

Parashas Vayigash – Goshen: a Blueprint for our Destiny – by David Levy

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The B'nei Yissoschor (Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapiro 1783-1841) dicusses why Yaakov sent Y'hudah down to Goshen ahead of the rest of the family and why does it not say לגשן but rather גשנה?

He explains that the גלות מצרים was the root of all four later גליות, namely Bovel (Babylon), Modai (Persia), Yovon (Greece) and Edom (Rome). This is hinted to in Sh'mos 2:23 where it says ויהי בימים ויהי רובים and the letters of רבים indicate the four exiles of מדי בבל יון מדי.

He then cites the Maharal of Prague who in his Sefer נר מצוה notes that the four kingdoms where we were exiled each attacked a different כח of the Jewish people namely our נפשיי (soul), גופניי (physical body), and שכליי (intellect). Bovel in destroying the First Beis HaMikdosh and preventing us from offering Korbonos attacked our souls because it says in relation to Korbonos in Vayikroh 2:1 ונפש כי תקריו. The next kingdom Modai attacked our bodies because Homon tried to destroy us physically. Yovon attacked our intellect and tried to wean us away from our religion and beliefs. Rome in our long 2000 year exile has attacked הכל or all three: first it destroyed the Second Beis HaMikdosh, again preventing us from offering Korbonos; in the Middle Ages and beyond we were persecuted physically in the Crusades, the Inquisitions and various massacres. Finally in more recent times, beginning with the Haskalah when we have been accepted into non Jewish society our intellect and faith have again come under attack with the danger of assimilation. So the Rome exile incorporates a Bovel phase, a Modai phase and a Yovon phase and it is the latter which we are currently living in.

The strange word גשנה alludes to these four exiles: נ = נפשיי; ג = גופניי; ש = שכליי; ה = הכל (B'nei Yissoschor even ascribes significance to the Minhag on Chanukah for children to play with a Dreidel on which (in Chutz Lo'retz at least) the same letters ש ג ה נ appear. These too represent the 4 kingdoms. The Dreidel is spun around the central point which represents כלל ישראל and which always remains in place as these four letters rise and fall in their turn).

Yaakov understood that the גלות מצרים was the root of the four later גליות and that is why he sent Y'hudah ahead to work in conjunction with Yosef to defend us from these attacks upon us. It is mentioned in Talmud Succah 52b and elsewhere that the final גאולה will come about first through משיח בן יוסף and then through משיח בן דוד. The G'matriya of משיח is 358 which equals the G'matriya of גשנה and also of נחש (which represents the Yetzer Hora) so משיח is the antidote to that and the four kingdoms. When Moshiach comes we will truly be able to see that: יקיק מלך יקיק מלך, the G'matriya of which phrase is 358!

This amazing Ma'amar of the B'nei Yissoschor was brought to my attention a few years ago at Start Your Day the Torah Way by Rabbi Shmuel Kimche. In a different Wort at the same venue also relevant to Parashas ויגש, Dr Shalom Springer quoted Rav Moshe Shapiro who observed that any word where ג and ש are juxtaposed has a significance which is ambiguous or ambivalent. Commentators are divided as to whether ויגש אליו יהודה means that Y'hudah drew near (יגש) to Yosef in a submissive or an aggressive manner (or perhaps a combination). The B'nei Yisroel dwelt in גשן which was part of Egypt but was a separate part (the first Ghetto?). A פילגש (concubine) is a partner to a man but not in the sense of being fully married. A גשר (bridge) connects but also allows each side to retain its own identity. גשם (rain) can be a blessing or a catastrophe. No doubt you can think of other examples though there are not that many Hebrew words where these letters appear adjacent to each other in that order.

These Divrei Torah illustrate how לשון קודש is clearly unique in the depth of meaning conveyed by its individual letters and words.