

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

ד"ה ויגש אליו יהודה פרשת ויגש תשמ"ח בלתי מוגה

Published for Shabbat Sedra Vayigash

7 Tevet 5783, 31 December 2022¹

UNIFYING THE WORLD

THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF CONFLICT. THE TORAH DESCRIBES the difficult relationship between Joseph and his half-brothers, which resulted in their selling Joseph to Egypt as a slave. In a remarkable way he became Viceroy of Egypt. Then his brothers came to Egypt to buy food. He recognised them, but they did not recognise him. The Sedra Vayigash presents the dramatic moment of reconciliation. The key words are 'And Judah drew near to Joseph'².

The conflict between the brothers was played out later in the history of the Jews in the Land of Israel. After the wonderful climax of the reign of Solomon, and the building of the Temple, there was a rebellion against Solomon's son, and the country split in two. The Northern Kingdom (sometimes called Ephraim) was ruled initially by a descendant of Joseph, and the Southern Kingdom was ruled by a descendant of Judah, through David and Solomon.

The Haftorah for this Shabbat³ expresses the prophecy of Ezekiel that ultimately the two sectors of the Jewish people would be re-united, under the rule of a descendant of David. That ruler will be the Messiah, who will bring unity to the Jewish world and indeed to all humanity.

בברכת רפואה שלמה וקרובה בשביל האשה העניא רבקה בת ברכה דבורה לאה תחי'
Praying for a Refuah Shelemah for Henya Rivkah bas Brochah Devorah Leah 'תחי'

¹ Maamar Vayigash Elav Yehuda 5748 (1987). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Sedra Vayigash 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Gen.44:18

³ Ezek.37:15-28.

The discourse presents the idea that the Torah is eternally relevant, both when it speaks of the past, and also when it prophecies for the future. Whatever it is saying should also be relevant to the spiritual life of the individual today.

The discourse presents two forms of this, both subtle, and both meaningful. The first is the distinction or even rivalry between Study and Action. Judah and David initiating the line of Jewish Kingship, represent commitment and Action. Joseph, whose name means 'increase', represents the world of Study and intellectual exploration, which constantly reaches further in terms of ideas and understanding.

In theory one extreme would be an exclusive focus on Study, the other would be concern only with Action. The discourse presents the ideal that one needs both elements in a balanced way. The Study should be focused on Action, and the Action should be informed by Study. Thus Judah (Action) and Joseph (Study) are joined.

Another expression of the resolution of the conflict concerns the process of prayer. There is the personally liberating dimension of the Morning prayers, Shacharit, represented by Joseph. The section of prayer before the Amidah concludes with a blessing thanking G-d for 'redeeming Israel'. This aspect of prayer, before the Amidah, especially when made more meaningful through contemplation and melody, can be a process of self-discovery and personal redemption.

Then comes the Amidah, a prayer of stillness and total focus on the Divine, beyond all sense of self. It is characterised by *bitul*, self abnegation. This is described as expressed by Judah.

There is a traditional concept that one should 'join Geulah to Tefilah', that the redemptive and liberating aspects of prayer should join with the selfless recitation of the Amidah⁴. This has a practical aspect, that one does not interrupt between the words 'blessed is G-d who redeems Israel', and the beginning of the Amidah. In addition there is the idea that however great one's sense of inspiration and liberation in the earlier part of the prayers, there is also a point when pure selflessness is required, immobile, communing with the Divine.

This is another form of joining Joseph and Judah.

A further point discussed by the discourse concerns the way that Judah gives a resume of the past events to Joseph: that the brothers have an elderly father, and

⁴ See Shulchan Aruch, Orah Haim, 66:7-9.

a youngest brother (Benjamin) whose brother (Joseph) is dead⁵. Hence their father loves the youngest one very much, for he is the only surviving child of his mother. Judah continued with the description of the way the Egyptian Viceroy asked to see the youngest brother, and so on, up to the present moment. This caused to Joseph to feel intense, uncontrollable emotion and consequently he finally revealed his identity to his brothers.

The discourse asks why this account should have this effect. Most or all of the details had already been told to the Viceroy, and of course, as Joseph, he already knew them only too well.

The discourse explains that Judah, due to his *bitul*, selflessness, was able to elevate those events, including even the hint at the capture and sale of Joseph, to an exalted level where bad was transformed to good. The story of Joseph's life, and of the lives of his brothers in relation to him, was transformed from tragedy to a tremendous Divine gift. Hence Joseph was able to say 'G-d has sent me ahead of you as a provider'⁶, a provider with the ability to keep his family alive during the famine which devastated the whole region.

This is a further aspect of the interaction and union between Joseph and Judah.

Through seeking this union on a personal level, or even just discussing it, we help to bring it about in tangible, global form, when indeed the Jewish people will be united, and so will the rest of humanity, with the spiritual leadership of a scion of the House of David bringing personal, spiritual and even political unity to the world.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁵ See Rashi to Gen. 44:20.

⁶ Gen. 45:5.