

Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

The teachings of the Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr and Likkutei Torah

Yehuda, Yosef and the power of action

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פרשת ויגש

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The Parsha opens with Yehuda's approach to Yosef to appeal for the release of his brother Binyamin. The tension between Yehuda and Yosef would run throughout our history.

Spiritually, Yehuda and Yosef represent two different worlds. The message of the Parsha and Haftorah describe the layers of our soul and provide a timeless lesson in our personal Avodah.

The Jewish philosophers and mystics classify everything within creation into four orders; *Domem* - the inanimate, *Tzomeiach* - plant, *Chai* - animal and *Medaber* - mankind.

These four orders follow a hierarchy. The inanimate, which has no life in it, is the lowest of the four orders. Plants are a higher order and animals are yet higher. Mankind is the highest order of creation, possessing the greatest qualities and capabilities.

The hierarchy described above only exists within the paradigm of creation and world order. Chassidus explains that whatever appears lower in the created reality, is in fact higher in its spiritual source. In terms of spiritual origin, the lowly inanimate *Domem* is the greatest of all.

The Mishkan was a temporary dwelling place of the Shechina and therefore reflected the limited G-dly light that conforms to the hierarchy within creation. The floor of the Mishkan was earth (*Domem*). Above that stood the walls which were made of beams of cedar wood (*Tzomeiach*). These were covered with tapestries of wool and animal skins (*Chai*).

G-dliness would only rest in a full state of revelation in the permanent structure of the Beis Hamikdosh, a microcosm of the revelation of the Messianic era. Here the essential truth of reality was revealed; the way things are in their source.

And so, the Beis Hamikdosh had to be constructed entirely of *Domem*; stones, bricks or cement, from floor to ceiling. Exposed wood could not be used in the structure at all.

The Alter Rebbe relates this discussion to Yehuda and Yosef and the energies that they represent.

The Mishkan, which was primarily made of wood, stood in the territory of Yosef. Yosef means to grow and increase - like the *Tzomeiach* that grows and flourishes. In Avodah Yosef represents the service of Hashem with our minds and hearts, feelings and understanding that grow and are dynamic.

The Beis Hamikdash was constructed (in part) in the territory of Yehuda. Yehuda comes from the term *Hodaah*. This refers

to the service of *Bittul*, surrender and humility.

In contrast to emotional service, *Hodaah* is expressed in simple action. Like the lowly *Domem*, action is the lowest of our expressions, seeming simplistic when compared to the vitality of feeling and understanding.

We can relate this to an argument of the sages on the order of Creation. Beis Shammai say that the Heavens were created before the earth. Beis Hillel say that the earth was created before the Heavens.

The two are not really arguing. It just comes down to a matter of perspective. In Lecha Dodi on Friday night, we say סוף מעשה במחשבה תחילה, the end of creation arose first in thought. In Hashem's thought - the intention and purpose of Creation, the earth came before the Heavens. In the actual creation, the Heavens were created first.

The spiritual worlds of the Heavens are like the *Tzomeiach*. There the souls enjoy a spiritual service of feeling and understanding. The earth, is about serving Hashem through the simple action (*Domem*) of keeping physical Mitzvos.

In the order of Creation (Seder Hishtalshelus), the experience of the spiritual worlds appear superior. But in their source, Hashem's essential intent for Creation is for the humble service of our world. This intent is realised through simple deeds of Mitzvos, fulfilled with a sense of surrender.

In the Parsha, reflective of Golus, Yosef is superior to Yosef and Yehuda needs to approach him. This status quo perpetuated when the Jewish nation split after the death of Shlomo. The northern Kingdom of Israel, led by the Tribe of Yosef was more powerful, followed by 10 of the 12 Tribes. The Kingdom of Yehuda numbered only 2 Tribes.

The Haftorah, a Messianic vision of Yechezkel, tells us how this story ends. In the times of Moshiach, the two kingdoms of Yehuda and Yosef will be reunited as one and Dovid (Moshiach), from the House of Yehuda will be the king over them all.

Action may seem like the lowest of our expressions, but its source is the loftiest and it is of most consequence. The simple act of a Mitzvah achieves more than any meditation or study.

We don't see it now. But when the truth of reality will be revealed, when Yehuda will reign supreme, then we will see the superiority of simple surrender as expressed in action.