrew, hear stories and teachings, and sometimes watch interesting videos.

But this cold morning Michael rolled over, hugging the blanket even tighter. He couldn't be bothered going to Cheder... He just wanted to stay indoors and have fun on his new computer.

"MICHAEL!! The bus is leaving in five minutes – GET UP!!" This time her voice was even louder, but Michael didn't budge.

"I'm tired," he said, pretending to be half asleep, waiting for his mother to stop nagging him.

"Michael Daniel Kahn, unless you have a valid excuse, you had better get up right now." Michael sat up with a fright. The use of his full name meant that his mother was *really* serious.

"Thank you," she said, exasperated, "now if you don't mind, hurry up, so I don't have to drive you to Cheder!"

"Wait, mum!" he called. Mrs Kahn turned around. "I don't want to go to Cheder." "What do you mean; you don't want to go to Cheder? Listen here, I'm sorry, but you have to go."

His mother had a lot of things to do that Sunday morning, and had no time for this. "Listen Michael, I'm coming back in three minutes and I want to see you up and dressed!"

In fact Michael got dressed in record time, and he could have caught the bus, but upon seeing the sad look on his face as he grabbed something to eat on the way, Mrs Kahn stopped him. "Michael, why the long face?" she asked worriedly, "are the boys bullying you?"

"Nah," he shrugged, "but why would do you care so much that I should go? What difference does it make?" Just then the bus drove past. "Looks like I'll be driving you," Mrs Kahn sighed. "Get into the car."

Once they were together in the car, she continued talking. "Michael, Michael. Everyone needs to get an education, and as a Jewish boy it's very important that you also get a Jewish one. You know, you can actually see from this week's Sedra the importance of schooling."

"Mmm?" he looked up, chewing on his breakfast bar.

"When Jacob and all his descendants were leaving to go to Egypt, the Torah says that Jacob sent Judah ahead. Rashi says that was in order to set up Yeshivot – Jewish schools. Throughout the long exile in Egypt, there were always Yeshivot. If Jacob felt it necessary to send his son ahead, and if throughout all the troubles in Egypt, they made sure there was somewhere to study their Hebrew heritage, then it's obviously extremely important to get a Jewish education." Mrs Kahn eyed her son through the rear view mirror. He was nodding thoughtfully as he wiped the crumbs from his mouth.

The car pulled up in front of the synagogue. "Well off you go, Michael. Have a great morning."

"You too, Mum. Thanks for driving me." As Michael stepped out of the car, it occurred to him he was actually lucky to have a Cheder right near him. And in the afternoon, well, then he would make sure he did something that was *really* fun...

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