

TORAH PORTION
"VAYIGASH", JANUARY 1-7, 2006

***"ALL WE NEED IS—A CHANGED HEART"*¹**

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As I'm writing this week's commentary, Israel's Prime Minister, Mr. Ariel Sharon is fighting for his life! No one is sure about the exact outcome and how long it will take until he is announced dead. I'm sure that most of you are following the news coming out of Zion these days as well.

Here in Israel, we are entering a new year (at least according to the worldly/pagan calendar), and I believe that we are certainly at the threshold of "a new thing", some kind of an unknown "turn" in Israel's destiny. The people of Israel are praying for Sharon to overcome this (significantly strong) stroke he has suffered. I personally pray from the depth of my heart for his *salvation!* I pray that while in this very difficult situation, that Sharon will have visions and visitations from the Almighty, and from our wonderful Lord and Savior, and that he will be given a chance to repent and accept Yeshua in a true way! This is *not* the time to get into disputes regarding politics, as we all make mistakes, and we *all* are a bunch of imperfect human beings.

This "new" year, each one of us, as well as every individual living on the face of this planet, must examine his/her own heart. A real change in this fallen world will only come when a real change within our own hearts take place. Every year around this time, people wish one another a better year than the one before. But, if we were to honestly look back at our previous year, could we really say that it was a better year than the one before? I'm sure for some of us it was indeed, but what about most of us? Was it indeed a better year? Again, in my humble opinion, the problem does not lay at all in the opening of any "new" year, whether it is "new" according to God's Biblical calendar or a pagan one. Real success and prosperity do NOT depend on any calendar, or any political leader. As mentioned above, our real success depends directly on the condition of our own HEARTS!

This week's Torah portion describes the long awaited reconciliation and restoration of Joseph to his brothers and his beloved father. Indeed, we can say that from that moment on, this was indeed "a better new year"/beginning for the family of Israel! But what preceded all of this? Last week we discussed the time period just before the resurrection, which is characterized mainly by the process of "walking through the valley of the shadow of death" or a "death to self" process. This week's portion continues with this same theme. Just moments before everything is going to completely change for the better, something crucially important needs to take place. While leading us through "the valley of the shadow of death" (life's hard and almost impossible circumstances), what is the real thing that God wants to accomplish in us? He wants to lead us into a new condition, that of a complete heart change! Actually, any process of "death to self" (if we truly agree to walk through it), will eventually lead us to a true change of heart!

This week's portion begins with Judah approaching Joseph in a very special and significant way. He values himself only as, "your servant" (Gen. 44:18; In Hebrew, "*Avdechah*" can be translated also as "your slave"). And, he acknowledges Joseph's very special position: "You are even like Pharaoh" (Gen. 44:18, a beautiful picture/foreshadow of Yeshua's very special position with God).

Now, please remember that this was the very Judah who initiated the selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelites! Go read Genesis 37:24-28. Does it not remind you of yet another Judah? Find the answer in Matthew 26:14-16.

Indeed, it seems like last week's Torah portion and this week's portion deal with two different "Judahs"! What caused Judah to have such a different attitude/approach? What made him such a humble/meek person? What exactly caused his complete change of heart? As you remember, last week's portion dedicated one whole chapter to Judah's experiences while Joseph was in Egypt (Gen. 38). Anyone reading this chapter carefully can clearly see "the valley of the shadow of death" which Judah needed to go through. He was separated from his brothers and father as he went down (both physically and spiritually as we can clearly see). He lost his wife and first two of his three beloved sons. Unknowingly, he slept with his daughter in law, was humiliated by her (when discovering who she really was), and bore two sons from her.

All of the above experiences that Judah needed to go through did NOT occur in a short time period. After all, it takes some time to find a woman, marry her, have three sons with her, lose her, have two more sons out of his daughter in law, etc., etc. As I mentioned in last week's commentary, this "death to self" process does take some time, it is not a McDonald's paced fix!

God allowed Judah to go through this "valley of the shadow of death" in order to break the "old Judah" away from him, and bring about the "new Judah", clothed with "new garments" (i.e. having a sacrificial love and compassion towards his old father, see Gen. 44:18-34).

Yes my beloved, as it was back then, so it is in our own times! For two thousand years now (foreshadowed by Joseph's twenty years in Egypt), God has been allowing His chosen people (the Jews, foreshadowed by Judah) to go down through a long process of "death to self" (i.e., being dispersed among the nations of the world, persecuted, humbled, murdered etc., etc.). God has been allowing His beloved people to walk through "the valley of the shadow of death" for many years now. Actually, this "breaking, shaping and molding" process continues to this very day! Yes! Even in our own homeland—our own Promised Land, we are still facing uncertainties, hardships, wars, terror attacks, political instabilities (look at Sharon's present condition) and so on.

The only question is: When are we going to cooperate with the Almighty and turn back to Him in true repentance? When are we going to humble ourselves and admit that we can not do anything without Israel's Messiah? Without His great mercies? Without His forgiveness? This is again, foreshadowed by Joseph in Genesis 45:5. I don't know the exact timing God has on His Biblical calendar, but there's one thing that I can tell you for sure: His promises are true, and they *will indeed* be fulfilled. Whether it takes a few more years, or many more years, God *is* going to eventually accomplish what He had designed from before the foundation of the world! How do I know it? By simply reading the Torah portions and by considering the great pictures, patterns and foreshadows presented there! May we all know Him better this "new" year, and most of all, may we all have a better understanding of the very special and significant time which we are living in!

Blessings from above, In Him,

Rami