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Vayigash | Pure Torah Study - Healing For All





# MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת ויגש | אנגלית

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Parshat Vayigash - The Urge to Steal



# The Urge to Steal

The prayer service had long since ended; the congregants had dispersed to their homes, but Yossi remained seated, his head buried in his arms.

Light footsteps were heard from the entrance. The regular caretaker entered the study hall, carrying a bucket and a mop, and energetically began moving the benches and tables.

When he reached Yossi's seat, he turned to him and said, "I need to clean this area; could you please stand up?"

Yossi lifted his head and with his bloodshot eyes gazed at the caretaker.

Startled by his appearance, the caretaker began peppering him with questions: "What happened? Are you okay? Can I help with something? How long have you been sitting here?"

A bitter smile appeared on Yossi's face. "You can't help me."

"You're mistaken," said the caretaker. "You can share with me; I can listen. That's a big help."

Yossi looked at him and thought:
"He seems like a kind person. It
doesn't seem like he'll judge or
belittle me. Maybe it's really
worth sharing with him?"

The caretaker sat down on the bench and looked at Yossi silently.

To Yossi's surprise, he felt a spirit of calm and tranquility emanating from the caretaker and began to pour out his heart:

"I'm aware of my weakness, kleptomania; I have a compulsion to steal.

When I see unattended possessions or money, my heart burns with an irresistible urge, and I just take off with it.

Parshat Vayigash - Awareness is Not Enough

After each theft, my heart calms down, and when the passion is extinguished, my heart and conscience starts to stir in me without any mercy or compassion, and an inner voice shouts - 'You despicable thief!'

Today, today I saw a little boy who went to buy an ice cream, and without noticing, the money fell out of his pocket, and instead of returning it to him, I took it. I heard his cries when he discovered that it was missing, his screams shattered my heart. I truly have no hope; I'm a lost case."

The caretaker looked at Yossi, and they both sat together on the bench in silence.

# **Awareness is Not Enough**

After a few long minutes that seemed like an eternity, the caretaker spoke up and said, "You're right, stealing is a very serious matter. When one steals, it causes a person's soul to be uprooted from their source in the realms of holiness and to receive sustenance from the powers of impurity. Certainly, one must weep and sigh over it, but that almost doesn't help to in any way guarantee a better future."

"Why doesn't it help?" asked Yossi.

"To explain, I need to bring the Tractate of Nedarim."

The caretaker stood up and went to fetch the volume of the Talmud,

and Yossi thought to himself, "Who knows, maybe this caretaker will manage to cleanse my soul as well?"

The caretaker opened the Talmud (Nedarim 32b) and began to read:

"Rami bar Abba said: What is the meaning of that which is written: 'A small city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great fortresses against it. There was found in it a poor wise man, and through his wisdom, he delivered the city; yet no one remembered the poor man'

(Ecclesiastes 9:14-15)?:

'A small city' - is the body.

Parshat Vayigash - Awareness is Not Enough

'With few men in it' - refers to the limbs.

'And a great king came against it and besieged it' - this refers to the evil inclination.

'And built great fortresses against it' - these are the sins of man.

'There was found in it a poor wise man' - this refers to the good inclination.

'And through his wisdom, he delivered the city' - referring to repentance and good deeds.

'Yet no one remembered the poor man' - at the time of the impulse of the evil inclination, no one is cognizant of the good inclination."

"The holy Talmud," the caretaker continued, "reveals a wonderful secret:

'At the time of the impulse of the evil inclination, no one is cognizant of the good inclination,' meaning, that at the moment when the evil inclination tempts a person to sin, there's no recollection of the good inclination."

To elaborate further:

When a feeling and desire arises in a person's heart, he cannot escape it by reminding himself that it's forbidden. 'For the awareness of the prohibition does not have the power to separate a person from evil.'1

At the moment of temptation - when a spirit of folly enters a person - it deceives him and confuses his mind, causing one to imagine that it is 'not a big deal' if he commits this particular sin - he will still remain within his faith.

During the time of a spiritual trial and challenge, one's memory becomes dim and weak, and the person forgets all of the knowledge he has learned and all of the regrets for his past misdeeds.

That's why I said regrets and being despondent doesn't help the future," concluded the caretaker.

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Parshat Vayigash - Giver or Receiver

"So what can be done? How can one cope with the evil desires and cravings of the heart?" asked Yossi.

"I don't know, but I know of a wise Jewish scholar, and if you agree, we can go consult him."

Yossi blushed. "I'm embarrassed to face him."

The caretaker looked at Yossi compassionately and explained, "When you go to a doctor, you're not ashamed of your illness, and

you do everything he says. So too, and all the more so when you go to a Jewish sage - a healer of souls - you mustn't be ashamed."

The two of them went together, and arrived at the rabbi's chamber.

Yossi spoke and wept, and the rabbi listened to Yossi's words in silence.

All three - the rabbi, Yossi, and the caretaker - sat together around the table in silence.

#### Giver or Receiver

After a few moments that seemed like an eternity, the rabbi began and said, "Indeed, you have a valid point. When a feeling and desire arises in a person's heart, he cannot be spared from its clutches merely by reminding himself that it's forbidden. The awareness of the prohibition alone does not have the power to separate a person from evil.

When such a desire arises in a person's heart, he remains susceptible to immediate danger from the 'spirit of folly' that can overpower and subdue him."<sup>2</sup>

"But I don't understand,"
Yossi shook his head. "Why
doesn't one's awareness of the
violation he stands to commit
have the power to cause an
upstanding person to refrain from
evil?"

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**2.** In the words of the Talmud (Sotah 3a): "Resh Lakish said, 'A person does not

commit a sin unless a spirit of folly enters him.'"

Parshat Vayigash - Giver or Receiver

"That's a very good question," the rabbi praised Yossi.

"We find that the Baal HaTanya elaborated on this topic, and this is how he explained it:3

"We must understand what our sages declare, 'No person commits a sin unless a spirit of folly enters him.'

We observe clearly that in matters of desire that a person may have, even if he is a great scholar in other areas, nevertheless, when a desire is awakened within him, at that moment he will act like a fool. His wisdom departs from him at the time when he desires, and this phenomenon is experienced by all people; even great sages succumb to folly just like fools.

It seems puzzling - why does one's intellect depart with regard to matters which they desire?

The explanation is that when it arose in G-d's will to create the world, He designed it to operate through the two aspects of giving and receiving. That is, all movements in the world occur in one of the two modes, either through giving or through receiving.<sup>4</sup>

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- **3.** Maamarei Admor Hazaken 5566 (Part I, page 403).
- **4.** We quote the words of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Part I, page 23):

"When G-d created man, He fashioned him to be a 'giver' as well as a 'taker'.

The power of giving is a supreme attribute from the qualities of the Creator, blessed be He, who is compassionate, benevolent, and gives without receiving anything in return.

G-d made man to be the same, as it is written: "For in the image of G-d He made man" (Bereshit 9:6), meaning

to show compassion, to do good, and to give.

However, the trait of 'taking' is the human desire to draw everything within his domain toward himself. This power is what is called 'self-love,' and it is the root of all evils.

The Holy One, blessed be He, demands of man that he be a giver, and that his giving be abundant and his taking minimal, and that the little that he takes is only to the extent that is necessary for him to fulfill his aspiration to give and do good.

Thus, even the nature to 'take', is rooted in a holy source - the desire to give - and not merely to receive."

Parshat Vayigash - Torah Insures Against Degeneration

When a person gives, they are referred to as 'Duchra' (male), and are in a state of revealed intellectual illumination - 'Mochin DeGadlut' (expanded consciousness).

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But when a person is a receiver, they are referred to as 'Nukva' (female), and are in a state of limited and concealed intellectual illumination - 'Mochin deKatnut' (constricted consciousness).

This explains why at the time that a person desires something, a spirit of folly enters them. It is because at that moment, they have become a 'receiver,' since they wish to derive and receive pleasure from that matter, and they consequently are in the aspect of 'Nukva' (receiver) relative to the object of his desire."

Since one becomes a 'receiver,' they also act and become foolish at that moment; they desire and crave to obtain enjoyment from

that particular pleasure, and the desire overpowers and controls them. It furthermore blinds their eyes from seeing the truth - 'for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise' (Deuteronomy 16:19).

This subservience and receivership is what removes the wisdom from the wise who fall in unholy desires."

"Do you understand?" The rabbi turned to Yossi. "When the urge and desire to steal awakens in your heart, it blinds and overpowers your intellect, and you forget everything you knew about wrong and right."

"Rabbi, what should I do? Help me!" pleaded Yossi.

The rabbi looked kindly into Yossi's eyes and said, "With G-d's help, I will try to find a solution together with you.

Let us begin with a closer look at this week's Torah portion."

# **Torah Insures Against Degeneration**

"In our Torah portion, Parshat Vayigash, Yosef reveals himself to his brothers and says: "I am Yosef

your brother, whom you sold into *Egypt*" (Bereshit 45:4). Afterwards, he commanded them: "*Hurry and* 

#### Parshat Vayigash - Torah Insures Against Degeneration

go up to my father and say to him: 'Thus says your son Yosef: G-d has made me master over all of Egypt; descend down to me, do not delay... And you shall dwell in the land of Goshen'" (ibid., verses 9-10).

Yaakov our forefather heard Yosef's request, and he pondered the fate his children would now face - "The time has come to descend to Egypt; this is surely the will of G-d. But how will my descendants withstand the trials and temptations of Egypt? What will give them the spiritual strength to cope?"

Yaakov came to the conclusion that the only way to maintain a life of Judaism is solely through the study of Torah. When one studies Torah, one draws down G-d's light, and this light refines and purifies the soul.

Therefore, Yaakov called his son Yehudah and requested that he go to Egypt and establish houses of Torah study, such that when he would arrive, there would already be a prepared house for Torah learning.

Through this, Yaakov guaranteed that the Jewish people would be able to withstand the difficulties there, and even if, G-d forbid, they would experience spiritual "falls" and succumb to the lowly trends of the time, they would have a prepared refuge.

Yehudah indeed descended to Egypt and established a house of Torah study.<sup>5</sup>

#### Parenthetically:

Indeed, as long as the Jewish people who dwelled in Egypt engaged in the study of the Torah, they withstood all the desires and

#### 🗝 Wellsprings of Wisdom 🗫 🗕

#### **5.** As the verse states:

"He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef to prepare the way for him in Goshen" (Bereshit 46:28).

We quote from a discourse delivered by Rabbi Yoram Abargel (Imrei Noam, Parshat Vayechi, Essay 3): 'In connection with the opening words of Parshat Vayechi, "And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years" (Bereshit 47:28), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, of saintly memory, brings a story in 'Hayom Yom' (18 Tevet):

"When the Tzemach Tzedek was a child, he learned in the Talmud Torah the

#### Parshat Vayigash - Torah Insures Against Degeneration

commentary of the Ba'al HaTurim on the verse "And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt" - that the choicest years of Yaakov's life were the ones he lived in Egypt. There, in Egypt, our forefather Yaakov lived a spiritual life of utmost perfection.

When the Tzemach Tzedek heard this he was enveloped in deep thought, and when he finally returned home after his studies, he approached his grandfather, the Ba'al HaTanya, and wondered: "Grandfather. How is it possible that our forefather Yaakov, the choicest of the patriarchs, lived the best years of his life - in the impurity of Egypt, 'the nakedness of earth?

How was the most distinguished of our holy forefathers able to live his lofty spiritual life while residing in Egypt, whose earth and air was impure, and whose inhabitants were abominable and impure to an unparalleled degree? Shouldn't a righteous person in such an impure place feel constant and unbearable torment?"

In response, his grandfather - the Baal HaTanya - explained a remarkable insight:

Before Yaakov descended to Egypt, he made sure to send Yehudah ahead to establish a house of study there, which would serve as a sacred place for him, where his sons, and his grandsons would engage in Torah and prayer.

Through their Torah study, the land of Egypt and the surrounding air were purified and sanctified, and they were enveloped by the pure and enlightening air of the Land of Israel, enabling them to live a spiritually perfect life."

Rabbi Yoram continued: 'This teaches us that it doesn't matter where one resides - even in a place as impure as Egypt - when a holy Jewish community is established, composed of G-d-fearing and upright people, and a synagogue, a Torah study hall, and a Talmud Torah is established, the area becomes purified and sanctified with the holiness of the Land of Israel, and one is blessed to live a fulfilled life both materially and spiritually.

On this subject we bring another teaching of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, (Hayom Yom 11 Tevet):

"A person's life depends on the air around him. Without air, one cannot live, and the quality of one's life corresponds to the kind of air one breathes. When one lives in an atmosphere of Torah and its commandments, they have a healthy life. But one who lives in an atmosphere of heresy, experiences an unhealthy life, prone to contracting contagious diseases."

For this reason, when choosing a place to live, it is very important to choose to live in an atmosphere of Torah and Mitzvot, rather than a place of frivolity and abandon; a person who desires that his soul remains healthy, must ensure to live in an atmosphere of holiness and to spend time among friends who engage in holy and sanctified activity. If one notices that his friends are negative influences, they must distance themselves and find more suitable companions.

It's also crucial for a person to distance and protect their wife and children from negative influences, drawing close only to those with a positive spiritual impact. It is human nature to learn from one's friends

Parshat Vayigash - Torah Insures Against Degeneration

temptations of the world. But over time, their diligence weakened, and they stopped studying the Torah, and this ultimately, was the cause for their enslavement."

"You too," the rabbi turned to Yossi and concluded his answer, "if you set fixed times for the study of Torah, over time you will be able to leave your misdeeds and wrongdoing behind you in the distant past."<sup>6</sup>

Yossi balked at the suggestion, which seemed too good to be true.

The rabbi looked at him and asked, "You have a hard time

believing me? Let us study further the words of the Baal HaTanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi:<sup>7</sup>

"Even a person who often fails in the sins of theft, immorality, and bloodshed should study the Torah laws pertaining to these sins. Although, seemingly, he is studying but not practicing that which he learned, which is very severe nevertheless, he should study.

This is because by constantly reviewing these warnings, perhaps the luminary within the Torah will return him to the good path, and transform the evil stubbornness of

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and relatives; and as they behave, so will he. As the verse states: "He who walks with the wise becomes wise, but a companion of fools will suffer" (Proverbs 13:20).

**6. In** one of the discourses, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, shared that many people come and bemoan the difficulties they experience in their battle against the evil inclination, asking for advice; however, indeed, the best advice is the study of Torah.

To quote from his words: "I deeply desire to inspire the Jewish world toward action - it must be obligatory for each person to study a set amount of Torah every day without fail.

Know that even those who are very distant from holiness, who have been caught up in a bad trap to the point that they are accustomed to sins - heaven forbid - even so, the power of Torah is so great that it can rescue them from the sins that they are familiar with.

If they were to establish for themselves a fixed and strong commitment to study a certain amount of Torah every day, no matter what, they will certainly merit to escape their bad predicament through Torah, for the power of Torah is exceedingly great."

7. 'Maamarei Admor Hazaken Haktzarim' (page 559), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Laws of Torah Study, 4:3).

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his heart, and the deadly poison into a life-giving remedy, for his own good and for healing.

Therefore, our sages say (Pesachim 50b): "A person should engage in Torah and Mitzvot even if not for their proper intent, for thereby they will come to do it for its own true sake" - because from performance not for its own sake, he will be able to come to do it for its own sake, and

to observe and perform, for the inner light within it will bring him back to the good path.

As our sages expound on the verse: "They have forsaken Me and have not kept My Torah" (Jeremiah 16:11) - Would only that they had forsaken Me but still kept My Torah, for the inner light within it would have returned them to the proper path.'8

**8.** Fortunate is one who studies Torah every day; through this, they merit elevation after elevation, and bask in the light of the divine presence and merit to behold the pleasantness of G-d.

Moreover, the study of the Torah is powerful and can influence every individual at all times. No matter the age at which a person begins to serve G-d, if they accept upon themselves the yoke of Torah, the highest and loftiest spiritual levels become attainable.

In this connection we bring the following story ('Raboteinu', page 119):

Thousands of years ago, there lived in the Land of Israel a wealthy man named Hurkanus. In addition to his wealth. G-d blessed him with several talented sons. Hurkanus, believing that his sons' talents were best put to use through menial labor, employed all of his sons in his sprawling fields.

Eliezer, one of his sons, who was particularly mighty and strong, Hurkanus sent to work plowing the mountainous terrain of his estate.

One day, Hurkanus visited his son Eliezer in the field and found him in tears. He asked, "My dear son, why are you crying?"

Eliezer replied, "Father, I am already twenty-eight years old and have never studied the Torah before; my soul yearns for the Torah."

Hurkanus was disappointed. about work? Leave these distracting thoughts aside and get back to work."

Seeing his father's steadfastness, Eliezer resolved to undertake fasts until he would be divinely answered. He then fasted for fourteen consecutive days, and on the fifteenth day, Elijah the Prophet appeared to him and asked, "Son of

Hurkanus, why do you cry?"

#### Parshat Vayigash - Torah Insures Against Degeneration

Eliezer replied, "I am already twenty-eight years old and have never studied the Torah before; I want to learn."

Elijah said to him, "If you wish to study Torah, go to Jerusalem and seek Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai."

Immediately, Eliezer set off for Jerusalem. When he arrived, he sought out Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's study hall, and requested to meet him.

When he was admitted, Eliezer burst into bitter tears, "I have never studied anything - not even the recitation of Shema."

Under the tutelage of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, and with great toil, effort, and total dedication, Eliezer was finally able to study Torah. He was enraptured by its love, and its words flowed through his being, refreshing his soul.

Meanwhile, Hurkanus and his sons searched for Eliezer, not knowing where he had gone, and eventually, they discovered that Eliezer had gone to Jerusalem to study Torah.

His brothers came to Hurkanus and said, "We work hard, and invest great efforts in the businesses, increasing the profits, while Eliezer has shirked off his duties and has gone off to study Torah.

When the day comes and the estate is divided, Eliezer must not get a share of any of it. We refuse to continue working unless you go to Jerusalem and inform Eliezer that he will not receive a penny of the inheritance."

Hurkanus took his horse and went to Jerusalem. Upon arrival, he found the city adorned in celebration; Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was hosting an event and had invited all the city's prominent figures.

Hurkanus entered the grand hall apprehensively.

Rabbi Yochanan noticed him entering, and turned to Eliezer and said, "Share with us a Torah teaching."

Rabbi Eliezer began to expound, and his face shone like the light of the sun, and radiated like the spiritual rays of Moses, and no one could discern whether it was day or night.

Rabbi Yochanan stood, kissed him on the head, and said, "Fortunate are Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, that this scholar has descended from them."

Upon hearing these words, Hurkanus exclaimed with great emotion, "Let me say it right: Fortunate am I, that this scholar has descended from me."

Years passed, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus continued to engage in Torah study with devotion, holiness, and purity. He advanced from strength to strength, uncovering great treasures of Torah.

Ultimately his final day on earth arrived, as stated in the account recorded in the Zohar (Midrash HaNe'elam, Vayera, 98a):

"Our sages taught: When Rabbi Eliezer the Great (as he was termed) fell ill, it was a Friday. He sat his son, Hurkanus (named like his father), at his right side and revealed to him deep and hidden secrets of the Torah.

At first, Hurkanus did not accept his father's teachings, thinking his mind was unsettled as he neared death. However,

Parshat Vayigash - Yehudah's Unique Vessels

# Yehudah's Unique Vessels

The caretaker raised a finger.
"Yes?" the rabbi turned to him.
"What do you have to say on the matter?"

"What I don't understand is that Yaakov had not one but three outstanding children who were great Torah scholars, namely: Levi, Yehudah, and Yissachar.

Among them, Yaakov appointed Levi to head his study hall in Egypt, as Maimonides writes (Laws of Idolatry, 1:3):

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when he saw his father's clarity of mind, he received from him close to two hundred great and lofty secrets.

When Rabbi Eliezer reached the mystical secrets of the pure marble stones that merge with the upper waters - hinting to the mysteries of the masculine and feminine waters, secrets that are uttered by the righteous at the time of their passing - Rabbi Eliezer wept and ceased revealing secrets.

He said, "My son, contemplate the mystery of the pure marble stones, for I can no longer reveal any additional secrets of Torah to you."

Hurkanus asked, "Why not?"

Rabbi Eliezer replied, "Because I see and feel that I will soon depart from this world."

Rabbi Akiva came to visit him and requested, "Master, teach me Torah."

Rabbi Eliezer opened his mouth to teach the mystical vision of the divine chariot, and a fire descended from heaven and surrounded them both. He taught Rabbi Akiva three hundred laws on the subject of leprosy, and over two hundred interpretations for verses in the Song of Songs. Rabbi Akiva's eyes flowed with tears, and the fire returned and encircled them.

Rabbi Eliezer continued to explain the mysteries of the Song of Songs. When he reached the verse: "Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick" (Song of Songs 2:5), he revealed such lofty secrets that Rabbi Akiva could no longer bear the intense divine light descending from the heavens, and cried out loud, overcome with awe of the Divine Presence.

Rabbi Eliezer continued teaching Rabbi Akiva the profound secrets and great mysteries of the Song of Songs. He made Rabbi Akiva swear not to use any verse, explaining that the secrets revealed could achieve extraordinary results, yet it was not G-d's will for people to use them due to their immense sanctity."

Parshat Vayigash - Yehudah's Unique Vessels

"Yaakov our forefather taught Torah to all of his sons and chose Levi and appointed him head, and he placed him in the study hall to teach the way of G-d and to keep the commandments of Avraham, and he commanded his sons not to cease appointing from the sons of Levi an overseer one after another so that the study would not be forgotten."

Yissachar as well was quite learned, as were many of his descendants.

As such, of all his three scholarly sons, why did Yaakov specifically choose Yehudah?"

The rabbi looked at the caretaker with a look of appreciation and said, "You asked a great question, a very great question indeed. You are, of course, correct.

Yaakov had three sons who were all great Torah scholars, but from amongst them he chose specifically Yehudah. The reason for this is to teach a lesson to all future generations:

'The holy Torah is a wondrous light, and to receive this light, one requires an appropriate vessel.'

To explain:

A fundamental concept in Kabbalah is that 'every spiritual flow that descends from heaven requires a vessel to contain it.' When there is no vessel capable of containing it, the spiritual abundance that descends is of no benefit.

Similarly in our case: The Torah is a great, immense, and awesome light, but to receive it, one needs to put forth a vessel.

Each person, according to the size of their vessel and its strength, receives an abundance of this light. If the vessel is small, the abundance will be small; if the vessel is large, it can receive and contain a great abundance.

Certainly, Yaakov's three sons all had suitable vessels for the light of Torah, and they therefore merited greatly to this light. But nevertheless, there was a difference between them:

With regard to the two brothers, Levi and Yissachar, we are not informed about the nature of the vessel with which they received the Torah.

With Yehudah, however, the vessel he possessed has been

Parshat Vayigash - The Vessel to Torah - Nullification to G-d

revealed to us, and therefore, when Yaakov wanted to teach the lesson - that to receive the light of Torah, we need a vessel - for future generations to come, he sent specifically Yehudah.

And the vessel that Yehudah had, that enabled him to receive the light of Torah is complete and utter nullification to the will of G-d" the rabbi concluded his thought, and took a sip of water.

#### The Vessel to Torah - Nullification to G-d

"I imagine," the rabbi continued from where he left off, "that at least once in your lifetime, you must have studied Torah studiously, utilizing and subjugating all the powers of your body and soul. At least once in your lives, you must have felt the great mental effort and the strain on the body that occurs during in-depth study, and indeed, this effort is certainly very important.9

But despite this, if all of the effort is only exerted in the intellectual plane without any exertion and contemplation to seek G-d, the Giver of the Torah - as it is said: 'With all my heart I sought You' (Psalms 119:10) - the study alone is lacking, and it is

not out of the question that one might even dare to defy G-d's will following this study.

However, when a person studies Torah amidst the nullification of his will to the will of G-d, and with humility and submission to G-d's will, he then merits that the intellect of the Torah becomes a vessel for the light and illumination of the Torah.

To serve as a vessel for the light to be revealed within it, one needs to be nullified to the spiritual light of G-d without being hindered by the feeling of one's own existence.

When one has attained this attribute, the verse can be fulfilled in him: 'The Torah of truth was in his

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**9.** The following passage is excerpted from the words of Rabbi Yitzchak

Ginsburgh ('Sod Hashem Liyreav', page 352).

Parshat Vayigash - Yehudah Blamed For Yosef's Disappearance

mouth... and he turned many away from iniquity' (Malachi 2:6) - that is, he can return and bring back to the realm of holiness the multitude of desires that are involved in the vanities of this world, and the cravings that are found in the 'public domain', and all the ambitions of the soul that scatter after sin - and return them to holiness, to the 'hidden desire,' to our holy Torah.

Since Yehudah revealed this vessel of nullification to the will of G-d, he therefore merited the light of Torah, and for this reason Yaakov specifically sent him down to Egypt, so that we may learn from him the proper attributes necessary

for receiving the light of the Torah."

The rabbi rose from his place and prepared to leave.

"Wait, wait," the caretaker and Yossi pleaded in unison, "we still haven't discussed the nature of Yehudah's nullification to G-d's will, and where it has been expressed."

The rabbi sat back down and examined the intrigued faces of the caretaker and Yossi.

"My dear friends, I will gladly explain this matter to both of you, and let me start with a well known concept."

# Yehudah Blamed For Yosef's Disappearance

When a Jew studies Torah with his faculties of understanding, by the means of this understanding he unites with the Creator in a wondrous and powerful unity.<sup>10</sup> But even so, knowledge and understanding are only the vessel for this unity.

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**10.** In the holy words of the Tanya (Likutei Amarim, Chapter 5):

"When a person understands and comprehends a law in the Mishnah or Talmud thoroughly and clearly, his mind grasps and encompasses it, and his mind is also enclothed within it at that time.

These rulings of the Torah, express the wisdom and desire of the Holy One, blessed be He, who wished that when Reuven would argue so and so, for example, and Shimon argues so and so, the verdict between them should be thus.

Parshat Vayigash - Yehudah Blamed For Yosef's Disappearance

The unity itself is achieved through nullification. When a person nullifies himself to the intellect of the Torah without emphasizing and feeling his own existence, he merits this wondrous unity.

"And of such character," the rabbi continued, "was our teacher and master, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, may his memory be a blessing.

Rabbi Yoram had a pure and clear intellect, and yet, throughout his life, he walked before G-d with simplicity and sincerity, and served his Creator with nullification and acceptance of His yoke.

The Holy One, blessed be He, illuminated upon him His light, and bestowed upon him wonderful teachings and insights that enliven Jews to this day.

One of these teachings he shared on Shabbat Parshat Vayigash in the year 5772, and I quote:11

"In Parshat Vayeshev, it is told that Yosef's brothers went to graze their father's flock and were delayed in returning, and Yaakov's heart was filled with worry for their well-being, and he sent Yosef to see them.

When Yosef reached them, they stripped him of his tunic and sold him to the Ishmaelites, and thus it transpired that Yosef was brought down to Egypt.

The brothers then consulted each other: 'What shall we tell

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Even if this case never was and never will be brought to trial, nevertheless, since it arose in the desire and wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, that if one argues this way and the other that way, the verdict would be such and such, when a person knows and understands this verdict in his mind - as specified in the Mishnah, Talmud, or legal codes - he grasps and encompasses in his mind the desire and wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He. No thought can grasp

Him or His desire and wisdom except when they are enclothed in the rulings outlined before us, and his mind is also clothed within them

This is a wondrous unity, unparalleled and incomparable in the physical realm - becoming truly as one and united from every side and angle."

**11.** The next few paragraphs continue this teaching.

Parshat Vayigash - Yehudah's Family Affairs

our father when he asks us where Yosef is?' So they slaughtered a young goat and dipped the tunic in blood and came to Yaakov and said: 'This we have found; please recognize whether it is your son's tunic or not' (Bereshit 37:32). Yaakov said, yes, this must be my son's tunic: 'An evil beast has devoured him; Yosef has surely been torn to pieces' (ibid., verse 33).

'An evil beast has devoured him' - the 'evil beast' here refers to Yehudah. Yehudah was thought to have killed Yosef.

As written in Midrash Tanchuma (Vayigash, section 9): 'Yaakov our forefather thought that Yehudah had killed Yosef when they brought him the tunic, as it is said: 'And he recognized it and said: It is my son's tunic; an evil beast has devoured him', and 'beast' refers to Yehudah, as it is said: 'Yehudah is a cub lion' (Bereshit 49:9). Yaakov would often accuse and say to Yehudah, 'You are the one who devoured him.'

Yaakov accused Yehudah of killing Yosef, but Yehudah would not respond or refute because one does not answer back to a father.

### Yehudah's Family Affairs

As days passed, Yaakov's sorrow grew and intensified, as the verse states: "And his father wept for him" (Bereshit 37:35).

When the brothers saw their father's grief, they turned to Yehudah and said, "It is all your fault. After all, you are our leader and 'king', if you had told us not to

sell him, we would have listened to you," and therefore, the brothers demoted him from his greatness.

After they brought him down from his leadership role, Yehudah went to Adullam and married Aliyat, the daughter of Shua, 12 who was a Canaanite. She bore him three sons: Er, Onan,

Parshat Vayigash - The Tale with Tamar

and Shelah, and then stopped bearing.

When Er was eight years old, Yehudah took a wife named Tamar for his firstborn son, and her name was Tamar. Er did not behave with holiness and modesty and passed away young.

Yehudah then married Tamar to Onan, his second son, but he too did not behave with holiness and modesty and passed away prematurely. After 21 additional months, Yehudah's wife died as well.

Following each of these tragedies, Yaakov remarked to Yehudah, "This is retribution for devouring Yosef," and time and again Yehudah remained categorically silent, as was his attribute.

#### The Tale with Tamar

When Yehudah saw that two of his sons who had married Tamar had died, he thought, "She cannot come to my third son, the men who are with her are destined to die," and he therefore, did not give her to his son Shelah.

Although Tamar was a young woman with her entire life ahead of her, and she could have easily found a new husband, she did not want to give up on Shelah. Tamar, who was the daughter of the righteous Shem, had experienced since childhood the joy and bliss of

a household steeped in Torah<sup>13</sup> - the grand splendor and the dew of life that enters into the depths of the heart, and the vibrant Shabbat table accompanied by songs, melodies, and stories of the righteous. She was not willing to give up the privilege of being connected to the progeny of Avraham and Yehudah the righteous.

When she heard that Yehudah was going to Timnah, she went and sat by the roadside. Yehudah saw her, and mistaking her for a harlot, asked her, "What do you

Parshat Vayigash - The Tale with Tamar

want in exchange for your services?" She answered, "A kid from your herd of goats."<sup>14</sup>

Three months passed, and it was related to Yehudah: "Tamar your daughter-in-law has committed adultery, and moreover, she is pregnant by harlotry" (Bereshit 38:24), and her judgment must be determined.

Yitzchak, Yaakov, and Yehudah gathered and formed a court of Jewish law, 15 who ruled that her sentence by law was to be burned by the stake.

They did not want to delay her judgment, and sent to gather wood and flammable materials, and before her eyes, they kindled the fire.

Tamar, who did not want to shame Yehudah, sent him a discreet message: <sup>16</sup> "Please recognize<sup>17</sup> whose signet, cords, and staff these are" (ibid., verse 25).

In those moments, when the realization of what had transpired, and what she was about to face on his account became clear to him, Yehudah felt immense and overwhelming shame; he felt the blood rushing down from his face and from his entire body directly to his pounding heart.<sup>18</sup>

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- **14.** In Bereshit Rabbah (Parshah 85, Section 9), it is explained that because Yehudah caused his father grief by dipping Yosef's coat in the blood of kid goats, Tamar deceived him as well with kid goats. For in heaven, they are very strict with regard to causing one's parents grief.
- 15. Yalkut Shimoni (Parshat Vayeshev, 145).
- **16. From** this verse our sages learn (Bava Metzia 59a): "It is better that a person throw himself into a fiery furnace than to shame his fellow in public."
- **17.** In Bereshit Rabbah (ibid., Section 11): Because Yehudah said to Yaakov, "Please

- recognize the coat of your son" (Bereshit 37:32), he was punished and Tamar said to him, "Please recognize whose seal this is." (Bereshit 38:25).
- **18.** My father Rabbi Yoram explained the words of the Talmud (Bava Metzia 59a): "Anyone who shames his fellow in public is as if he sheds blood; the redness departs and pallor comes."

Since the heart is the king of the organs, and the organs fulfill its command. Therefore, when there is great and overwhelming distress, they all flee to take refuge under the protection of their king.

Parshat Vayigash - The Choicest of the Land of Israel

Within him an intense battle raged, and his thoughts stormed silently.

He reasoned, "I can avoid carrying out Tamar's death sentence without needing to confess, and Tamar will be saved from death, and I will be spared from shame."

But Yehudah overcame this and declared in a strong voice, "I did this travesty."

Yaakov saw this and heard Yehuda's confession, and understood the gravity of his son's misdeeds,

and chided him once more: "In the Ten Commandments, we find that 'You shall not murder' is stated adjacent to 'You shall not commit adultery' (Exodus 20:13), teaching us that when one commits murder, they afterward fall prey to sin with women. This is what happened with you: first, you killed Yosef, and now you sinned with Tamar - this is your fourth punishment from G-d," Yehudah heard this stern rebuke, yet remained stoically silent.

#### The Choicest of the Land of Israel

Years passed, and famine began in the land of Israel.

Yosef's brothers descended to Egypt to buy grain and other foodstuffs, and Yosef, the supreme ruler, said to them, "You shall not see my face again unless your additional brother is with you."

As the famine intensified, Yaakov said to his sons, "Go to Egypt and buy us a little food."

His sons replied, "To go down to Egypt, we will need to take Binyamin with us."

Yaakov feared sending Binyamin with them. He thought, ominously, that perhaps it was decreed that Rachel and her sons would die on the way; Rachel and Yosef died on the way, and if they would take Binyamin too, perhaps he too would suffer a tragic death.

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Therefore, when a person is shamed and feels immense distress, and all the blood in their body rushes to the heart, causing their face to turn pale.

Therefore in heaven, one who shames another is judged as a murderer.

Parshat Vayigash - The Choicest of the Land of Israel

Yehudah then approached his father and said, "Give me Binyamin, and I guarantee to bring him back to you." Yaakov said to him, 19 "Is it not enough that you have killed Yosef? Do you also wish to kill Binyamin?" And Yehudah once again remained silent in the face of the rebuke.

Yehudah said to Yaakov, "Father, this time don't worry - I will take responsibility for him."

Yaakov agreed and said to them, "If you must meet the ruler, at least appease him," as it is written: "Then their father Israel said to them, 'If it must be so, then do this: take from the choicest of the land in your bags, and carry an offering to the man - a little balm, a little honey, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds'" (Bereshit 43:11).

We need to understand, did Yaakov intend to appease the

king's viceroy merely with bags of nuts and almonds?

And we find in 'Likutei Moharan' (Part II, Teaching 63) that Yaakov, in his divine foresight, knew that when a person experiences an attitude of arrogance toward others, feeling superior and that everyone should only fulfill his needs and desires, it is a sure sign that his behavior and character is akin to an animal.

Therefore, Yaakov told his sons that they needed to remove from the viceroy of Egypt his spirit of the animal and instill in him the spirit of a human being, 20 and this is achieved through holy songs and melodies. And the verse mentions "balm, honey, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds" which all symbolize and allude to musical notes and rhythms.

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**19.** Midrash Tanchuma (Vayigash, Section 9). **20.** In Likutei Moharan (ibid.), it is written that G-d placed in the hearts of shepherds the desire to play music, for without music, they themselves might become

like animals of the field that eat grass (being that a person is greatly influenced by his surroundings); and it is through melodies, that the human spirit is distinguished and is elevated from the animal spirit.

Parshat Vayigash - A Fundamental Principle - Speech Diminishes Reverence

# A Fundamental Principle - Speech Diminishes Reverence

Despite all the humiliations he sustained, Yehudah did not respond in kind or answer his father disrespectfully - he carefully guarded the law that one must not contradict their father's words, as ruled in the Shulchan Aruch:21

"What is reverence? One should not stand in their father's designated place where he stands in council with his friends, nor in the place designated for him to pray. One must not sit in his designated seat at home, nor contradict his words, nor rule regarding his opinion in his presence, even to say, 'Father's words seem correct."

Since, according to Jewish law, it is forbidden to answer back to one's father, Yehudah did

not ever respond to his father's stinging rebuke.

Yehudah's utter self-nullification to G-d was the very vessel that readily contained within it the light of the Torah that would be transplanted into Egypt.

"Now you understand," the Rabbi finally concluded to a very grateful Yossi and a tired caretaker, "why Yaakov sent specifically Yehudah - because Yehudah embodied and revealed the great character trait of self-nullification to G-d and led by example generations to come."

The janitor looked at Yossi and said, "Thank G-d that I happened to have met you; thanks to you, I learned incredible insights that I had never heard before."

# The Virtue of Honoring Father and Mother

In closing, we take this opportunity to expand a bit more

on the commandment of honoring one's parents:

Parshat Vayigash - The Virtue of Honoring Father and Mother

In a discourse delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, of saintly memory, he said the following:<sup>22</sup>

At Mount Sinai, we received two stone tablets, each inscribed with five commandments. On the right tablet five commandments deal with duties between man and G-d, and on the left tablet five commandments that deal with the duties between man and his fellowman.

The final five commandments between man and his fellow are: "You shall not murder," "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," and "You shall not covet."

The first five commandments between man and G-d are: "I am the L-rd your G-d," "You shall have no other G-ds before Me," "You shall not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain," "Remember the Shabbat day to keep it holy," and "Honor your father and your mother."

We must understand: honoring one's father and mother seems to belong to the commandments between man and his fellow; why was it listed fourth, belonging to the first five commandments that are duties that pertain to honoring G-d?

To explain this, we must quote the words of the Talmud (Kiddushin 30b): "There are three partners in a person: the Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother. When a person honors his father and his mother, the Holy One, blessed be He, says: 'I consider it as though I have dwelt among them, and they honored Me.""

Elsewhere (Niddah 31a), our sages have elaborated further on the partnership between the Creator and the parents in creating the child:

"From the father's seed, the child develops five things in his body: bones, sinews, nails, the brain, and the white of the eye.

From the mother's blood, the child develops five things in his

Parshat Vayigash - The Virtue of Honoring Father and Mother

body as well: skin, flesh, blood, hair, and the black of the eye.

Corresponding to these ten that things the father and mother provide together, the Holy One, blessed He, he child grants the with ten faculties: spirit, soul, radiance, sight, hearing, speech, mobility, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom."

Based on this, we can understand why honoring father and mother is considered one of the commandments pertaining to honoring G-d:

Since the father and mother are partners with the Holy One, blessed be He, in creating a person, it follows that out of respect for G-d, we are obligated to honor His partners in our creation.

Thus, the obligation to honor one's parents stems from the

obligation to honor the Holy One, blessed be He, and therefore, this commandment is listed among those that deal with honoring G-d.<sup>23</sup>

Since there is genuine a partnership between the parents and the Holy One, blessed be He, in creating the child, their honor and reverence are equated with the honor and reverence due to G-d, as our sages say (Kiddushin 30b): "It is stated, 'Honor your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12), and it is stated similarly, 'Honor the L-rd with your wealth' (Proverbs 3:9) - to teach that the Torah equates the honor of parents with the honor of the Omnipresent G-d.

Likewise our sages declare, "It is stated, 'Every man shall fear his mother and his father' (Leviticus 19:3), and it is equally stated, 'You shall fear the L-rd your G-d' (Deuteronomy 6:13) - the

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**23.** To quote the words of the Ramban (Exodus 20:13):

"Behold, the Ten Commandments consist of five commandments honoring the Creator and five for the benefit of man. It appears from the tablets that the first five on one tablet - are those honoring the Creator, as I mentioned - and the second five were written on the other tablet, such that there would be five corresponding to five."

Parshat Vayigash - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Torah equates the reverence and fear of parents with the reverence of the Omnipresent."

May G-d grant us the ability to fulfill this great and lofty commandment properly.

# **Summary and Practical Conclusions**

- 1. The only way a person can maintain his Jewish identity amid the hardships of exile is solely through the study of Torah. When a person studies Torah, he draws down a G-dly light, which purifies and cleanses his soul. By setting a fixed time to study Torah, over time, one will merit to overcome his negative inclinations.
- 2. Many people struggle with their battle against the evil inclination and seek advice. The best advice is to study Torah. This counsel can help everyone, even those very distant from holiness who have been trapped by the evil inclination and have been accustomed to sin, G-d forbid.

The power of the Torah is so great that it can extract them from their habitual sins, provided that they commit to a fixed daily schedule of study.

- 3. When one studies Torah and nullifies his will to the will of G-d, without a sense of pride and self-importance, he merits the revelation of G-d's light within him, and it guards and protects him from all harm.
- 4. When a Jew studies Torah with comprehension and understanding, he unites with the Creator in a profound and wondrous unity.

However, knowledge and understanding are merely vessels for this unity; the unity itself is achieved through self-nullification. When one nullifies himself to the intellect of the Torah without a sense of self importance, he attains this marvelous unity with G-d.

5. Human life depends on the air around us; the quality of the air we breathe affects our lives, and without air, we cannot live. Just as clean, pure air brings healthy physical life, so

Parshat Vayigash - Summary and Practical Conclusions

too, spiritually speaking - living in an atmosphere of Torah and Mitzvot grants us spiritual health. Conversely, living in an atmosphere filled with corrupt behavior and speech inevitably leads to one contracting various "spiritual diseases."

Therefore, when choosing a place to live, it is incumbent to select a community where people live in an atmosphere of Torah and Mitzvot, rather than a place of frivolity and permissiveness, where people do as they please.

6. A person who desires to have a healthy soul must ensure to live in an atmosphere of holiness and spend time among friends whose minds and heart is engaged in holy, and good matters.

If one notices that some of his friends are not positive influences, he should gradually distance himself from them until he finds proper and upstanding companions.

It is human nature to learn from one's friends and relatives, and as they behave, so will he. As it is said: "He who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer."

Thus, whoever associates with wise and virtuous friends will eventually become wise and learn himself.

#### **Shabbat Shalom!**



# "A person must rejoice when the time for

# prayer

# as the author of the Tanya says that:

every Jew, wherever he is, receives from G-d at the time of prayer a gift called "Mochin D'Gadlut," meaning that the understanding of everything is expansive before him, as is written

"Open wide your mouth and I will fill it"



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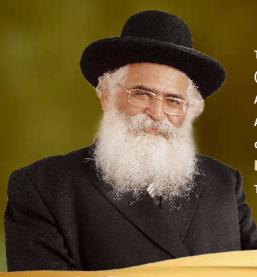
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#### **Shabbat Times**

# Vayigash

4th of Tevet, 5785

| City        | Candle<br>Lighting | Shabbat<br>Ends | Rabbeim<br>Tam |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| New York    | 4:23 pm            | 5:27 pm         | 5:54 pm        |
| Miami       | 5:25 pm            | 6:21 pm         | 6:56 pm        |
| Los Angeles | 4:39 pm            | 5:39 pm         | 6:10 pm        |
| Montreal    | 4:06 pm            | 5:14 pm         | 5:37 pm        |
| Toronto     | 4:35 pm            | 5:42 pm         | 6:06 pm        |
| London      | 3:46 pm            | 5:04 pm         | 5:18 pm        |
| Jerusalem   | 4:33 pm            | 5:24 pm         | 5:55 pm        |
| Tel Aviv    | 4:29 pm            | 5:20 pm         | 5:51 pm        |
| Haifa       | 4:26 pm            | 5:21 pm         | 5:51 pm        |
| Be'er Sheva | 4:30 pm            | 5:25 pm         | 5:56 pm        |
|             |                    |                 |                |

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HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

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When a person knows and appreciates the value of Torah learning and the fulfillment of the commandments, they desire to see their children continue in this path, and will sacrifice and do all that is in their power, that they follow this path with joy and satisfaction.



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