

Joseph’s Body

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

Joseph’s Spark

In the Torah portion of *Vayigash* (read during the month of Tevet), Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father yet live?”¹ Joseph, the brother who was thought to have assimilated amongst the Gentiles (for a period of 22 years, from the age of 17), reveals himself suddenly to his brothers as a proud Jew, faithful to the traditions of his father, Jacob the Patriarch.

Joseph symbolizes the spark alive in the heart of each Jew, even one that appears to have assimilated amidst a foreign culture, estranged from the traditions of Israel. Though “I sleep” in exile, “my heart is awake”²—this is the spark of Joseph. “Every person has his day,”³ a time will come and the spark of Joseph will eventually be revealed for all to see: “I am Joseph, does my father yet live?”

Our matriarch Rachel called her first-born Joseph (Yosef), explaining that, “God shall add [*yosef*] to me *another* son.”⁴ In Chassidic writings it is explained that the special quality embodied by Joseph is the ability to favorably influence a Jew who has affiliated with those outside the fold (and thereby appears to be “an other”) to return to be a son to his Father in Heaven. Joseph is able to accomplish this because his spark has been burning in the heart of the estranged Jew all along (he who had appeared to be “an other”).

With Divine Providence, Joseph was sent to Egypt before his brothers in order to prepare the way—to implant in the land of Egypt the power of Jewish survival, which would become critical after the Jewish exile to Egypt. Thus, Joseph’s soul can be understood to hide in the recesses of the souls of his brothers—the children of Israel—in their exile, and it awakens them to go out of exile, since, as related by the sages, it was Joseph who gave over the password for redemption with his words, “God will surely remember you.”⁵

In the *Zohar*, it is stated that Joseph’s revelation to his brothers alludes to God’s own revelation to the Jewish People at Mount Sinai. God revealed Himself with the words, “I am *Havayah* your God who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”⁶ The awakening to depart from Egypt, which is the secret of Joseph’s revelation to his brothers, is really the manifestation of God’s essence amidst the Jewish People. With an awakening from below (with the initial desire from the Jewish People to



GALEINAI PUBLICATION SOCIETY

2 Hausner St. • Jerusalem 96431 • tel.: 972.547.533770 • info@gpsociety.org

be redeemed), a complementary desire is aroused from Above (from God to deliver His people). Essentially the two are really one and the same—"I am *Havayah*, Your God."

"I Will Sing Praises to My God While I Exist"

When the brothers returned to Canaan they brought good tidings: "Joseph is still alive." In turn, Jacob declared, "It is great; Joseph my son is still alive."⁷ Significantly, in each of the three excited pronouncements—"I am Joseph; is my father still alive" (אָנִי יוֹסֵף הָעוֹד אָבִי) (הָיָה) "Joseph is still alive" (עוֹד יוֹסֵף הָיָה) and "It is great; Joseph my son is still alive" (רַב עוֹד הָיָה יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי הָיָה)—the word "still" (עוֹד) is prominent.

There is an important verse in Psalms which also prominently stresses the word "still": "I will praise God while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I still exist"⁸ (אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה בְּחַיִּי אֲזַמְרָה לְאֵלֹהֵי בְעוֹדֵי). About this verse, the first Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, explains in *Tanya*⁹:

When it states, "I will praise God [*Havayah*] while I live; I will sing praises to my God [*Elokim*] while I still exist," it indicates that life is drawn down from God's name *Havayah*. But, the word "still" ["while I still exist"] refers to the body, which is secondary to the life-force of the soul, and therefore stems [only] from the Name *Elokim*.

From this statement in the *Tanya*, we learn that the word still (עוֹד) refers to the Jewish body, which is subordinate to the Jewish soul.

The Divine soul of a Jew is, "truly a part of God above."¹⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising that the soul has eternal existence. However, regarding the body of a Jew, from the verses which contain the word "still" and quoted above, we surprisingly learn that in any situation—even when it goes down to Egypt, described as "the nakedness of the land,"¹¹ the most impure state—it continues to live and thrive. In the Jewish body, there is an essential spark (in addition to the pure soul placed within) that enlivens and sustains it. Indeed, this spark is none other than Joseph's spark, the secret of "God [*Elokim*] will surely remember you."¹² This is also the secret of Joseph's first words to Pharaoh, "It is not me; God [*Elokim*] will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."¹³

The Power of Generation

The first expression of excitement ("when Joseph made himself known to his brothers"): "Is my father still alive?" refers Jacob, the elderly father's body. Afterwards, the excitement concerns the Joseph, the son's body, which also has been able to survive and thrive: "Joseph is still alive," and "It is great; Joseph my son is still alive."

Our patriarch Jacob is the archetypal soul of the *sefirah* of beauty, which in the supernal human form corresponds to the body itself, i.e., the trunk of the body.¹⁴ Joseph who is described as the *tzadik*, the righteous individual who is the foundation of the world,¹⁵ is the archetypal soul of the *sefirah* of "foundation," which in the supernal human form corresponds to the sign of the holy covenant, the site of circumcision (in the

introduction to Tikunei Zohar, it is referred to as “the body’s termination”). Thus, we find that both Jacob and Joseph allude to the body—to the main part of the body and to the body’s termination. That they are as one is referred to in the Zohar’s words, “the body and the site of the bond are considered one.”¹⁶

On the verse, “These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph...,”¹⁷ Chassidic writings explain that all the generations of Jacob were born via the power of Joseph (including those born before Joseph’s was born; as well as the generations yet to be born from then until the end of time). The living “still” (עוֹד) of Joseph refers to the “live organ,” the organ of procreation, in which is encloded the power of generation, also called the power of the Infinite—in both physical and spiritual forms, as explained by the Ba'al Shem Tov. This reflects the essential vitality of Jewish bodies: that each form is able to generate an infinite variety of new forms.

The closing verse of the Torah portion of *Vayigash* is, “And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the territory of Goshen, and they took possession of it and grew and multiplied exceedingly.”¹⁸ The power to be fruitful and multiply (exceedingly, beyond all measurement and limitation) is Joseph’s special power. Joseph comes, as we saw above, from the Hebrew word meaning “addition” (תוספת), as in the saying, “That which is God’s addition, exceeds greatly beyond the origin.” In the words of the first Lubavitcher Rebbe: “Every Jew should strive to make another Jew.”

The Month of Tevet and the Body

The sages express that the month of Tevet is the month in which one body enjoys another one.¹⁹ In the month of Tevet, one “still” (עוֹד)—one body—receives pleasure from another “still” (עוֹד), body; “Is my father still alive” receives pleasure from “Joseph is still alive.” The father (the body’s trunk) receives from the son (the body’s termination) and the son receives from his father. This is to enable the begetting of numerous Jewish progeny—called the hosts of God—until the time in which all the souls in the (supernal, heavenly) body (the source of all souls) will have been brought into bodily form.²⁰ It is only then that the Mashiach will appear.

The anniversary of the passing of the first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, known as the Alter Rebbe, author of the *Tanya* and the *Shulchan Aruch*, is on the 24th day of Tevet. The Alter Rebbe used to say that in the world to come, the soul will be nourished from the body. There will be a reversal of nature: the essential (the soul) will become incidental while what was once incidental (the body) will become essential. This is the deepest secret of “Joseph is still alive.” The spark of Joseph (which is in each Jew) will live eternally, while the soul (the aspect of “I will praise God [*Havayah*] while I live”) will receive its principal vitality from the body which will live forever.

¹. Genesis 45:3.

². Song of Songs 5:2.

-
- ³. Mishnah *Avot* 4:3.
 - ⁴. Genesis 30:24.
 - ⁵. Genesis 50:25. When Moshe Rabbeinu came to tell the people that the time of the redemption had come, they tested him as to his knowledge of this password.
 - ⁶. Exodus 20:2.
 - ⁷. Genesis 45:28.
 - ⁸. Psalms 146:2.
 - ⁹. Chapter 6.
 - ¹⁰. *Tanya*, Chapter 2.
 - ¹¹. Genesis 42:9.
 - ¹². Genesis 50:24.
 - ¹³. Genesis 41:16.
 - ¹⁴. Introduction to *Tikunei Zohar*.
 - ¹⁵. Proverbs 10:25.
 - ¹⁶. *Zohar* III, 223b.
 - ¹⁷. Genesis 37:2.
 - ¹⁸. Genesis 47:27.
 - ¹⁹. *Megilah* 13a.
 - ²⁰. *Avodah Zarah* 5a.