

Vayigash

The ancestral stories in the Torah are truly reflections of future Jewish conditions. The Portion of *Vayigash*¹ particularly mirrors a phenomenon of American Jewish life. How often have we met Jews whose authenticity we have doubted? Suspicions are raised, for they do not speak as Jews ought to speak.

In the previous Portion we read how Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. In *Vayigash* they eventually do so, but not until Joseph carries on a dialogue, realizing that at first they are not convinced of his claim.

"*Ani Yosef*"—"I am Joseph," is followed by "*Ani Yosef Achichem*"—"I am Joseph, your brother," and he proceeds to retell the events that led to his becoming Viceroy of Egypt. Seeing the apparent blank stares of his brothers, Joseph, our Sages explain, asks his interpreters and advisors to leave, and proceeds to speak for the first time in *Lashon Hakodesh*—the Language of Torah—as can be detected from the words, 'See it is my mouth that is talking to you.'²

Upon hearing "their language"—the language of their ancestors—in words that reveal an eternal link with their heritage, the brothers of Joseph are able to recognize that he is truly a Jew—their brother, Joseph.

"All the years during which Israel spent in the wilderness, the Ark containing the bones of Joseph, and the Ark containing the Tablets of G-d's Law, traveled together."³

The Josephs, those who dedicate themselves to the study and observance of Torah under the most exceptional circumstances, living and speaking as a Jew ought to live and speak, survive. The *Midrash*⁴ expresses this idea most beautifully: "While the Israelites traveled on, two sparks of fire flashed from the staves of the Ark to confront their enemies." Jews who carry with them their own Ark and Torah can travel with assurance of security. The staves represent Jewish self-pride, a self-pride stemming from the *Kedusha* one attains through Torah study.

The Chofetz Chaim, of saintly memory, used to say, in the name of a great Torah scholar, that to seek inspiration to study Torah, one should have in mind three basic principles: (1) that no more than one day remains for him to live; (2) that he has no more than the one chapter of the Mishna with which he is now occupied; (3) that he is the only Jew whom the A-mighty has commanded to study the Torah, and the fate of the world thus depends on him alone.

By encouraging the study of Torah on a daily basis, exposing the language and thought process of our remarkable heritage, all Jews will once again speak Jewishly.

A final thought—Joseph removed the ‘interpreters’ from his presence. He realized that, to present the authentic and true essence of who and what he was, the veil of ‘foreign interpretation’ must be abrogated. We have seen the havoc caused by those who claim to ‘interpret’ Judaism. We must educate our people to the extent wherein they will be able to make *Havdallah* and separate those who present Torah in its true light from those who present their light as the true Torah.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bereishith 44:18 - 47:27
2. Ibid. 45:12
3. Sotah 13a
4. Bamidbar Rabba 5:1