

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM RABBI YITZI

PARSHAS VAYIGASH

Anguish Yes, Fear No

In this week's parsha, Vayigash, we read of the descent of the Jewish people into their first exile, Egypt. As they are about to exit the Holy Land, Hashem tells Yaakov, "don't be afraid to go down to Egypt, because I will make you into a great nation there. I am going down to Egypt with you..."

Rashi explains that Yaakov was "anguished over leaving the Holy Land." How could I lead my family away from the best place for them to become a nation, the place most conducive to be a Jew and to be close to Hashem? How will we become Hashem's nation in a dark and distant exile?

Hashem tells him "don't be afraid to go down to Egypt, because I will make you into a great nation there. I am going down to Egypt with you..."

While Hashem allays his fears about going down to Egypt, He does not even mention Yaakov's anguish over leaving Israel. Why not? Since this is Hashem's message to Yaakov as he goes down to the first Jewish exile, there must be lessons here for every Jew on how to deal with the exile. What are those lessons?

Being in exile, one may feel that it is a lost cause trying to make a difference in a Jewish way. Hashem is telling us that the opposite is actually the case. The fact that Hashem puts us in a predicament, means that this situation is most conducive to accomplish our mission, it is here where we will be most effective and most successful.

The key is not to be afraid of the situation, don't be afraid of the exile, embrace it and find how to use your predicament to effect even greater change.

This is what Hashem tells Yaakov " don't be afraid of going down to Egypt, because I will make you into a great nation THERE." Why shouldn't you be afraid? Why will you succeed? Because Hashem is going down with you.

Now, if we succeed, there is the possibility to become comfortable and lose focus of our purpose. This is why Hashem doesn't mention Yaakov's anguish, because it is his anguish that will keep him focused on his essential purpose and bond with Hashem. This anguish is the force behind our success.

Sometimes I feel, that if only Hashem would speak to me, as he did to Yaakov, it would be so much easier to deal with the pain and suffering. But then I remind myself, that everything in Torah is Hashem talking to me. It is not easy to see it that way, but it is true. It takes effort and thought, again, it is not easy, but if you can put this in focus, you will find comfort in knowing that Hashem is talking to you and He is always with you, you are Yaakov.

So we need both, first, not to be afraid and second, the anguish. We need to realize that although we can succeed greatly in exile, it is not our place. We must cry out to Hashem that He send Moshiach and bring the exile to an end. May it happen soon.

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I want to thank my wife Dina, for her help writing this article.

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