
THE WEISS EDITION

וַיִּגְשָׁ

Vayigash



Surviving or Thriving?

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Light points

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

Lightpoints

לזכרון ולעלוי נשמה
הרה"ח הרה"ת הרה"ג ישעיהו זושא
ב"ר אברהם דוד ע"ה ווילהעלם
נלב"ע ביום ד' שבט התשפ"ב
תנצב"ה

וַיַּגַּשׁ

Vayigash

מה:כט-כז | 45:26-27

וַיַּרְא אֶת הַעֲגָלֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשַׁאת אֹתוֹ
וַיִּתְהַרֵּת רֹוח יַעֲקֹב אֲכִיכָּם: וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב
עַד יוֹסֵף בֶּןِי חִי אֶלְכָה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּطַרְמָם אֲמֹת

*He saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to carry him,
and the spirit of Yaakov their father revived.
Yisrael said: “It is much! Yosef my son is still alive!
I will go and see him before I die.”*

Surviving or Thriving?

In case his father doubted that he was indeed still alive, Yosef sent a sign with his brothers to confirm his identity.¹ Since the Hebrew words for “wagon” and “calf” are spelled the same, **עֲגָלָה**, Yosef sent wagons to his father to allude to the last topic he and Yaakov had studied together—the laws of *eglah arufah*, the calf that is decapitated to atone for an unsolved murder.²

1. Bereishis Rabbah 94:3.

2. See Devarim 21:1-9.

When Yaakov saw the wagons, the verse says, “his *spirit* was revived”: he was now certain that Yosef was alive both physically and spiritually, still “living” with the Torah they had studied together 22 years earlier. Yaakov’s words in the next verse, “It is much! Yosef my son is still alive,” likewise express his admiration for Yosef’s spiritual strength: “The power of my son is great, since he endured so much suffering and yet he still stands in his righteousness! He is greater than I.”³

Despite the theme shared by these two verses, we traditionally separate them in the public Torah reading. The words “The spirit of Yaakov their father revived” conclude the third portion of the reading, and the next verse opens the fourth. This underscores the two distinct aspects of Yosef’s spiritual endurance that impressed Yaakov.

The first verse describes Yaakov’s “revival of spirit” upon recognizing that Yosef had withstood his challenges and maintained his attachment to the Torah. But that feat alone was something that Yaakov had also accomplished when he lived with Lavan for 20 years: “I lived with the wicked Lavan, but I observed the 613 commandments—I did not learn from his evil ways.”⁴

More remarkable, however, was Yosef’s second achievement: not only had his environment not affected him, *he* had affected his environment! As the ruler of Egypt, he used his power to influence the Egyptians spiritually as well.⁵ Of this second aspect, Yaakov said—in what we read as a separate portion of the reading—“The power of my son is great... he is greater than I.”

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 30, pp. 222–228

3. Bereishis Rabbah 94:3.

4. Rashi, Bereishis 32:5.

5. See Rashi, Bereishis 41:55.

46:3 | מִזְרָחָה

אֶל תִּירָא מִרְדָּה מִצְרָיִם כִּי לֹוִי גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר־יָמָךְ שָׁם

*Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there
I will make you a great nation.*

No Pain, No Gain

As Yaakov and his family journeyed to Egypt, G-d appeared to Yaakov and told him: “Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will there make you a great nation.” What was Yaakov’s concern? Rashi explains, “Because he [Yaakov] was anguished that he was compelled to leave [the land of Canaan] and go abroad.”

Rashi’s wording indicates that Yaakov was not only *afraid* of what his future held in store, but also *anguished* about leaving the land of Canaan. Yet it appears that G-d does not address Yaakov’s anguish, only his fear. G-d tells him not to be afraid, because his family will emerge from Egypt even stronger than when they arrived; but evidently, his distress over leaving Canaan was still justified. In fact, Rashi’s words can be interpreted as a hint to the reason Yaakov need not be afraid: his anguish itself would guarantee that his family would thrive there.

Yaakov’s resultant mix of emotions—confidence in G-d’s promise, while simultaneously anguished over being exiled from the eternal Jewish homeland—symbolize the paradoxical feelings that the Jewish people must have toward *galus*, our state of exile and subjection to foreign rule until the coming of Moshiach.

On the one hand, we must not be daunted by the intensity

of *galus*. Knowing that we were exiled solely by G-d's will, we can be certain that G-d has endowed us with the strength necessary to overcome any challenge to His service that *galus* presents. On the other hand, we must never become comfortable with our state of exile, for it is precisely our distress and discomfort that give us the strength to transcend the awful darkness and confront its challenges.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 30, pp. 234–235

מו:כח | 46:28

וְאַתָּה יְהוּדָה שְׁלֹחْ לִפְנֵי אֶל יוֹסֵף לְהֹרֶת לִפְנֵי גַּשְׁנָה

*He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef,
to prepare Goshen in advance.*

One-Track Education

Yaakov sent Yehudah to Egypt to establish a place of Torah study and education in Goshen before the rest of the family arrived.⁶ Why was it necessary for this institution of learning to be established by Yehudah, rather than by Yosef, who was already living in Egypt, and who certainly had both the means and the conviction to do so? Yosef had even proven himself to be on a higher spiritual level than Yaakov's other sons, considering that his preoccupation with the governance of Egypt diminished neither his spiritual sensitivity nor his devotion to G-d. So why did Yaakov insist on sending Yehudah to establish the school, instead of Yosef?

Despite Yosef's spiritual greatness, excellence in Torah study requires something that he simply did not have—time and freedom to devote himself exclusively to Torah study, with no other care in the world. Granted, this does not reflect negatively on Yosef, who flawlessly fulfilled his G-dly mission that demanded wholly engrossing himself in Egypt's national interests; but the quality of his Torah study, in and of itself, could not be on par with that of his brothers, who were shepherds by trade, and for the most part entirely removed from the pressures of the world.

6. Rashi ad loc.

Yaakov therefore appointed Yehudah to establish the center of Torah study in Goshen. This academy would be the foundation of Yaakov's family's residence in Egypt, and the spiritual power plant for the entire world, so it was crucial that the students devote their minds to Torah alone, without worrying about the outside world. It was Yehudah alone, not Yosef, who was capable of founding such a school.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 3, pp. 827–830*

 47:12 | מז:יב

וַיַּכְלֶל יוֹסֵף אֶת אֲבִיו וְאֶת אֶחָיו וְאֶת
כָּל בֵּית אֲבִיו לְחַם לְפִי הַטָּר

Yosef sustained his father and his brothers and his father's entire household [with] bread according to the young children.

Judge My Actions, Not My Plans

In the book of Tehillim G-d is called “The Shepherd of Israel... He who leads Yosef like flocks of sheep.”⁷

The Midrash interprets this verse (non-literally) as the Jewish people’s supplication before G-d that He lead us like flocks of sheep “just as Yosef did.” Specifically, “Just as Yosef sustained each person according to his deeds, as it is written, ‘Yosef sustained his father...,’ [we ask that] we too should be sustained according to our deeds.”⁸

This teaching is puzzling. Is it necessary to draw an analogy from Yosef—or anyone else, for that matter—to request that G-d treat us in accordance with our deeds? Wouldn’t that be the most fair and reasonable thing to expect from G-d? In fact, the greatness of Yosef was that he *did not* treat people only according to their deeds; he sustained his brothers and their families *despite* what they had done to him! Why then does the Midrash regard Yosef as the paragon of “sustaining

7. Tehillim 80:2.

8. Midrash Tehillim 80.

each person according to his deeds,” and why must we make a special request that G-d treat us in a similar manner?

With its spotlight on Yosef, the Midrash is highlighting that Yosef treated his brothers “according to their deeds”—*notwithstanding their intentions*. As he benevolently told his brothers, “Indeed, you intended evil against me, [but] G-d designed it for good, in order to bring about what is today, to keep a great populace alive.”⁹ Disregarding his brothers’ terrible intentions in selling him, Yosef focused only on the wonderful outcome of their deeds (by Divine plan), and rewarded them accordingly.

This then is also the meaning of our prayer, according to the Midrash, that G-d sustain us “according to our deeds.” We are requesting that in instances where our good deeds were without feeling, or were perhaps wrongly motivated, may G-d ignore our intent, as Yosef did. May He consider only our deeds, reward us for the good we have done, and disregard our less-than-perfect intentions.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, pp. 242–247

9. Bereishis 50:20.





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