



Reconnection Torah Reflections on *Parashat Va-yigash*

Genesis 44:18 – 47:27

In this week's Torah reading, *Va-yigash*, we witness a great healing that comes when Joseph, the now-powerful right-hand-man to Egypt's Pharaoh, reveals his true identity to his long-estranged brothers.

Years earlier, Joseph aroused his brothers' jealousy as a young man with grand dreams and as their father's obvious favorite child. Joseph's brothers conspired and sold him into slavery. Everyone in Joseph's family suffered the legacy of that horrible conflict. Joseph was cut off from his family and survived repeated deprivations as a servant and then as a prisoner in a foreign land (Egypt). Back in Canaan, Joseph's father, Jacob, was led to believe his son had been killed by a wild beast, and remained in sorrow thereafter. We can only imagine the sense of guilt, loss, and remorse that plagued Joseph's brothers, who brought about this family tragedy and who continued to hide the truth about it from their father.

Now we find all of Jacobs' sons in the same room, in the Egyptian palace where the powerful Joseph dispenses grain to famine-stricken petitioners. Joseph has recognized his brothers, has tested their loyalty, has taken steps to make a permanent hostage of his younger brother Benjamin; and all the while his brothers have not realized that the high official before them—with his courtly Egyptian dress and commanding speech—was their own flesh and blood.

The moment of truth arrives. Judah takes a huge risk and approaches the menacing official, unbidden. He offers his own life in servitude to buy Benjamin's release. In a moving speech, Judah pleads for the welfare of his (and Joseph's) younger brother Benjamin, and for the welfare of their ailing father in Canaan.

Then in Genesis 45, Joseph can hold back no longer. Years of hurt and resentment seem to melt away as he breaks into tears and declares, "I am your brother Joseph." From that point on, Joseph is able to move into completely new territory in his relationship with his brothers. He announces that they need not be distressed about what they did to him earlier, for he had come to see this was all for the ultimate good—part of God's plan for the family's survival during the years of famine. Joseph asks about his father, and makes arrangements for food and gifts for each of his brothers. Everyone weeps together. Eventually the other brothers find their voices and are able to talk again. The text does not spell out what words they then shared with Joseph—one can imagine some of the intriguing possibilities! The narrative continues with a great sense of both relief and redemption.

Reflecting on the coming together of Joseph and his brothers allows us to consider the trajectory of our own lives. May we find the strength, the inspiration, and the willing partners to open and sustain evermore deep, honest, loving relationships.

Some questions to consider:

- If you have ever shared a deeply-hidden, yet essential part of yourself with another person, what was that like? How did that open or shift the path of your relationship(s)?
- Is there something you wish you could reveal to a loved one or a close friend? What steps can you take in that direction? What stands in the way?
- What risks are you willing to take on behalf of someone you love?

If there is a place of hurt or resentment in a relationship you value (or once valued), can you envision a healing release and reconnection?

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