

Parashat Vayigash 5778, 2017:

The Power of Unity

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina and Chaya Mindel bat Leah Basha, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* concludes with the *pasuk* (verse): “And Israel dwelt (*vayeshuv*) in the land of Egypt in the land of Goshen, and they acquired property in it, and they were prolific and multiplied greatly.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 47:27, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The first phrase, “And Israel dwelt (*vayeshuv*) in the land of Egypt in the land of Goshen,” is difficult to understand as it is unclear as to whom the appellation, “Israel,” refers. Do we interpret it as referencing Jacob, since “Israel” became his additional name following his successful wrestling match with Esau’s guardian angel? In my estimation, this approach is particularly apropos, since “Israel” is paired with the singular form of the Hebrew verb, *vayeshuv*, thereby leading us to surmise that this may logically refer to Jacob. It is equally possible, however, that it may have an entirely different connotation.

One of the early medieval *meforshim* (commentators) to discuss this question was Rabbi David Kimchi (known as “the Radak,” 1160-1235). In his opinion, “Israel” does not refer to Jacob, but rather “to the entire collective, i.e. the Jewish people.” This interpretation is quite solid, since the second half of the verse is comprised of Hebrew verbs that are stated in the plural form. Moreover, there are other instances in the Torah wherein “Israel” signifies the totality of the Jewish people, e.g. “Israel dwelt in Shittim...” (*Sefer Bamidbar*, 25:1) The majority of Torah commentators

follow the Radak's view; therefore, the beginning of our verse may be legitimately translated/interpreted as, "And the nation of Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the land of Goshen."

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar (known as the "Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh," 1696-1743), suggests that the singular form of the verb "dwelt" in our *pasuk*, is teaching us a profound lesson: "The Jewish people [in Egypt at this time] were of one opinion and there was nothing that separated them from one another (*v'ain pirood ba'neyhem*)." By extension, during this early phase of the Egyptian exile, the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of Jacob lived as one united community that shared the same goals and vision of a glorious future under Hashem's beneficent protection.

The Ohr HaChaim's explanation is reminiscent of the greatest event in Jewish history when our people were, once again, completely united – the Revelation at Mount Sinai: "They journeyed from Rephidim, and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel encamped (*va'yichan*) there opposite the mountain." (*Sefer Shemot* 19:2) Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself on *Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*, notes that the phrase, "and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain," is written in the singular rather than the plural as we find in the rest of the verse: **and Israel encamped there**: "Hebrew - *va'yichan* [the singular form, denoting that they encamped there] as one man with one heart (*k'ish echad b'lev echad*), but all the other encampments were [divided] with complaints and with strife." It seems, therefore, that when we were united *k'ish echad b'lev echad* at *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai), nothing was impossible, for even finite man was capable of encountering the infinite and ineffable Creator of the Universe!

May the time come soon and in our days when we once again stand shoulder to shoulder *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, living lives infused with deep respect for one another. Then with Hashem's help and our passionate desire, we will be able to serve Him, as our forebears did during Jacob's time in Egypt, and when we received the holy Torah - as one indivisible and united people. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.