



Parashat Vayigash



English version

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## NEVER, EVER, ALONE

Yaakov was afraid of going down to Egypt. וַיִּאָמֶר אֲנֹכִי הֲאֵל אֵלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב אֵלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִרְדָּה מִצְרַיִם כִּי־לִגְוִי גָדוֹל אֶשָּׂא: *And G-d said, I am the G-d of your father. Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.* אֲנֹכִי אֶרֶד עִמָּךְ: *I will go down with you to Egypt and I will take you up as well, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes.*

The Or HaChaim asks a few questions. *What was Ya'akov's great fear in going down to Egypt? Was he afraid of being enslaved? Yaakov was not afraid of anything! He believed in the power of a ישראֵל; he used this power to fight angels! So, what was he afraid of? Also, how did G-d console him? After all, they did go down to Exile, and they **were** enslaved!*

The Netivot Shalom continues this train of thought. We find another time when the Jews went into Exile. עַל נְהָרוֹתוֹ בְּכֹל שָׁם יֹשְׁבָנוּ גַם־בְּכִינֹו בְּזַכְרֵנוּ אֶת־צִיּוֹן. *On the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, and we also wept, when we remembered Tzion.* (Tehillim 137) What were they crying about? Were the Jews afraid of the Babylonian Exile? A Jewish soul is strong enough to go through the worst conditions. So, what were they afraid of?

The Zohar tells us how Yechezkel consoled those weeping Jews. *G-d called out to all of His angels, to His ministering angels, to His multitudes, and to all of the hosts of the Heavens, and He said to them, What are you doing here? My Children are in exile, and you are here? Get up, all of you, and go down to Bavel, and I am coming with you.* When the prophet Yechezkel said to them that G-d would be with them in Bavel, it consoled them.

Because that was all that they wanted to hear (Zohar Shemot B).

And this was Ya'akov's fear. That he would be alone, that G-d would not be there with him, or with his children. But G-d said, אל תירא עבדי יעקב, *Yaakov, my servant, do not fear.* I will come down with you; I will be there with you. In the Shmutz of Egypt. Down till the lowest level of impurity. And if you become too deeply caught up in the impurity of Egypt, I will save you, before you reach the point of no return.

No matter what you are up against. No matter *who* you are up against, G-d is there. When Moshe had to face Pharaoh, what was he worried about? How could Pharaoh be so, so far from G-d? After experiencing seven plagues, how could his heart still be as rigid and immovable as a stone? How did G-d calm Moshe down? בָּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי־אָנֹכִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי לְבָבוֹ Come to Pharaoh- I am already there waiting for you; for I have hardened his heart. It is all ME! I am in his heart, and that is why it is so hardened! (Shem Mishmuel)

The Baal Shem Tov would teach that there is no person on earth who does not have his own, custom-fit exile. קָרְבָה אֶל־נַפְשִׁי גְאֻלָּה (Tehillim 69). There is a beautiful prayer that many Jews say before Kiddush on Friday night. שְׂתַרְחַמְנֵי עוֹד בְּגִלוּתִי. *May You, Hashem, have mercy on me, even in my exile, to redeem me.* No two people's problems are alike. Each one has his/her own darkness. How does one deal with his/her own exile?

The Brisker Rav would teach the trick - King David said it best: שְׂבַחְסֶךָ יְמִשְׁעֵנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ יְנַחֲמֵנִי G-d,

Your שבט Your rod that You rebuke with, and Your walking stick (that one leans on), will console me (Psalms 23). What? I can understand how the cane on which one leans can be a consolation. But how can the stick that one is struck by be a consolation? The answer is that if it is G-d behind the stick, if it is one's own Father who is delivering the blows only out of love, that, itself, is a consolation. For it means that G-d is there with you the whole time.

The Shem Mishmuel writes, that in the perspective of Judaism, *all the problems in your life are because you do not feel that you have G-d in your life*. As the passuk says, וְתָרָה אִפְּי בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְעִזְבוֹתָיִם וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם לְאֹכַל וְהָיָה לְאֹכַל וּמִצְאָהוּ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֹא עָלַי כִּי־אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקַרְבִּי מִצְאָוֵנִי וְצָרוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהָרַעוּת הָאֵלֶּה *And I will be angry on that day, and I will leave them, and I will hide My Face from them, and they will be devoured and many evils and tragedies will befall them. And they will say on that day, it is because there is no G-d in my midst that these evils have been visited upon me.* וְאָנֹכִי הַסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֵלַי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים *And I will hide My face on that day, from all the evil that is done, for they turned to other gods.* (Devarim 31; 17)

How do these pesukim make sense? How could it be that the fellow who realizes the cause of his pain and suffering and even says Viduy that it is because G-d is not in his midst... that G-d will continue to punish him with the worst punishment-that G-d will hide His face from him?

The Shem Mishmuel answers that this is the reason why this fellow is suffering and will continue to suffer. *Because he believes that G-d is not with him in the darkness.* And that is why G-d will continue to hide His face! Because the person does not recognize that this difficulty, this darkness, has G-d behind it. Judaism explains that darkness is not the absence of light. Darkness is *also* G-d's creation. יוֹצֵר אוֹר וּבוֹרָא חוֹשֶׁךְ. Darkness means that G-d is *causing* lack of light. G-d gives a person difficulties to enable him to grow. And just like the Jews needed the Egyptian exile to become a great nation, so, too, each person has his own exile, because He wants to enable a great G-dliness to shine through it into the world. So, when a person

does not recognize that whatever "goes wrong" in his life is being orchestrated by G-d - for a very good reason - G-d hides Himself even further. He brings darkness, then more darkness...until the intensity of the darkness is so great, that it could not have been caused by anything other than Almighty G-d. Once the one who is in suffering realizes this, the amazing happens: The darkness vanishes, in a blink.

The Zohar tells us the story of Chananya, Mishael and Azarya. Nebuchadnezzar threatened to throw them into the raging flames of a huge furnace, if they would not bow down to the idol. When they were tied up to be thrown in, each one raised his voice, in front of all the nations, kings and ministers that were gathered there to bow down. Chananya said, יְקִוֵּךְ לִי לֹא אֵינְרָא מִה־יַעֲשֶׂה לִי אָדָם: *G-d is for me; I will not fear. What can man do to me?* וְיְקִוֵּךְ לִי בְּעַרְיָי וְאֲנִי אֲרָאָה בְּשֹׁנְאָי *G-d is with me through my helpers, therefore, I can face my foes.* Mishael opened his mouth and said, וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עִבְדֵי יַעֲקֹב וְנָאֵם יַקִּיבֹל ... כִּי־אֲתָתָּה אַנְי לְהוֹשִׁיעֵנָה *And you, do not fear, my servant Yaakov, said G-d... For I am with you, to save you...* When the gentiles present heard that these youths still trusted G-d's promise to be with Yaakov and his descendants in Exile, they burst out laughing. Azarya cried out -Shema Yisrael... And at that moment, HKBH said to His Throne, to the Shechina, "Tell me, in the merit of which of these three statements should I save these three Tzaddikim?" And the Shechina answered, in the merit of the statement that was laughed at, the mention of Your promise to be with Yaakov and his descendants in Exile". So, G-d saved the three tzaddikim in that merit, and all those who laughed were burnt to death, instead of these three (Zohar Acharei Mot 57a).

How does one bring G-d into his own exile? How does one see that G-d is with him, no matter what? One needs wide screen, panoramic, full high-definition awareness for this. One needs time, alone. To think in quiet. As Rabbenu Bachye explains, the reason why so many of our leaders were first shepherds was to give them an opportunity to do התבודדות, to have time with G-d. And when we spend time alone with G-d, only then do we realize how we are never, ever alone.

## THE POWER OF N.A.G.

Self-help that the Torah offers is always more effective and genuine than the self-help ideas of the Gentiles. It is always an octave above. That is the idea of eight nights of Chanukah, and it is the concept that we fought the Greeks about. We fought for being on a different octave, a different level of a person, אִישׁ-לִּישׁ.

The only way we can actualize this new octave, this spiritual level, is through the key element called happiness. In the Jewish religion, one is punished for not serving G-d with joy (see Devarim 28; 47), for not being cognizant that it is an honor, a precious gift, to have a relationship with the Almighty G-d. If your religion is down, not vibrant, not full of excitement, it is not authentic Judaism. Because when you are down, you're connection is down. Even a man as great as Yaakov Avinu, who was on the level of an angel, when he was down about losing Yosef, he lost his Ruach Hakodesh, his high-level connection.

אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה לִמְנוּחָה מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד בְּבֹא אֵלָיו נֹתֵן הַנְּבִיא (Psalm 51) When David Hamelech was reprimanded by Natan Hanavi for his act with Bat Sheva, he composed a Mizmor for his own Teshuvah and for all those who will repent in future generations. Why does David call it a Mizmor? Why isn't it a קִינָה, a lamentation? The answer is that even to do Teshuva, you need to get into a positive state. King David knew that you can't change if you are down.

R' Wolbe writes that the challenge of learning mussar is that when you realize how wrong you were, how you lied to yourself for so long, and in such a bad way, it is hard not to feel guilty, down and depressed (AleI Shur 2 161). And when someone takes Mussar as a "guilt trip", instead of using it to bring him to awareness, he can't change. One of the greatest challenges for the coach is to help the client see his shortcomings while keeping him positive. A big enough, strong enough person, faces his biggest mistakes, his biggest lies and says "I am happy I realize how wrong I was, because I am big enough to take responsibility, to leave the past, and make a new beginning." This mindset is fundamental to learning Mussar.

The Baal Shem Tov (צוואת הריב"ש) would teach that sometimes the Yetzer Hara dresses up as your Rebbe, Mashgiach, Yetzer Tov, etc., and makes you feel bad - that you could be greater, holier, more religious. And that you should be on a higher level than you are. Why does the Y. Hara do this? Because when he gets you down about your spiritual level, he can get you to give up much more than you are willing to bargain for, otherwise. The Yetzer Hara knows that although depression is not a sin, it can bring you to the worst sins. So, how do I know if the spiritual drive to do "extra" inside me is a Yetzer Tov or a Yetzer Hara? It depends where it is taking you. If it brings you to serving G-d with more happiness and love, with more motivation and alacrity, it is your Yetzer Tov. If it prevents you from serving with love, with passion, from keeping the Shulchan Aruch, it is your Yetzer Hara. And he is pushing you, so that you fall flat on your face.

How do we stay happy serving G-d, no matter what? How do we turn on that fire, and reignite the soul? Let us step back for a moment, and take a drone's-eye view. So many people in the world are depressed - more than 350 million people (World Health Organization). David Burns, author of Feeling Good, talks about depression and how to cure it. "Depression has been called the world's number one public health problem. In fact, depression is so widespread it is considered the common cold of psychiatric disturbances. But there is a grim difference between depression and a cold. Depression can kill you." A quick Google search will tell you what that the world offers to fight depression.

But what I found amazing is that the Torah is giving us another octave, a new dimension of self-help that is way ahead of everything the gentiles offer. And that is the Power of N. A. G. It is the secret the Yosef shared with his brothers. וְעִתָּהּ אֵלַי תַּעֲצָבוּ וְאֵלֵי יְחִיר בְּעֵינַיִכֶם כִּי-מִכַּרְתֶּם אֹתִי הֲנֵה כִּי לְמַחְלָה שָׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאַל תִּהְיוּ כְּאֵלֵי הַיָּמִים לִפְנֵיכֶם. And now, be not depressed and do not be angry in your eyes for selling me here, for I was sent by G-d, before you, to be a sustenance (a provider). וְעִתָּהּ לֹא-אֶעֱשֶׂם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הֲנֵה כִּי הֶאֱלַחְתֶּם.

And now, you did not send me here, for it was G-d..."

What type of solution was this? How could it prevent them from feeling down about the biggest and only mistake of their lives, about the lie they lived for 22 years? How did the fact that Yosef would be the sustainer of the family help them not to be down about their terrible mistake, that caused their father so much pain? And, why "Now"?

In these words, Yosef revealed to his brothers the three powers of staying positive. The first answer is the Power of Now. Yosef kept saying the word עתה, now. Most people get down and suffer from stress, worries, guilt, etc., because they are not in the Now. They are living in the past or the future. My favorite question as coach is, what are your options? Because that is the best question to take them out of past/future thinking and bring them back into the now. Anything that is actionable, is in the now. G-d's present to you is the present, and only the present. Only He is in the past/present/future at the same time. You have no control over the past or future, so let go of it. The word עתה is usually referring to Teshuva (Breshit Rabbah 21; 6), because Teshuva it is not about living in the past, living in regret. Teshuva is about living in the Now, recognizing the sin as something that you find disgusting, despise, and disconnect

from, so that in the Now you will learn new habits and behaviors. Teshuva is not about feeling bad about "you". It is realizing how bad the action, decision, or behavior was.

The second power is the Power of Anyway. Yosef told his brothers, I was, anyway, going to come down to Egypt. G-d sent me here before you sent me here. לפניכם. Had I known how things were going to turn out, I would have paid to go to Egypt. You sold me, but I would have gone anyway. The power of Anyway is the power that keeps people positive. It gives us the power to deal with the past.

And the third power is the Power of Give. Yosef told his brothers not to get down, because he is in this to be a giver, כי למהיה שלחני for I am a sustainer. The Baal Shem Tov taught that depression and being down comes from wanting, valuing, and according too much importance to this World and its desires. When a person becomes a Giver, and despises taking from this world, from the honor, fame, and desires, the Baal Shem Tov promises, he will not get down. (צוואת הריב"ש)

These three Powers, that the gentiles don't list, are most powerful in helping a person stay clear of negative thoughts. And with them we can self-actualize and reach the next octave, because these lead us to serving G-d with joy.

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