

# VAYIGASH: YOSEPH HATZADIK?

- Why is Yoseph the only Torah personality to be called a Tzaddik? Several answers. One answer is based on a shiur by Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, zt"l.

## VAYIGASH

(This is a shiur outline. It can easily be converted to a drasha. The second part of this presentation dealing with the teshuva of the brothers is based on a shiur I once heard from the Rav, Harav HaGaon Yoseph Dov Soloveitchik)

1. We call him Yoseph Hatzaddik. He is the only Torah character so called! Our sages emphasized this. The Zohar, part I, Ch. 45, describes him as Yoseph Hatzadik hu amud haolam... Why did they feel it was important to designate particularly Yoseph, as a Tzaddik?

2. There are a number of possible answers.

A. He overcame a bad beginning.

B. He conquered his Yetzer Hara, and that's the hardest thing to do. Yoseph lo nehshad al haavera (Avoda Zara 3a).

C. He lived in galut, yet remained faithful.

D. He was the provider, viceroy of Egypt, yet he remained unspoiled by wealth, and that is also very hard to achieve. Lo natan lebanav afilu hamisha kesef, ki asa beemuna (Midrash Al Yithalel).

3. But if he was so called, he must earn his title from beginning to end! How can we justify his actions to his brothers? And how can we justify his twenty years of silence to his father, without communicating with him? According to the Midrash, he sincerely missed them all. Well then, why not tell them he is alive?

5. He had to remain silent. Because he was entrusted with dreams and the mandate to make them come true. He was baal hahalomot; Not guided by his dreams but their master, the man who was to make them come true.

A. Why was the Ruach HaKodesh silent? As well we may ask why God was silent in our own time, a great unanswered question. We are not granted the answer. Yet in Joseph's case we can perceive some answers.

B. If he had told his father, could he have expected the sons to have been kept in the dark? What would happen to their Teshuva?

C. And what kind of a revelation could he have given him? What information could he share? That his brothers had sold him? Is this what one tells a father? The Midrash (Pesikta Rabbati,

3:45), tells us that even after he was reunited with his family he was unable to be alone with his father, lest he ask embarrassing questions which would condemn his brothers and excite his father's anger, so that his curse upon them would destroy the future of our people. *Lo nichnas lehityahed im aviv, Shelo yomar lo, heach asu kach ahicha, Umekallelam, venimtzet mahariv et kal Haolam* (pesikta rabbati, 3:45).

6. He also remained silent, because how different were his dreams from the reality of the pit. How puzzling, it all was to him, until the path of God would unfold, and then, once perceived, how could he, the dreamer, upset the reality and prevent his dreams from coming true?

7. But what of his brothers? Why should he have treated them so?

Yoseph dreamed of stars representing his brothers. But they would only be stars if they hadn't fallen from their place in the sky. Since they had fallen, there must be a way to have them reset, somehow, back in their true place in the firmament. How was that to happen? It could only happen through teshuva.

8. But there are two kinds of teshuva. One kind of teshuva is the repentance of the thief who is caught. He is sorry, but only sorry that his attempted burglary failed. If he would be assured of success, he would not repent. That is not real teshuva. Real teshuva, in the words of the Rambam, is when *yaid alav Yodea Taalumot shelo yashuv lehevo ze od*. The Almighty Himself bears witness to the real teshuva of the contrite heart.

9. To bring this about, two conditions are necessary.

A. They must be put in the same position as before, this time in the case of Benjamin. They must be willing to sacrifice themselves rather than allow Benjamin to remain a slave.

B. They must have experienced shame for what they had done in the past.

The brothers passed both tests. Not only did they defend Benjamin offering themselves instead, but when Joseph finally revealed himself to them they were so ashamed that they could not say a word. They were stricken dumb. Reading the Torah portion, you perceive Joseph talking at length, trying to convince them that it is the will of the Almighty, that he was sent to give life, and much more. They could not utter a word. *Velo yachlu echav laanot oto ki nivhalu mipanav*.

There is another place in the Tanach where we find the same manifestation of shame. The prophet Nathan appeared before King David to denounce him for his sin with Bath Sheva (Shmuel II, 12:1-13). He confronted the King with the parable of the rich man and the poor man, and how the wealthy man stole the poor man's only beloved lamb. King David cries out – *Ben Mavet haish haose zot*/ The prophet says *Ata Haish*, denouncing the King, and all David could say was *Hatati laHashem*, and there is a space in the middle of the passage and the prophet continues as if it is the logical sequitor, *gam heevir Hashem et hatatcha*... What happened? That space changed the world for King David. He wanted to say *viduy* at length, to fulfill all the requisites of the baal teshuva, but he was so stricken with remorse that he could not utter another word. The Almighty knew what was in King David's heart, so he caused the prophet to continue "and God has

removed your sin” as if it was a continuation of the thought. Indeed it was. It was a continuation of that silence expressed by the piska beemtza pasuk, that space in the middle of the passage, which expressed the total revolution in King David’s heart at that time. So it was with Joseph’s brothers.

10. Only then could the brothers be reunited, the dreams fulfilled, the family together, father and all his sons, united in heart and spirit as well as physically.

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