

VAYIGASH (PART II)

OXEN AND DONKEYS

A

The Wise Water Drawers

The *pasuk* states, “*Mayim amukim eitza b’lev ish, v’ish t’vunos tidlena*, Counsel in man’s heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out” (Mishlei 20:5). The Midrash and the Zohar both apply this *pasuk* to the confrontation between Yosef and Yehuda. However, each source applies this *pasuk* to a different character in the story. The Midrash identifies the wise person as Yehuda, who knew how to draw deep waters from Yosef. The Zohar, though, maintains that Yosef was the wise man who knew how to draw deep waters from Yehuda.

This confrontation between the two brothers led to the reconciliation between Yosef and the rest of his brothers. Both leaders did remarkable things in the course of their discussion. Yehuda offered himself as a slave in place of Binyamin, who was about to be taken as a slave for “stealing” Yosef’s cup. He also appealed to Yosef’s conscience and referred to his elderly father, who would be broken if he lost a second child. This argument caused Yosef to reveal his identity and ultimately led to the great reunion. On the other hand, Yosef forgave his brothers’ criminal act of kidnapping him and selling him into slavery. He reached out to them and

initiated a great reconciliation. In this confrontation and conversation, two great people were at work.

The Shem Mishmuel says that, really, there is no dispute here between the Midrash and the Zohar. Both brothers were great people and rose to incredibly high levels in this saga of the sale and the eventual reunion of all the brothers. They both did something special. The Midrash emphasizes the role of one brother, while the Zohar emphasizes the role of the other. Both of them had a special wisdom that came to the fore at this point.

B

The Harvester and the Plower— Intellect and Emotions

The Shem Mishmuel then cites another Midrash. “*Hinei yamim ba'im ne'um Hashem v'nigash choreish ba'kotzei*. Behold days are coming, says Hashem, when the plower will meet the harvester” (Amos 9:13). Usually, a farmer plows his field a few months before the harvest. But, says the prophet, eventually Israel will be so productive that they will plow and harvest at the same time. The Midrash interprets the plower as a reference to Yehuda, and the harvester as a reference to Yosef. What is the meaning of this?

The Avnei Neizer explained this Midrash based on the Gemara (Mo'eid Katan 2b). The definition of plowing (one of the prohibited *melachos* of Shabbos) is softening hard ground. On a personal level, Yehuda is the plower. This includes softening and weakening the hardened hearts that people sometimes have.

Human beings tend to be stubborn. Sometimes, our stubbornness may even include apathy and cruelty towards other people. Sometimes, we don't listen to the cries of people who suffer in this world. It is important that we have soft hearts to feel the pain and anguish of people who are suffering. We must have a heart of flesh, not a heart of stone. Yechezkel says that when Hashem

brings Mashiach, He will remove the stone heart from within us and give us a heart of soft flesh (Yechezkel 36:26). Just as hard ground needs to be softened so that it can be receptive to planting, a person must have a soft heart that will be receptive to the pain of others and the light that Hashem shines into the world. The light of Hashem cannot pierce a heart of stone. But soft flesh can be sliced, cut, and pierced. If the human heart is soft with compassion, it can absorb the light of Hashem. Developing this soft heart is the role of Yehuda.

Yehuda was the progenitor of Dovid Hamelech, the greatest of all Jewish kings and the very symbol of compassion. All of Sefer Tehillim is full of his feelings of love and concern for people. In it we read of Dovid's constant desires to be close to Hashem and always experience Him. Dovid Hamelech epitomized the soft, kind, and feeling heart—the opposite of the stone heart. This comes from his ancestor Yehuda.

The harvester refers to Yosef. From Hilchos Shabbos, we know that harvesting means detaching something that had been growing from the ground. Harvesting creates detachment. This is true about people as well. A certain part of us is supposed to be detached. The intellect of the human being should not be soft, swayed by emotion. The intellect must be able to work in its own realm, that of cold logic. It must be able to say, two plus two equals four. It should be able to compute and analyze the facts of a given situation without being affected by emotion. This is true in the study of science, and it is true of Torah study as well. Our minds must go straight to the point of what the Torah is teaching us without letting emotional tendencies blind our logic. The persona of Yosef is the logician.

Yehuda is the feeling man, represented by the *chamor* (see above Parshas Vayishlach). Yehuda is the heart and feelings of Israel. Yosef is the analytical mind and intellect of Israel, represented by the *shor*. Yehuda is the plow who softens the heart. Yosef, the harvester, is the mind that operates through detachment.

Using Emotion and Intellect to Serve Hashem

These two great *tzaddikim*, founders of the Jewish People, are not just models for their respective *shevatim*, but for each and every Jew. One is the heart of the Jew, and the other is the mind. Every person must possess and develop a combination of a logical, intellectual mind with a warm heart filled with feeling.

There are two great expressions of serving Hashem and keeping His Torah: Torah study and prayer. “*Talmud Torah k’neged kulam*. Torah study is the equal to all other *mitzvos*” (Pei’a 1:1). This is primarily an intellectual endeavor. The second method of expressing fealty to God is by praying to Him, accomplished through arousal and experience of feelings. “... *Lahavah es Hashem Elokeichem ul’ovdo b’chol levavchem uv’chol nafshechem*... To love Hashem, your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul” (Devarim 10:12). The Gemara (Taanis 2a) asks: How does one serve God with his heart? The Gemara gives a short and profound answer—with emotional prayers. Prayer is not meant to be primarily an intellectual exercise. It should move us emotionally! Just saying the words of prayer is not enough. We must feel the words. We must emotionally beg Hashem for the things that we desire and thank and praise Him with all of our heartfelt feelings.

We need to see more emotional prayer among us. Too often, prayer becomes an intellectual exercise, as if going through a checklist to say this chapter and recite that prayer. Prayer must include emotion! Before you pray, think of yourself as talking to Hashem. Then pray and speak emotionally of your needs and ask for help. “I am Your child. I need Your help. I am suffering. My family needs Your help. My people need Your help. Come help us, Abba!” This is how we serve Hashem with all our heart, by praying. We must also sing songs of joy and praise, including Hallel. Our hearts serve our Creator, Who is our best friend and our Father in heaven. This is the service of the heart, *avoda shebalev*.

Torah, however, is in the mind—the cool, collected intellect, logically analyzing, unmoved by emotion. When learning Torah, we must be sharp and to the point. Prejudices and preconceptions have no place in Torah study. We should not take the Torah where we want it to go. We must follow the Torah’s logic where it tells us to go. This is the only real way to learn—*Torah lishma, la’amita shel Torah*, no matter where it takes us. In *talmud Torah*, the heart cannot be our guide; the mind must be the master.

Yehuda was an emotional person, and he was the antagonist of Yosef, of whom he was originally jealous and whom he at first hated. He was almost ready to kill him. He then instigated the sale of Yosef. This was the downside of his emotional nature. Later, in the story of Yehuda and Tamar, Yehuda repented. Even though Yehuda was the leader of the brothers, he courageously admitted his guilt. Tamar, a young woman, was able to show how terribly he had acted. Yehuda was about to commit the worst of crimes, murder, but he didn’t. “She is right,” announced Yehuda, “and I am wrong.” He succeeded in directing his emotions the other way.

Emotions can be very damaging. Negative emotions can really hurt others, and even the person who experiences them suffers. But on the other hand, emotions can be wonderful, especially in terms of changing a person for the good. Positive emotions include the emotions of love and yearning for something better, the emotions of shame and regret, those of a desire to do good, those of excitement to do the right thing. These are great emotions and are at the core of repentance.

We must be able to say that we have made a mistake. The mind sees things one way. If a person analyzes a situation and concludes that a certain behavior was fitting, the mind will normally maintain that conclusion. The heart, though, can cry and see the pain that one has caused others. The heart has the ability to change.

Change is so important for us! We must be brave enough to admit that we have made mistakes and that we can learn from them. Through life experience, we learn that we can and do make

mistakes. We even can be happy to grow through our mistakes and do *teshuva*. These emotions encourage a person to experience the catharsis of change. This is the *lev* of a Jew. This is Yehuda.

Yosef's role, the mind, is also very important. When it discovers the truth, the mind knows what it is and will not budge from that truth. If you know that two plus two equals four, the whole world could oppose you, but you would still know that it is the truth. You would surely insist that it is so. We know as truth that Hashem gave us the Torah. No one can move us from this truth. No matter how much our enemies try to distort history, they cannot succeed, because our minds will not be swayed.

Similarly, no amount of misrepresentation and deceit will ever change the truth that we are the founders of the holy city of Jerusalem and that we had two Batei Mikdash there. No matter how many bulldozers come to the Temple Mount to destroy remnants of our Holy Temple that stood there, they cannot change our awareness of the reality of our history. No one can change the truth for us. The mind of the Jew knows the truth and will not leave the truth—“*Moshe emes v'soraso emes*, Moshe and his Torah are true” (Sanhedrin 110a). This is logical and historical fact.

No amount of pressure ever has been able to change us as a nation. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were burnt at the stake in the Middle Ages, but we did not abandon the truth of our faith. The Holocaust did not make us abandon our faith that we are the chosen people. The terrorist attacks of today will not change our awareness of the truth that the Land of Israel and Jerusalem are ours. We know this truth, no matter how much they may attack us. We may become frightened by our enemy's attempts to hurt us, but we never will relinquish our recognition of the truth. What our parents taught us is true, and what our teachers taught us is true. We are the chosen people of God, and He gave us the Torah that guides us to this day.

Yosef was the true Jew. Chazal say he was the same Yosef in his father's house, in the house of Potifar, in jail, and then in the palace

of Egypt. His steadfastness was rooted in the power of his mind to know the truth and to remain absolutely committed to his values in all circumstances, whether they were pleasant or horrible.

Yehuda was the first Jewish king. The Rambam writes (Hilchos Melachim 3:6) that the king's heart is the very heart of Israel. As the heart of his people, Yehuda was ready to sacrifice his own freedom and even his life for the benefit of Israel. This is why he offered himself as a slave in place of Binyamin. He wanted to preserve Yaakov's life and the burgeoning family-nation of Israel. Self-sacrifice and absolute dedication to the nation of Israel is the very heart of our people.

Thus, the reconciliation of Yosef and Yehuda ensured that Jewish leadership would forever have the optimal combination of thought and feelings, using the thinking Jewish mind and the feeling Jewish heart for the benefit of all Jews. This is the model of Dovid Hamelech and Mashiach who will ultimately lead our holy people at the time of the final redemption. This is the model that we should try to emulate in our own lives.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does the Midrash call Yehuda the plower?
2. Why does the Midrash call Yosef the harvester?
3. What is the great value of the intellect?
4. What is the great value of the emotions?
5. How did Yosef deal with all the different situations in his life?
6. How did Yehuda deal with all the situations of his life?

EXERCISES

1. Keep a daily log for a week. Chart situations that you dealt with using a) intellect alone, b) emotions alone, or c) a combination of intellect and emotions.
2. Which areas in your life need adjustment in terms of intellect and emotions?
3. Plan your adjustments and make a plan to implement them.

