

# The Shul

at the Lubavitch Center

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January 4, 2020

VaYigash

7 Tevet, 5780

## Do You Know Your Soul?

The story of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers after decades of bitter separation is one of the most dramatic in the Torah. Twenty-two years earlier, when Joseph was seventeen years old, his brothers kidnapped him, threw him into a pit, then sold him as a slave to Egyptian merchants. In Egypt, Joseph spent twelve years in prison, from where he rose to become viceroy of the country. Now, the moment was finally ripe for reconciliation.

“Joseph could not hold in his emotions,” the Torah relates in this week’s parshah. He dismissed from his chamber all of his Egyptian assistants, “and he began to weep with such loud sobs that the Egyptians outside could hear him. And Joseph said to his brothers: ‘I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?’ His brothers were so astounded, they could not respond.”

### A Sage Weeps

The Talmud relates that whenever the great sage Rabbi Elazar came to this verse — “his brothers were so astounded they could not respond” — he would weep. Rabbi Elazar would say, “If the rebuke of a man of flesh and blood (Joseph) is so powerful that it causes so much consternation, the rebuke of G-d (when it comes) will all the more so cause much shame.”

Yet, two points in Rabbi Elazar’s statement seem to be amiss. Firstly, the verse does not say that the brothers were astounded because Joseph rebuked them. Perhaps the brothers were astounded by the realization that the man standing before them was none other than their long lost brother Joseph?

Secondly, the comparison between Joseph’s rebuke of his brothers and G-d’s rebuke of mankind seems to be exaggerated. The brothers personally sold Joseph into slavery, subjecting him to the worst type of abuse. It stands to reason, therefore, that they would be utterly in shock when they finally faced him. Could any of us have ever have caused a similar affront to G-d, as to experience such dread in the face of G-d’s rebuke?

### Our Inner Dreamer

To understand this, we must recall the idea stated a number of times that all of the figures depicted in the Torah are not just physical people who lived at a certain period of time. They also embody particular psychological and spiritual forces, existing continuously within the human heart.

Joseph is described in the Torah as a beautiful and graceful lad, “handsome of form and handsome of appearance,” and as a “master of dreams.” According to the Kabbalah, Joseph symbolizes the pure and sacred soul of man.

Thus, to understand the story of Joseph, we must understand the nature of our own soul.

### A Portrait of the Soul

What does a soul look like? What elements of our personality can we attribute to our soul?

In the Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi defines the soul as a flame that seeks to depart from its wick and kiss the heavens. “The soul,” he writes, “constitutes the quest in man to transcend the parameters of his (or her) ego and become absorbed in the source of all existence.”

The sixteenth-century Kabbalist, Rabbi Elazar Azkari, wrote a prayer which describes the soul in these words: “My soul is sick with love for you; O G-d, I beg you, please heal it by showing it the sweetness of your splendor; then it will be invigorated and healed, experiencing everlasting joy.”

The soul, in other words, is that dimension of our psyche that needs not self-aggrandizement, dominance or excessive materialism. It despises politics, manipulation and dishonesty. It is repulsed by unethical behavior and by false facades.

What are its aspirations? The soul harbors a single yearning: to melt away in the all-pervading truth of G-d.

### The Abused Soul

Yet, how many of us are even aware of the existence of such a dimension in our personality? How many of us pay heed to the needs of our soul? In response to the soul’s never ending dreams and yearnings that confuse our ego-based schedules and disturb our cravings for instant gratification, we so often take the “Joseph” within us and plunge it into a pit. We attempt to relegate its dreams and passions to the subconscious cellars of our psyche.

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When that does not work, because we can still hear its silent pleas, we sell our "Joseph" as a slave to foreigners, allowing our souls to become subjugated to forces and drives that are alien to its very identity.

Can you imagine how horrified you would be if you were to observe somebody taking the little adorable hand of an infant and placing it on a burning stove? The Chassidic masters describe each time we utter a lie, each time we humiliate another human being, each time we sin, as precisely that: taking the precious innocent spirituality of our soul and putting it through abuse and torture.

### Moment of Truth

Yet, in each of our lives the moment arrives when our inner "Joseph," which was forced to conceal its truth for so many years, breaks down and reveals to us its identity. At that moment, we come to discover the sheer beauty and depth of our soul, and our hearts are filled with shame.

The humiliation the brothers experienced when Joseph revealed himself to them did not stem from the fact that he rebuked them for their selling him into slavery. Joseph's mere appearance to them constituted the most powerful rebuke: For the first time they realized who it was that they subjected to such horrific abuse and their hearts melted away in shame.

Similarly, Rabbi Elazar was saying, when the day will come and we will realize the G-dly and spiritual sacredness of our own personalities, we will be utterly astounded. We will ask ourselves again and again, how did we allow ourselves to cast such a beautiful and innocent soul into a dark and gloomy pit?

(by Yosef Y. Jacobson from <http://www.chabad.org/>)

### Community Information of Interest

**January 4: Two Parties and a State: Israel and the Jewish People 1980-1983. Lecture by Rabbi Dovid Katz.** "Too Much" – *The Collapse of Menachem Begin and the End of an Era.* This lecture will begin at 8:00 p.m. and be held at the Congregation Shomrei Emunah

### Seudah Shlishit סעודה שלישיית

Cantor and Mrs. Allan Berman are sponsoring  
Seudah Shlishit this Shabbat  
in memory of the Yahrzeit of Allan's mother,  
**Malka bas Avraham (Mitzi Berman).**

### 'The Rav's Friday Night Hashkafa Q&A Shiur for Men'

will take place **next** Friday night (Parshat VaYechi, January 10<sup>th</sup>)

at 8:00 p.m. and will be held at

the home of **Rabbi & Mrs. Larry Ziffer**, 2530 Farrington Road.

Questions can be submitted in advance to [rabbikaplan@chabadmd.com](mailto:rabbikaplan@chabadmd.com) or anonymously in the shul mailbox.

### Yahrzeits The Next Three Weeks:

Allan Berman	9 Tevet - Sunday night / Monday	for mother	Malka bas Avraham
Michael Frank	9 Tevet - Sunday night / Monday	for father	Ephraim Mordechai ben Shlomo
Howard Elbaum	11 Tevet - Tuesday night / Wednesday	for brother	Yaacov Kopel ben Avraham Menachem

### DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE

#### Friday, 1/3 — 6 Tevet

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  
Candles — 4:37 p.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:40 p.m.  
Father and Son Learning — 7:45 to 8:30 p.m.

#### Shabbat, 1/4 — 7 Tevet

Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.  
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:47 a.m.  
Beitzah Gemora Shiur — 3:55 p.m.  
Minchah & Seudah Shilishit — 4:25 p.m.  
Ma'ariv — 5:39 p.m.

#### Sunday, 1/5 — 8 Tevet

Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:45 p.m.

#### Monday, 1/6 — 9 Tevet

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.  
Ma'ariv — 8:15 p.m.

#### Tuesday — Fast of 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, 1/7 — 10 Tevet

Fast Begins — 5:56 a.m.  
Shacharit & S'lichot — 6:35 a.m.  
Mincha / Ma'ariv — 4:45 p.m.  
Fast Ends — 5:29

#### Wednesday, 1/8 — 11 Tevet

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  
Kerisus Gemora Shiur — 7:45 p.m.  
Ma'ariv — 8:15 p.m.

#### Thursday, 1/9 — 12 Tevet

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.  
Ma'ariv — 8:15 p.m.

#### Friday, 1/10 — 13 Tevet

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  
Candles — 4:44 p.m.  
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:45 p.m.