



PARSHAS VAYIGASH

5772
SHALOSH SEUDOS
TORAH

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The Treasures of Teves

Our Moment of Greatest Anxiety will be Transformed into Salvation

Yosef was already missing for twenty two years and the quest of the brothers to find him in Egypt was unsuccessful. Now, their most dreaded nightmare and their father's supreme concern - that Binyamin be lost in addition to his beloved Yosef - was unfolding before their eyes and they were helpless to stop it. Yehuda, the strength of the brothers, the leader and pride of the tribes offered to serve as a slave in an effort to spare Binyamin.

It was the darkest moment in their lives.

Suddenly, the light broke through the darkness and their confusion melted in the bright rays. Their tormenter ripped off his mask and said; "I am Yosef". The despicable despot was none other than Yosef, their brother who loved them, and only meant their well-being. Their angst was transformed into joy. Within a moment, all their troubles vanished.

The Midrash sees the revelation of Yosef as a forerunner for the ultimate redemption.

The situation in our times right before the redemption, too, seems hopelessly dismal. We are still weary after the devastating losses of the holocaust and - once again - dangerous problems face the Jewish People.

Iran - who has threatened to wipe Israel off the map – is very close to developing atomic weapons, and the world lacks the will to stop them. The Palestinian problem persists and no political or military solution seems feasible.

A tremendous spiritual darkness has descended. Society is descending rapidly to the moral chaos that prevailed during the pre-deluge era. This creates overwhelming challenges to our effort at maintaining the moral purity of ourselves and our children.

The world in general is in tremendous danger from the Islamic extremists. Predictions are dire at best and the situation seems hopeless.

Suddenly, Hashem will reveal himself and say "I am Hashem". He will rip the mask off the natural world of cause and effect and we will see that it was Hashem, our beloved, who was manipulating events. All the troubles that befell us were ultimately for our benefit. Within a moment, our anxiety will be transformed into ecstasy.

Yishmael is the Last Exile

In this week's parsha, the Jewish People descended into their first exile. "This," the Izbitzer Rebbe zt"l noted¹, "is hinted in the name of the parsha. ויגש is an acronym for וַיִּנְטֵן" "אֶת־עֲלֵיכֶם גָּעוֹלָה!" – "Jews cry! Shout woe!"

At the 'Bris (covenant) Bain HaBisarim' Hashem revealed to Avraham Avinu the four exiles that his descendants would endure. The verse relates that אֵימָה, חִשְׁכָה, גָדוֹלָה, נּוֹפְלָת, 'a great dread and darkness fell upon him'. אֵימָה corresponds to the Babylonian exile, חִשְׁכָה to the Greek exile, גָדוֹלָה to the Persian-Median exile, נּוֹפְלָת to the exile of Edom (Rome – the European nations). The last word, עֲלֵיכֶם, corresponds to Yishmael³.

At the end of the last exile, Yishmael will attach himself to Edom and take over. The word denoting the exile of Yishmael is עֲלֵיכֶם, which denotes attachment⁴. Indeed, Yishmael's exile is not an independent one; it is attached to the exile of Edom.

The Difficulty of the Ishmaelite Exile

The Zohar laments that the Ishmaelite exile is the most difficult one.

The Rambam, who suffered under the Islamic oppression of Yishmael, complains⁵ of its bitterness with the words King David expressed in Tehilim⁶ in the chapter where he asks Hashem to rescue him from people that are liars.

"Woe is to me! ... I have dwelled with the Nomadic tribes of 'Kedar'(these are the people of Yishmael⁷). My soul has had its fill of resting with the haters of peace. I am for peace, but when I propose peace to them, they want war."

The expression - Woe is to me! - is not found regarding the bitter exile of Edom. Only when faced with the deceitful crookedness of the two-faced Ishmaelites - who professes to want peace while inciting their masses to slaughter Jewish children - does the cry escape: Woe is to me!

Yishmael can't handle peace! He finds no peace when everything is peaceful. For him to be fulfilled he must be engaged in warfare.

The verse is Devarim refers to Yishmael as אֹיֵב – enemy. The word is similar to אָבִי – woe!⁸

Yishmael Occupies the Place of the Bais HaMikdash (holy temple)

The aspect of the exile of Yishmael that is most painful is their occupation of the place where the Shechina (divine presence) was once manifested. It pierces the Jewish heart that on the place where the Holy of Holies stood - and no one but the High Priest on Yom Kippur was allowed to enter – an Arab kid now bounces his ball. It is a tremendous disgrace for the Shechina. 'On the destroyed mountain of Tzion, foxes stroll about'⁹.

Yishmael prevents the building of the Bais HaMikdash. The Chafetz Chaim relates¹⁰ that if we were to sacrifice – at least one time – the morning 'Tamid' sacrifice, Hashem would immediately rebuild the Bais HaMikdash. The Chasam Sofer writes in a letter¹¹ that it is futile to engage in the halachic (legal) permissibility of doing so because the Ishmaelites would never allow it, anyhow.

Today, Yishmael occupies the Temple Mount, which is in Binyamin's portion of land. This is similar to the Egyptian ruler wanting to capture Binyamin.

Indeed, it inspires a וַיַּגְשֵׁה, a cry and lament, seeing the disgrace of the Shechina - in the portion of Binyamin - caused by the children of Yishmael.

We Are Guaranteed That Prayer Is Effective Against Yishmael

וַיִּשְׁמַע קָل וַיַּעֲנֶם יוֹשֵׁב קָדֵם יִשְׁמָעוֹל¹² The Pirkei DiRabbi Eliezer says that the name 'Yishmael' hints that G-d will always hearken (to the pain of the Jewish People) and answer them; who resides in 'kedem'.

This seems to contradict what the angel told Hagar –Yishmael's mother – when he instructed her to name him because "שֶׁמֶן ה' אֶת עֲנִיר"¹³, 'Hashem has recognized your (Hagar's) pain'.

However, the pain the angel is referring to becomes clear with his next words – "וְהִוא יְהִי – פָּרָא אָדָם יְדוֹ בְּכָל יָד כָּל בָּו"¹⁴. 'He will be a wild-ass of a man; his hand will be against everybody and everybody's hand against him'. Hashem will hearken to the pain that this untamed animal of a human being will cause the Jewish People. "שֶׁמֶן ה' אֶת עֲנִיר" is to be understood as – Hashem has heard your pain, i.e. the pain that you cause others.

וַיַּגְשֵׁה, when we spell out the letters – וַיַּד גִּימֶל שֵׁין – is gematria (the same numerical value as פָּרָא אָדָם יְדוֹ בְּכָל יָד כָּל בָּו) (they both equal 476). The wild-ass of a man that is Yishmael evokes a cry of 'Woe!' – וַיַּגְשֵׁה

The exile of Yishmael is very difficult to endure. However, we are guaranteed - as the Pirkei DiRabbi Eliezer says - that if we pray for salvation, Hashem will rescue us. That prayer will be effective is a guarantee specific to the exile of Yishmael.

Yishmael Occupies the Place of ‘Kedem’

The ‘Tomer Devorah’ teaches that man must resemble his creator through his actions. To resemble Hashem as he rules in the highest world called ‘Keser’ one must act in accordance to the Thirteen Attributes of mercy which are in effect in the world of ‘Keser’.

The Thirteen Attributes of mercy are mentioned by the prophet Michah¹⁵. The last attribute – which encompasses all the other attributes and is the highest of them – is: ‘from the days of ‘Kedem’’.

A person acting in accordance to the merciful attribute of ‘Kedem’, would visualize even the most wretched being as a pure, suckling infant. He is aware that every person - no matter how low he has fallen - was once an innocent baby and is deserving of our compassion and prayer.

There is very elevated, spiritual world that is called ‘kedem’, where this attribute is used. Actions are ignored there, and only the most core essence of the soul is recognized. Hashem conducts the affairs of the world according to this attribute on Zos Chanukah (as was explained then). The Holy of Holies – the most elevated place in this world – corresponds to the spiritual world of ‘kedem’ - the most elevated sphere in the spiritual worlds.

Yishmael, by occupying the place of the Holy of Holies, inhabits the place of ‘Kedem’. Indeed, the verse which describes Hashem as listening to the cry of those oppressed by Yishmael, refers to Him as - ‘The one who resides in ‘Kedem’’ – the Holy of Holies. The one who dwells in ‘kedem’ will not tolerate Yishmael’s trespassing of his residence.

Mashiach – Who will Spread Peace – will Eliminate Yishmael – the Hater of Peace

There are thirteen methods with which the Torah is expounded upon. These correspond to the Thirteen Attributes of mercy. The sage that enumerates these attributes is Rabbi Yishmael. He is the counterpart in holiness to the wicked Yishmael.

The last attribute with which the Torah is expounded upon is: If there are two verses which disagree with each other, a third verse will be brought with which the contradiction will be resolved. Thus, peace is restored between the two verses. The last attribute of Rabbi Yishmael, the opposition of Yishmael – the hater of peace - is the instituting of peace between two opposing verses.

At the end of Tractate Sotah, the conditions that will prevail during the era right before the coming of Mashiach are described. One of them is a lack of cohesiveness among Jewish Torah leadership. This is similar to the phenomena of two verses that contradict each other.

Mashiach will then come and make peace between all Torah leaders. Mashiach corresponds to the ‘third verse’ which makes peace between the first two. In fact, הכתוב השליש, the third verse, is gematria, נשנ, (they both equal 1088). (This is if we use a special method of gematria called ריבוע and write the word Mashiach as following – מ, ש, מ, ש.)

With the coming of Mashiach who will successfully promote peace, Yishmael, the hater of peace, will be eliminated.

The Treasures Hidden in the Depth of Teves

When one throws a penny off the roof of a two story building onto a sandy beach, it will fall into the sand. The same penny, when hurled from the roof of a skyscraper onto the same beach, will fall much deeper. From an airplane, it will probably be buried many yards deep into the sand. The axiom deduced from this metaphor is: the higher the place an item falls from, the deeper it will plummet.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that the world is filled with sparks of holiness that have fallen. In very low places or times there lie buried sparks that have fallen from very high realms. When we serve Hashem in a specific place, time, and with specific items, we release the sparks trapped in the time, place and item and they are redeemed and return to their origin.

The days of Teves are very low; therefore, they contain sparks of holiness that have fallen from the highest realms.

It is very difficult to serve Hashem in these days; there is a sluggish feeling and it is difficult to conjure up the energy necessary to pray or learn Torah properly. However, one should not make the mistake of surrendering to his lethargy. As difficult as it is to serve Hashem, that is how important it is that we do so - because it is in the lowly days of Teves that holy sparks, fallen from the loftiest realms, are trapped. Our service of Hashem – specifically in Teves when it is not easy - will free these sparks and they will be elevated back to their origin.

This phenomena was hinted to by the prophet Yeshaya¹⁶, "כִּי רַבִּים בָּנֵי שׁוֹמְךָ מִבְנֵי בָּעוֹלָה", 'the days of destruction are greater than the days of freedom'. The days of destruction – the low month of Teves when the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed – has a greatness hidden within it that is superior to the happier days of the year because there are loftier sparks of holiness hidden therein.

חודש טבת is gematria (they both equal 729). The month of Teves is a month of destruction; however, it has tremendous holiness hidden within which comes from great heights.

The Love Hashem has for the Exiled Jew of Teves

As Yaakov descended to Egypt, Hashem revealed himself to him in a vision of the long night of exile – and called out to him “Yaakov, Yaakov”¹⁷. Hashem repeated his name as an expression of affection. This is seldom found in scripture. Hashem has a special love reserved for the Jew exiled in impure places and in low, difficult times.

Hashem then calmed Yaakov saying, ‘Do not fear to go down to Egypt, I am going with you, and will eventually ascend with you’. G-d holds the hand of any person going through difficult times and walks him through his ordeal.

חודש טבת is gematria (they both equal 723). During the month of Teves, when the nights are longest and the powers of evil strongest, Hashem calls out to us in affection, ‘Don’t fear, I’ll help you overcome the difficult tests of the time’. Hashem holds the hand of any person who reaches out for help and aids him in overcoming his challenges.

Yosef's Test was in the Depth of Egypt and Teves

A person attains his perfection, not during elevated spiritual times, but precisely in his most difficult hour. Yosef attained his lofty level of holiness in the quagmire of Egypt. The climax

of his test with the wife of Potifar occurred on the longest night of Teves, which coincides with the 25th of December - a night of tremendous impurity, known as 'Nittel'.

The verse states, "וַיְהִי כֹּיְם הַהָּרָא", 'and it was on that day'. spells כֹּיְם הַהָּרָא, the 25th day. The verse is hinting that the climax of Yosef's test was on the 25th of December – 'Nittel' - the day that is so impure that many have the custom of not learning Torah then.

The key weapon to withstand challenges in the area of morality is to learn Torah. Yosef was permitted to study Torah even though it was 'Nittel' - in order to defend himself against his terribly difficult test. However, Torah studied on 'Nittel' would lack the holy vitality necessary in order to protect him.

He was able to withstand his ordeal only with the help of Hashem Who caused an image of his father Yaakov to pass before his eyes. Thus, he was ignited with strength and exercised the superhuman power needed to withstand the test. Thereby, he merited attaining the lofty level of 'Tzaddik that is the foundation of the world'. None of the other tribes merit that the word 'Tzaddik' is appended to their names; only Yosef is called 'Yosef HaTzaddik'. He was purified and elevated specifically in his difficult times.

This Shabbos Elevates the Mitzvos of Chanukah

On Shabbos all the Mitzvos of the week ascend to heaven. During Shalosh Seudos, the highpoint of Shabbos, the entire Shabbos is elevated. Now is a most auspicious moment. The lighting of the Chanukah candles, the Hallel of all the mornings, and especially of the last and greatest day of Chanukah, Zos Chanukah, are rising on high.

ונזכה לראות בבנין ציון וירושלים ואז אגמר בשיר מזמור חנוכת המזבח

May we merit seeing the rebuilding of Tzion and Yerushalayim, and then we will sing the song of the inauguration of the Mizbe'ach.

¹ מובא בפרי צדיק

² בראשית טז:יב

³ פרקי דברי אליעזר

⁴ כמו ועליו מטה מנשה

⁵ באגרת תימן

⁶ פרק קכ'

⁷ בראשית כה:יא

⁸ רビינו בחיי דברים ל:ז

⁹ איךח חי:יח

¹⁰ וכן מובא בשם הגר"א

¹¹ לר' עקיבא איגער ('רל"ו)

¹² תהילים נה:כ

¹³ בראשית טז:יא

¹⁴ בראשית טז:יב

¹⁵ מיכה ז:יח - כ

¹⁶ ישעיה נד:א

¹⁷ רש"י בראשית מוב: