

## VAYIGASH (PART I)

# THE SECRET POWER OF YOSEF

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### Two Holy Names, Two Holy *Tzaddikim*

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Yosef and Yehuda clash in their climactic confrontation at the beginning of this *parsha*. This is an incredibly important event in the formation of the Jewish People. It receives much attention from the *mefarshim*, Midrashim, and Zohar.

The Gemara (Sota 10b) discusses the characteristic accomplishments of Yosef and Yehuda. Yosef, who was *mekadeish sheim shamayim* (sanctified God's name) in private, has two letters of Hashem's Name within his own. In one *pasuk* in Tehillim (81:5), Yosef is referred to as Yehosef, with an added *hei* after the first *yud*. That *hei* comes from Hashem's name. Together, the first two letters of his name, the *yud* and the *hei*, are the same as the first two letters of the name of Hashem. The Gemara says that because Yosef sanctified God's name in private, he merited to have the first two letters of Hashem's name in his name.

The Gemara then notes that Yehuda's name contains all four letters of Hashem's name. Why? Because he sanctified Hashem's name in public. The Shem Mishmuel explains that this enigmatic Gemara is a profound statement about the characters of Yosef and Yehuda.

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## Yosef—The Private *Tzaddik*

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Yosef was a very private person. In the beginning of the story of Yosef and his brothers, his brothers completely misunderstood him. They didn't grasp who he was, what he wanted, and where he was leading them. They misinterpreted his statements to them as threats. They somehow thought he was even trying to kill them. They responded to Yosef the way they did because they felt threatened by him. Yosef kept his real thoughts and aspirations to himself. He lived with the principle of *hatznei'a leches im Elokecha*, walking in private and silence with Hashem (Micha 6:8).

Chazal refer to Yosef with the appellation “*tzaddik*.” Only one other brother is given this title: Binyamin, who, according to the Gemara (Shabbos 55b), never sinned. Chazal do not refer to any of the other brothers as “*tzaddik*.” Neither Avraham, Yitzchak, or Yaakov is called *tzaddik*. Not even Moshe Rabbeinu is referred to as a *tzaddik*. Yosef, who was alone for twenty-two years in Egypt, became an even greater *tzaddik* while in a foreign society. Surprisingly, in this personally dangerous and spiritually perilous culture, he attained his highest level of purity, faith, and loyalty to his tradition as a Jew. For this reason, he is referred to as a *tzaddik*.

Yosef was attractive. In Mitzrayim, the wife of Potifar fell in love with and tried to seduce him. Yosef resisted and was thrown into prison. The Torah calls him, “*yefei to'ar v'yefei mareh*, a handsome and attractive man” (Bereishis 39:6). He looked good and was charming. Chazal say he was well groomed, made sure his hair looked good, and dressed stylishly.

The traditional image of a *tzaddik* is someone who dresses respectfully and takes care of himself—but we normally don't picture a *tzaddik* as dressed in the latest fashions. *Tzaddikim* certainly take care of themselves, but they focus more on their inner development. The Gemara (Ta'anis 7a) tells a story involving Rabbi Yehoshua, who greatly impressed the Romans with his

wisdom. The daughter of the king, though, didn't understand. She asked him, "How can such beautiful wisdom be contained in such an ugly body?" He told her to transfer the royal wine from barrels of clay to barrels of gold. When the wine spoiled, she understood that external beauty sometimes can spoil beautiful content. Yosef, though, was not a *tzaddik* in the way of Rabbi Yehoshua. He was just the opposite!

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### Master of Deception

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Yosef was a special kind of *tzaddik*. He was so exclusively focused on his inner development that he wanted his outside to deceive people. He was extremely private about his purity of soul and his high level of thinking, and he wanted to hide them. He wanted people to think he was a dashing, handsome young man. This was not who he was at all. This was the deception of Yosef.

Indeed, Yosef was the master of deception. He had an elaborate scheme that he perpetrated on his brothers to bring them to repentance. There is hardly any other story ever written that approaches the deception, cunning, and depth of thinking that Yosef used with his brothers when they came to Egypt. This plan eventually succeeded in bringing the family back together. Yosef was a master of deception, and he also succeeded in deceiving people regarding his righteousness. Chazal call him *tzaddik yesod olam*, a righteous person upon whom the whole world relies. He wanted nobody to know who he really was. On the outside, he appeared to be a happy-go-lucky fellow, but on the inside, he was a *tzaddik*, and a very special one at that.

Since Yosef, we have a tradition of the thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim* who do not appear righteous but, in reality, are the ones who keep the world going. Yosef was the first such person whose *tzidkus* was hidden. Not even his closest family knew. Perhaps his

father and teacher Yaakov knew who Yosef really was. None of the Egyptians knew. On the outside he was a different person than on the inside.

This is the meaning of the Gemara we learned earlier. When Yosef sanctified God's name, he did so in private. If the Torah would not have told us about how Yosef withstood the seductions of Potifar's wife, we would never have known about it. She used her looks and charm, she even threatened Yosef and said that he would be killed. Nonetheless, Yosef stood strong, never giving in to this temptation. Even in the dungeon after he was imprisoned, Yosef kept himself in a good mood.

When Yosef was in front of Pharaoh, Pharaoh was very impressed with his ability to interpret dreams. But Yosef said, "*Biladai*, I am not the one giving you this wise advice. Hashem is the one who will give you the answer" (Bereishis 41:16). All these amazing events were also in private, far away from his brothers and parents. Nobody from his circle of family and old friends ever would know of these actions.

Yosef had no real hope of ever going back to his culture and family. He was surrounded by a foreign culture that wanted him to be a part of it. Yosef was young, smart, attractive, and charismatic. Chazal say that after Yosef became prince of Egypt, all the girls in the palace wanted to marry him, and they probably did whatever they could to make themselves attractive to him. Yosef stood strong and did not give in to any of the pulls of Egypt. He had no family or community for support, but he was absolutely dedicated to God. This tremendous commitment knows no comparison.

Since Yosef was such a private person, Hashem tested him in private, and he rose to the occasion.

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### Yehuda—The Public *Tzaddik*

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Yehuda was a different type of *tzaddik*. Yehuda's righteousness was publicly known. His first great act was when he confessed to his role in the story of Tamar. She didn't even accuse him. She just appealed to him, "Maybe you know to whom this stick belongs." Yehuda, in front of his family, admitted "*Tzadka mimeni*," that Tamar had the right intentions and he was wrong (Bereishis 38:26). It would have been so easy for him to deny it all, and no one would ever have known about it. She was about to be killed. All he had to do was ignore her question. Instead, he confessed to his crime and saved her life.

We have read about innocent people who sat in prison because others did not admit the crimes they really committed. It's relatively easy to have someone else pay the price for one's own horrible actions. Very few people will say, "I am guilty. I will take the blame and consequences." Yehuda, though, admitted his guilt in a public forum even though he would suffer great embarrassment. This was *kiddush sheim shamayim b'farhesya*, sanctifying Hashem's name in public.

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### The Meeting of the Two *Tzaddikim*

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When Yosef and Yehuda met, it was more than a meeting of two long-lost brothers. The meeting of these two great *tzaddikim* was the collision of two different worlds, the hidden *tzaddik* and the public *tzaddik*. Yosef was *yosheiv b'seiser elyon*, one who sits in the private chambers of Hashem. Yehuda was Hashem's public *tzaddik*. Their meeting was a very important one indeed. Both *tzaddikim* have important roles to play in life, as we will soon see.

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## Recognizing and Sometimes Combating Jewish Guilt—The Power of Yosef Hatzaddik

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The Shem Mishmuel explains that the greatest spiritual enemy of the Jew is Eisav. When Yaakov fought with the angel of Eisav, one opinion in the Midrash explains that the angel appeared in the form of a Talmudic scholar. The worst and most difficult test for a righteous Jew is something that appears to be a *mitzva* but in reality is not. This is the *yeitzer hara* disguised as a *tzaddik*, tempting the Jew to sin because he believes it's a *mitzva*.

We Jews have an extremely sensitive conscience. Some people call it a guilt complex. We are infamous for our Jewish guilt. This is a blessing and at times a curse. It comes from an extreme sensitivity that Jews have developed over thousands of years of religious commitment to do what is correct and good and to stay away from evil. The evil inclination knows that he can't go to an average Jew and say, "Do something evil." We are too sensitive for that to work on us. We have too much of a feeling of conscience to simply do an evil deed. The *yeitzer hara* therefore comes to us like a *talmid chocham*. "The Torah wants you to do this," he prods. "He wants you to fight a Torah fight against another Jew."

We tend to think that we are right when we get into fights with other Jews. Sometimes, deep down we know we might not be right. But we want to be right. Our *yeitzer tov* would not tolerate doing any blatant evil. So, we convince ourselves that this is right! Then we're not doing something wrong—on the contrary, we are doing something right. This is the *yeitzer hara* of the *talmid chocham*. The action seems good but is evil. Who can fight this rationalization of evil packaged as good?

Yosef can fight this evil of Eisav. Eisav would come home after killing people and raping women, put on the clothing of a *talmid chocham*, and ask the best Torah questions to his father.

His hypocrisy was astounding. Nonetheless, hypocrisy tempts us. Who can prevent this? Only someone who knows the difference between the inside and outside of things. Yosef, who externally appeared as a playful young man, knew that his inside was something else entirely. Someone like Yosef will not be fooled by the external attractions of the *yeitzer hara* of the *talmid chocham*. This requires deep sensitivity. Yosef, the secret *tzaddik*, has this deep quality.

This is an important model for the Jewish people, especially for us today. The culture around us possesses incredible attraction. It tempts us to embrace the enticements of the evil side of the outside culture and rationalize them as good. We need to discern between what is truly good and what is an enticing yet evil thing. Much of this relates to the Hollywood culture, in which deception and evil are packaged as goodness. If you happen to see ads in the media and on the internet, try to discern the evil within, packaged as good on the outside. How many internet sites are attractive on the outside but evil on the inside? We need to be *tzaddikim* like Yosef, people who are not blinded and confused by an outside that doesn't match the inside.

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### **Standing Proudly and Openly for Our Values— The Power of Yehuda Hatzaddik**

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Yehuda, on the other hand, is another kind of *tzaddik*, the *tzaddik* on the outside. He publicly demonstrates his righteousness. It is important for people in their daily lives to muster the strength to do what is right. They need someone to whom they can turn to inspire them with holy strength and direction. These are our rabbis in our *shuls* and our teachers in our *yeshivos*. They tell us explicitly what is right and what is wrong. These are the great Jews who live clear Torah lives. Yehuda was both part of his brothers and their

leader. When he fell, they fell with him. When he rose, they rose with him. We all need openly righteous leaders who give us clear direction at all times. This is the *tzaddik b'farhesya*, the public *tzaddik* who stands openly for our holy mission in this world.

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### ***Tzaddikim in the Age of Mashiach***

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Chazal state that in the end of days there will be two messiahs who will follow the paradigms set by their respective predecessors. Mashiach ben Yosef will follow Yosef's model. He will be followed by Mashiach ben Dovid, who will follow the example of Yehuda.

The Zohar makes a frightening remark on the *pasuk* in Amos, "*Nafla lo tosifkum besulas Yisrael*. The Maiden of Israel has fallen and shall not continue to rise" (Amos 5:2). Israel has fallen many times. We fell to Egypt, Bavel, Persia, and more, and we have arisen again. We have returned now to Israel in holiness. However, the current exile of Rome seems interminable, lasting so far for almost 2,000 years. Even with the State of Israel of today, are we guaranteed that it will last? There is no guarantee. The Zohar says Bnei Yisrael will not arise again, because the *pasuk* says *lo tosifkum*.

This is a frightening prognosis of exile. How will Bnei Yisrael ever return to Israel in complete holiness? The Rambam was also perturbed by this problem. He does not cite the Zohar, but he understood the problem from the perspective of the *psukim* in the Torah. He says that *teshuva* will be the basis of redemption. The Torah says in Parshas Nitzavim that Bnei Yisrael will do *teshuva* and then will be redeemed.

The Shem Mishmuel addresses the Rambam's question from this perspective. How will we repent? Today, we can add to the question. Even with the State of Israel, when and how will we

repent? The state faces many challenges in its ability to form an authentic Jewish identity independent of Western culture.

The Shem Mishmuel says that this will be the task of Mashiach ben Yosef. Socially, Mashiach ben Yosef is a completely separate being. He does not fall with the people. Even though his brothers betrayed him, Yosef maintained his high level of righteousness. He even engineered a reconciliation with the very brothers who had betrayed him. Yosef brought food to starving Egypt, and to downtrodden Jews he will bring redemption. Yosef is the *mashbir*, the source of sustenance for Am Yisrael. He is a *tzaddik* who brings the power of the spirit and the life of Torah into the world. He brings this down from heaven to earth. He does this on his own.

The Jewish People at the time of Mashiach will have no strength to repent. They will be worn out after thousands of years of suffering: A Holocaust, pogroms, inquisitions, endless wars in the modern State of Israel, and continuous terrorism. Yechezkel compares Am Yisrael to dead bones, dry without any flesh, as a people without any spirit. They will need new inspiration from God to bring them to life. Hashem told Yechezkel, “Speak to the bones, let them have life” (Yechezkel 37:5). This will be the role and power of Mashiach ben Yosef. He will resurrect a dead people. He will be an incredible person with the capability to inspire all of Am Yisrael. With the communications capabilities of today, this can happen easily. Communication today is global. Mashiach ben Yosef will inspire us to be religious and spiritual, a vibrant, wonderful people.

After the mission of Mashiach ben Yosef and the rebirth of the Jewish spirit, Mashiach ben Dovid will come. He will return in *teshuva* with his fellow Jews and show them how to live a holy life twenty-four hours a day. He will lead them in a beautiful, spiritual, good life. And he will make the whole world a beautiful place to live in.

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## The Power of the Dream

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Yosef, the lonely *tzaddik* of Egypt, taught us how to survive even in an inimical environment. Yosef believed in the power of the dream. He always dreamed of a good and wonderful end. While he was experiencing all of his personal troubles, he knew that this was a dream coming true. Rav Shlomo Carlebach used to say, “What has kept the Jewish people going? Wonderful prophecies.” I would add that wonderful dreams have kept us going throughout all of the years of exile and persecution. The dream of the Mashiach has kept us going for centuries.

Chassidus has been unfairly accused of being a false messianism. This is not true. In fact, Chassidus is a true messianism. The Jewish people believe that the world is not condemned to eternal suffering and war. One day, the world will have true peace. We will have love among people and between people and God. This is the greatest dream of Yosef Hatzaddik. As Jews, we must not worry about the external environment we are in. It might be terrible, full of hate and violence. But Hashem, the source of our sweetest dreams, will make them come true, and evil will be replaced by goodness.

In our own lives, we must keep our own dreams alive, and we must believe in them, too. Every Jew is entitled to a wonderful Jewish life. We must believe in our children, that they can and will be righteous Jews. We must believe that the Land of Israel will be a safe and welcoming place for Jews to live in. This is the lesson of Yosef Hatzaddik. Don’t pay attention to the troubles, hatred, and seductions of daily life. These are mere tests. True life will be your dream that will materialize in the future. Yosef waited twenty-two years for his dreams to come true. His story is the story of the dream. We must live lives with Torah dreams, keep up the optimism that we will see the fulfillment of our dreams—for our families, for our country, and even for our whole world.

God is here with us. Yosef always mentioned God, whether he was in the dungeon or in the king's palace. "God is always with me and will take care of me," thought Yosef. This is why Yosef always was upbeat and happy. He knew Hashem had put him into the dungeon as well as into the palace. He had a mission to be *mekade-ish sheim shamayim* in private. Yosef even got Pharaoh himself to acknowledge God's existence! This is an amazing achievement for a young Jewish slave! Chazal say Yosef tried to get all of Egypt to fear God, although he was unsuccessful. When Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid come, though, even that dream will be fulfilled, and the whole world will know who God is: our Hashem, the God of Israel, the Creator of the Universe.

We must always keep the model of Yosef in our minds. We must believe in Hashem, that "*Elokim ya'aneh es shelom Paroh*. Hashem will bring peace to Pharaoh" (Bereishis 41:16), and indeed to every person. We must keep alive our dreams of redemption and goodness. We must avoid pessimism and bitterness. We must know that Hashem is with us as we go through all the travails of daily existence. We must find *tzaddikim* like Yosef and Yehuda to help us through our difficulties. We must pray for *tzaddikim* like these. And we should do what we can ourselves to approach their levels of *tzidkus* and leadership.

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## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. What types of *tzaddikim* were Yosef and Yehuda?
2. How did Yosef's life reflect his type of *tzidkus*?
3. How did Yehuda's life reflect his type of *tzidkus*?

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## PERSONAL QUESTIONS

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1. How would you classify your personality? Are you more like Yosef or more like Yehuda?
2. Do you know a *tzaddik* who is like Yehuda or Yosef?

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## EXERCISES

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1. For one week, keep a log of acts of *tzidkus* you perform.
2. For a week, practice being like Yosef Hatzaddik or like Yehuda.



