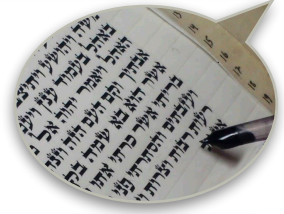




The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Bereshit

Parshat Vayigash

Tevet 5784 / December 2023

Yosef's Strength in Vulnerability

By Jeff Mond

I'm not a big dvar Torah guy.

I could probably analyze that statement and write about it, but that would be a different dvar Torah.

My hope is that this dvar Torah makes you think. That it has meaning to you and can make a positive impact on your life in some way. At a minimum, I hope you like it.

But I guess you wouldn't be reading this if you didn't like divrei Torah.

One of the most important storylines in *Parshat Vayigash* is about Yosef revealing himself to his brothers, who had sold him to slavery many years ago. No surprise, the brothers felt immense shame and guilt. What's interesting is that Yosef felt empathy. It's extremely hard to comprehend the overwhelming emotions felt by Yosef at that moment. How could he possibly feel empathy for the brothers who treated him so horribly and essentially left him for dead?

The Torah informs us that Yosef wept. My translation: he allowed himself to feel the full weight of his feelings. He allowed himself to feel vulnerable.

וַיִּבֶךְ יוֹסֵף בְּדִבְרֵם אֵלָיו

And Joseph wept when they spoke to him (Bereshit 50:17)

Many of us were taught that to be strong, we need to be tough. I believe there is strength in vulnerability. To be vulnerable with others and, more importantly, with yourself. Allowing yourself to feel, even if it's scary and even if it's painful. Processing and sitting with these emotions, letting the understanding of those emotions guide your actions, that is strength.

Feeling this pain yourself increases your capacity to feel the pain of others, that is true empathy.

To better understand yourself is to better understand all humans around you, that is the human condition. And it is how we can be the best version of ourselves and to ourselves and to others.

It's not a perfect analogy, but I've recently thought about emotions—happiness, sadness, anger, fear, etc.—and how they are like the seasons of the year—winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Both come go. We experience them, they pass, and we move on. And then we experience them again. There is no need to shy away.

There is one constant and that is that they always change. You can't hold on to an emotional state. Emotions aren't inherently bad or good, they just are.

I'm a new member of this community. I've lived here for a year and a half. One of the characteristics I've heard used to describe this community is its "warmth". This "warmth" is just another word for compassion and empathy. And I've felt it. It's a beautiful thing.

Each person can contribute to this warmth in their own way. Some people are good at giving emotional support, some are more in tune with people's physical needs, and others just know how to make you smile. Knowing yourself is knowing your strengths and how to do what you are best at.

As the community continues to grow, if we each take the personal responsibility to be vulnerable with ourselves like Yosef, we can learn a deeper sense of empathy for ourselves, for our community, and for others.

Jeff, a Jersey boy, and Sara, a Tennessee girl, somehow ended up in Westchester, moving to the community a year and a half ago during the great COVID migration. They have two loving twin boys, Oliver and Caleb, who are as sweet as they are mischievous. A fitness/health enthusiast and lover of all things music, you can find Jeff at the gym or dancing at the occasional rave. He is also the future founder of the YIS choir if he can learn how to sing.

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