

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Vayigash How do We Tap into the Mission of Mashiach ben Yosef?

Is Torah Immersion to the Exclusion of Secular Work the Ideal for Every Jew?

I spent my first seven years as a Ba'alat Teshuva (newcomer to Torah) in a Chareidi Yeshiva, where we learned the importance of separating ourselves from the secular world. Our lives were Torah and only Torah and the Rabbi taught that the mission for every Jew is to separate from the mundane world in order to devote oneself totally to Torah learning. I'm grateful for those foundational years of immersion in the holiness of Torah and for the experience of being supported by Hashem without having to be preoccupied with making a living. However, from the very beginning, it didn't sit well with me, that this was supposed to be the ideal lifestyle for every Jew. Doesn't the Mishna teach that if there is no flour, there is no Torah... One whose wisdom exceeds his deeds is compared to a tree with many branches and few roots so that when the wind comes, it uproots it and overturns it... (*Pirkei Avot* 3:20). Moreover, I couldn't imagine the bus driver sitting in yeshiva all day poring over a blatt (page) of Gemara, and how would people (like us) who didn't have cars get around if all the bus drivers metamorphosed into Yeshiva bachurim (students)? Our great role models in the Torah supplemented their Torah study with farming the land, shepherding, leading, building, and organizing perfected societies. They also fought many wars and made pacts with the surrounding nations. Likewise, the Rabbis in the Talmud had secular occupations from silversmiths to shoemakers. Abba Chilkiyah was a field laborer; Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was a businessman for forty years; Abba Oshiyah was a launderer; Rabbi Shimon P'kuli was a cotton dealer; Rabbi Shmuel ben Shilas was a school teacher; Rabbi Yosi ben Chalafta was a tanner; Rabbi Yochanan Hasandlar was a shoemaker; Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah was a blacksmith; Rabbi Safra and Rabbi Dimi of Nehardea were merchants; Rabbi Abba ben Zavina was a tailor; Rabbi Yosef ben Chiya and Rabbi Yannai owned vineyards; Rabbi Huna was a farmer and raised cattle; Rabbi Chisda and Rabbi Papa were beer brewers; Karna was a wine smeller (he determined which wine could be stored and which had to be sold immediately); Rabbi Chiya bin Yosef was in the salt business; Abba Bar Abba, (father of Mar Shmuel) was a silk merchant; and (Mar) Shmuel was a doctor. So how could our rabbi teach that every Jew should only learn Torah?

Contrasting the Divergent Approaches of Yehuda and Yosef

Having grown up with a Zionist outlook, rejecting the Jewish state and avoiding army service also bothered me. Thus, in 1987 we left the Yeshiva as my husband served in the IDF as a medical officer and I enrolled in Michlala Jerusalem College for Women where the teachings of Rav Kook changed my life. I learned about the holiness within the mundane, and rather than separating and segregating it was a mitzvah to connect with *Klal Yisrael* – the general community of Israel – and engender unity, for we all have a divine spark even if it is concealed. With this background, it was natural to perceive the different approaches of Yehuda and Yosef contrasted in *Parashat Vayigash*:

סַפַּר בְּרֵאשִׁית פָּרַק מִן פְּסוּקֵי כַח וְאֶת יְהוֹדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גֹּשֶׁן וַיָּבֵאוּ אֶרְצָה גֹשֶׁן:

“He sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef, to direct him to Goshen, and they came to the land of Goshen” (*Bereishit* 46:28).

Yehuda represents the Yeshiva World, whom Ya'acov sent ahead to Egypt to establish a yeshiva there (Rashi, *Bereishit* 46:28). Yosef, in contrast, occupied the top position in the decadent Egyptian society as he was able to elevate the spiritual sparks concealed within the greatest material darkness. Whereas Yehuda's

work corresponds to the task of *birur* (separation), Yosef's mission is to elevate the world. In Yehuda's world, there are clear boundaries between the holy and the mundane. Yet, for Yosef, holiness is present in the mundane or 'natural' world (the field) when we submit the mundane to its spiritual root. This concept applies very much to our time when the outlook of religious Zionism is contrasted with the Chareidi outlook that shuns the secular State of Israel. The Sefat Emet relates to this chasm in his commentary on *Parashat Vayigash*, Year 1871 of "Woe to us from the day of judgment..." (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 93:10) - For the distress of the tribes seems to be that by the revelation of Yosef's illumination came great shame. They mistakenly did not perceive Yosef's holiness due to the concealment. This is the shame of the times to come, when it will be revealed that this world's dealings are themselves entirely internally holy.

Our Inability to Recognize Mashiach Ben Yosef

In our time, those who walk in Yosef's path are often put down for being "less Torah observant" by those who don't recognize the holiness of Yosef. This is alluded to when the brothers first met the 'Egyptian' ruler, "Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him" (*Bereishit* 42:8). The Vilna Gaon emphasized the lesser-known teachings of the Talmud and Zohar about Mashiach ben Yosef (*Babylonian Talmud Sukah* 52b; *Zohar* I:25b; *ibid.* II:120a, III:153b, 246b and 252a). The redemption process starts with Mashiach ben Yosef, whose job it is to pave the way for the final Mashiach ben David (Rav Hillel of Shklov, *Kol Hator*, based on the Teachings of The Vilna Gaon, Chapter 1). Yosef's brothers' inability to recognize him applies to every generation, particularly to the Jewish people who fail to recognize Mashiach ben Yosef. "This is the work of Satan, who hides the characteristics of Mashiach ben Yosef so that the footsteps of Mashiach are not recognized and are even belittled. Were Israel to recognize Yosef, i.e. Mashiach ben Yosef the Mashiach whose job is to ingather the exiles, etc., then we would already have been redeemed with a complete redemption" (Rav Hillel of Shklov, *Kol HaTor*, Chapter 2:39).

Tapping into the Mission of Mashiach ben Yosef

I personally identify very much with the work of Mashiach ben Yosef which is threefold. The general mission of *Mashiach ben Yosef* is three-fold:

1. Revelation the Inner Dimensions of the Torah,
2. Ingathering of the Exiles,
3. Removal of the Impure spirit from the Land (building and planting).

The ingathering of exiles encompasses three tasks: building Jerusalem, gathering in the exiles, and fulfilling the commandments dependent on the Land. The verse "You will rise, and You will have mercy on Tzion for it is the time to favor her, for the appointed season has arrived" (*Tehillim* 102:14) refers to Mashiach ben Yosef. Wherever the word "to stand up" is mentioned, it refers to the line of Mashiach ben Yosef, as in the phrase "my sheaf rose" (*Bereishit* 37:7). "To favor" refers to planting as it states, "he will favor its dirt" (*Kol Hator* 1:7).

Learning the Principles of Mashiach ben Yosef at the Threshold of Redemption

The book *Kol Hator* enumerates 156 principles applying to Mashiach ben Yosef. They correspond to the numerical value of the name Yosef 156 = (10+6+60+80). The Vilna Gaon further highlights that 156 equals the gematria of tzion (90+10+6+50). Thus, Mashiach ben Yosef is intrinsically linked with religious Zionism in its truest sense. Tzion means the inner point, as the mission of Mashiach ben Yosef is to reveal the inner dimensions of the Torah as well as the inner sparks of holiness buried within the mundane reality. These two are interdependent. To understand the inner layer of the Torah we must dig down deeply through the exterior layers and find the hidden light. In the same way, revealing the Divine sparks within all reality requires us to look beyond the surface and connect with the concealed nuggets of

goodness. As we stand on the threshold of the Redemption, we must learn well all the 156 characteristics, aspects, appellations, and special attributes of Mashiach ben Yosef. We must also study well the secrets regarding the beginning of the Redemption that is hinted at in the holy compositions of the Vilna Gaon – so that we shall know the way and what will happen in our times. The beginning of the Redemption, otherwise known as the footsteps of the Mashiach, began the first hour of Friday morning in the 6th millennium, that is the year 5500 (1740), as is known, every hour [of the six days of creation corresponding to 6 millennia] consists of 41 years and 8 months. From hour to hour the footsteps have continued to progress in many aspects (*Kol Hator* 1:4).

Keeping the Flame of Yosef Alive

The Vilna Gaon's basic approach is contained in the words *Od Yosef Chai*, which means, "Yosef is still alive." Yosef and his mission continue to have relevance for the generations heralding the final redemption. *Parashat Vayigash* mentions the phrase "Yosef is still alive" twice:

ספר בראשית פרק מה פסוק כו וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי חַי אֵלֶיךָ וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטָרָם אָמוּת:

"They told him (Ya'acov), saying 'Yosef is still alive,' and [they told him] that he ruled over the entire land of Egypt, and his heart changed, for he did not believe them... Then Israel said, 'Enough! My son Yosef is still alive. I will go and see him before I die'" (*Bereishit* 45:26, 28).

This implies that Mashiach ben Yosef is still alive and will live, because, as it is written, every aspect of the beginning of the Redemption is dependent on him (*Kol Hator*, Chapter 1, 6a). Regarding the verse, "You shall possess it and you shall settle in it" (*Devarim* 11:31), the Vilna Gaon explains, "Because of your merit in taking possession of it, you will dwell in it, and how will you take possession of it, by establishing your claim." How does one establish a claim? This is done by building and planting (The Vilna Gaon, *Aderet Eliyahu*, *Devarim* 11). However, when necessary, force may also be used which is in line with Yehoshua's conquest of the Land of Israel. Yehoshua – a descendant of Efraim ben Yosef, was Mashiach ben Yosef, whose mission was to counterattack and fight Amalek (*Kol Hator*, Chapter 1, 9d). As Israel is waging a multifrontal war against the darkest evil – the spiritual Amalek whose main *raison d'être* is to murder Jews – we are experiencing the final powerful accomplishments of Mashiach ben Yosef, paving the way for the final Mashiach ben David. We at Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin continue to align ourselves with the mission of Mashiach ben Yosef, to ingather Jewish women from the four corners of the earth to make their home in Israel, to teach inner dimensions of Torah and to keep planting and tending our gardens! "Am Yisrael Chai" – "Od Yosef Chai!" "Yosef is still alive" and kicking!