

# Menachem Mendel of Hordaka

## Pri Ha'eiz

### Parshas Vayigash

**"And Judah approached him and said, 'Please, my lord...'**

The *Or HaChaim* explains the word **ויגש (approached)** and asks: what is the nature of this approach? He interprets it fittingly, explaining that the approach was in the heart, as is known: "As water reflects a face, so the heart of one person to another" (Proverbs 27:19). With these words, Judah's intention was to awaken Joseph's compassion. Therefore, he first drew his heart near to Joseph and genuinely loved him, so as to awaken Joseph's love and compassion toward him.

From here emerges a profound and holy teaching: the wisdom of a sage, imbued with grace, truth, and faith. However, if we consider Judah's perspective — that he believed Joseph was an Egyptian, and the Israelites were commanded not to show favor to them (*Deuteronomy 7:2*, "Do not show them grace") — Judah nevertheless did not refrain from bringing his heart closer and loving him. This aligns with the principle known from prayer, sacrifices, and food consumption, that even in such cases, it serves a higher purpose.

Our sages said in the Midrash and the Talmud that Jacob our forefather was destined to descend to Egypt in chains of iron, but instead... [they elaborate with] a parable: It is like an animal being led to slaughter that does not wish to go, so they draw it with a rope. This parable illustrates the matter of Jacob's descent to Egypt, along with his sons, in order to elevate the sparks of holiness from Egypt, as is known from the verse "*And they emptied out Egypt*" (*Exodus 12:36*). According to the Targum, this means they made it like a trap devoid of fish, and our sages added, "like a net without any fish."

Now, regarding the concept of human eating, it too serves this purpose — to elevate the sparks, step by step: from the inanimate to the vegetative, which is fit for human consumption, and what is not fit ascends from vegetative to animal, until it reaches human consumption. Sensory experience testifies that it is a wondrous thing: that physical food becomes the cause of the soul's connection to the body, without which it cannot live. This necessitates that within the food there is an essence of holy vitality that nourishes the soul, while the physicality sustains the body.

Nevertheless, no spark of holiness desires to leave its place of concealment and ascend. As our sages stated, "Every blade of grass has an angel over it, striking it and telling it to grow." The holy spark is afraid of an impure occurrence, fearing it may fall before a wicked person who will cause it to descend even further by consuming it improperly, sinking it lower than it was before.

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It is only possible to elevate the sparks if a person approaches eating with the mindset that they are consuming sustenance provided by the King's palace—God's palace—within the food. When a person eats and drinks with this intention, they draw close to God through the act of eating, akin to the practice of Rav Hamnuna Saba, who would immediately elevate himself, similar to the sacrificial offerings. Through this process, all the worlds become unified, from the lowest and most material realms to the highest Divine Will, the Infinite One, blessed be He, through the unification of man and animal in the act of eating.

On a slightly lower level is a person who is righteous before God but does not elevate the sparks immediately through their eating. Nonetheless, the additional vitality they receive through their food—and the life-force it imparts—can also become elevated. This occurs through the Torah that the person learns and through every deed they perform for the sake of Heaven afterward. In such cases, the life-force from the food is eventually elevated.

However, Heaven forbid, if a person becomes coarse through their eating—eating merely to satisfy their desire, as it is said, “They ate and were satiated, and their desires were fulfilled”—then they cause the holy spark within the food to descend deeper and deeper into the realm of impurity. In doing so, they give life to and create more impure shells (*kelipot*), Heaven forbid. This is the spark's fear of elevation—it resists ascending unless it is certain that the one consuming it will refine and elevate it. As noted earlier, the spark must sometimes be forced upward, as described: “Every blade of grass has an angel over it striking it, saying, ‘Grow!’”

In truth, when a holy spark sees a place prepared for its elevation, it eagerly seeks to ascend. This is known from the teaching regarding the “lower waters” crying, saying, “We, too, wish to be before the King.” This refers to prayer, when a person approaches God with the true point of their heart, as it is said about Judah. Sometimes, at such moments, foreign thoughts or impure traits arise within a person. These are sparks seeking elevation, for they see that the person is in a state prepared to elevate them through repentance and to be made ready to serve in holiness.

Similarly, our forefather Jacob was afraid to descend to Egypt to elevate the sparks of holiness, akin to the grass that must be struck to grow or the cow being led to the slaughterhouse, where it is elevated through its slaughter and consumption. He was destined to descend to Egypt in chains of iron, but his merit protected him, and God promised him, “*I will also surely bring you up again*” (*Genesis 46:4*).

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Our Torah, a Torah of truth and faith, teaches that it is certainly forbidden for a person to deliberately place themselves in a situation of trial or to intentionally entertain foreign thoughts in order to elevate them, Heaven forbid. For who knows if they will overcome like a lion and succeed, or if they will descend lower and lower and fail the test, Heaven forbid?

However, if the trial arises unintentionally, without premeditation, then it is surely from God, meant to test them. In such a case, they must muster all their strength and devote themselves completely to repentance, for this is their ascent. This was the matter with King Solomon, who said, *"I will increase, and I will not falter"* (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Initially, he acted deliberately, intending to elevate sparks of holiness, but he did not withstand the trial.

This also aligns with the teaching of our sages: one who sees something beautiful among creations must bless, *"Blessed is the One who has such things in His world,"* even if it is a beautiful non-Jew. This does not contradict the prohibition of *"Do not show them favor"* (Deuteronomy 7:2), as that refers to intentionally placing oneself in a situation to observe their beauty, which is forbidden. One is not permitted to seek out such sights to say, "How beautiful is this non-Jew," whereas, if it already happens to be in front of them, they are certainly required to bless and elevate the enjoyment of the sight.

This parallels the story of Rabbi Akiva and the matron, as our sages said, "It was at a corner"—meaning it happened upon him by chance.

Initially, it is certainly forbidden, and doing so requires self-sacrifice, as in the concept of "falling on one's face" (*Nefilat Apayim*), as is known. The general principle of elevating sparks is that a person must reflect on everything that happens to them, for within every occurrence—whether good or bad—there is a flow of Divine energy related to that event. Since "like produces like," and everything is stirred by its kind, one must immediately connect to the Divine through the event that has occurred. By placing it in their heart, they recognize that this too is from God, for there is nothing besides Him, as it is written, *"His sovereignty rules over all"* (Psalms 103:19).

The attribute of *malchut* (sovereignty) rules over everything and gives life to all. Through connecting to the Divine, *malchut* ascends to *yesod*, which represents the connection. This is the "ladder set on the ground with its top reaching the heavens" (Genesis 28:12), facilitating ascension, as is known from the teaching that the righteous are the foundation of the world.

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Therefore, when Judah saw all the events that had unfolded before them—as the brothers said to one another, “*What is this that God has done to us?*”—he understood that these occurrences called upon them to elevate themselves. This is why “*Judah approached him*”—with his heart—even if he believed Joseph was an Egyptian or a foreigner. For God had already orchestrated these circumstances and arranged for them to be compelled to seek mercy and plead for their lives.

Thus, Judah said, “*Please, my lord*” (*Bi Adoni*), reflecting his role as the king of the House of David, whose sovereignty encompasses all, and in whom everything is included. He approached to connect with Joseph and ultimately with God. On a deeper level of truth, Joseph represents *yesod* (foundation), which connects with *malchut* (sovereignty). Hence, “*Please, my lord*” (*Bi Adoni*) holds both its simple meaning and its deeper, mystical truth.