

פרשת
מקץ
Parashat Miketz

Bereshit / Genesis 41:1-44:17, Zechariah 2:14-4:7
Luke 4:16-31

Growing Spiritually and Maturing in the Faith

Most people who believe in the Lord God of Israel and in Yeshua His Messiah want to grow spiritually. Coupled with spiritual growth is also to mature in faith. The apostle Paul describes this as *“to be like Christ.”* Many however do not seem to understand what this means or how this is accomplished in living a daily repentant life style. In *Tehillim / Psalms 108*, the Psalmist opens saying, א שיר מְזֹמֶר לַדָּוִד: ב נִכּוֹן לִבִּי אֱלֹהִים אֲשִׁירָה וְאֶזְמְרָה אֶף-כְּבוֹדִי: *A song. A psalm of David. 108:1 My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing, I will sing praises, even with my soul. (NASB)* What does David mean that he will sing praises to the Lord even with his soul? What is it about the soul that makes this so significant? Note how this draws out an important point in relation to how some people understand repentance. Is repentance lived in a So'odic context (Zohar mysticism) in the sense that repentance is a desire that is not associated with the physical realm? The soul (nefesh) does not have a mouth in the sense that we can audibly hear our own spiritual voice. The nefesh is connected to our physical body, and as a result of the longing for our soul to praise the Lord, the praise of our souls become words which are expressed audibly for all to hear.

David's words "*even my soul*" (אֶף-נַפְשִׁי) is written in a peculiar way which translates literally as "*even my glory*" as he uses the root word כָּבֵד in reference to his soul. The significance of his words אֶף-נַפְשִׁי is in the reference to "*my glory*." Note how the glory of a man is in his heart. Man glorifies himself over and above others in his heart. This is a very easy thing to do and is something the Lord wants us to avoid. David states "*by his glory*," which is translated as "*his soul*," to say even his glory gives praises unto the Lord. This is important because it is only the one who humbles his soul (humbling his own glory) who is able to give praises unto the Lord by that which would rather set itself up to receive glory. Humbleness and repentance are key! In this week's Torah portion, Joseph was testing whether his brothers had changed, whether they had humbled their souls? Joseph did not take a So'odic approach to the testing of his brothers. He treated them in a particular way to see whether they had truly repented of their wicked ways, and to see how they would react, whether they would try to save themselves, or lay down their lives for one another? In today's world, there are a lot of self-help shortcuts that people try in an attempt to improve themselves. Some even look for an emotional experience, such as are some in the Pentecostal movement who seek a healing or a tongues experience over and above drawing near unto the Lord, and seeking first His Kingdom. It is thought by achieving these things, all problems may be solved and one may finally have become a "*mature Christian*." In reality, this only emphasizes one's immaturity in faith. In the *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 5:22* we read "*Ben Bag Bag says: Turn it and turn it, since everything is in it. And in it should you look, and grow old and be worn; and from it do not move, since there is no characteristic greater than it.*" What is the "it" that the Mishnah is likely referring to? Is this not a reference to the Scriptures, that which is a lifelong endeavor whereby laboring in the Scriptures changes us and our perceptions of the world. This process of studying the Scriptures also involves more than just reading the words of a text, it also involves reflection coupled with a practical interaction with the text in our lives. The on-going encounter with the biblical text gives each of us an opportunity to renew ourselves, to grow as individuals, and to strengthen our communal connections with one another which directly impacts our relationship with the Lord God of Israel. This is what it means to

grow spiritually and learn to be mature in our faith. Let's discuss this further in this week's study!

In this week's Torah portion, we are looking at *Bereshit / Genesis 42:1-16*.

Bereshit / Genesis 42:1-16

42:1 Now Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, 'Why are you staring at one another?' 42:2 He said, 'Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down there and buy some for us from that place, so that we may live and not die.' 42:3 Then ten brothers of Joseph went down to buy grain from Egypt. 42:4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, 'I am afraid that harm may befall him.' 42:5 So the sons of Israel came to buy grain among those who were coming, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also. 42:6 Now Joseph was the ruler over the land; he was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. 42:7 When Joseph saw his brothers he recognized them, but he disguised himself to them and spoke to them harshly. And he said to them, 'Where have you come from?' And they said, 'From the land of Canaan, to buy food.' 42:8 But Joseph had recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him. 42:9 Joseph remembered the dreams which he had about them, and said to them, 'You are spies; you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land.' 42:10 Then they said to him, 'No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 42:11 'We are all sons of one man; we are honest men, your servants are not spies.' 42:12 Yet he said to them, 'No, but you have come to look at the undefended parts of our land!' 42:13 But they said, 'Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our father today, and one is no longer alive.' 42:14 Jo-

seph said to them, 'It is as I said to you, you are spies; 42:15 by this you will be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here! 42:16 'Send one of you that he may get your brother; while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. But if not, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies.' (NASB)

א וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יִשְׁפָּכֶר בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְבָנָיו לָמָּה תִּתְרָאוּ: ב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי כִּי יִשְׁפָּכֶר בְּמִצְרַיִם רְדוּ-שָׁמָּה וְשִׁכְרוּ-לָנוּ מִשָּׂם וְנִחְיֶה וְלֹא נָמוּת: ג וַיִּרְדּוּ אֶחָיו-יוֹסֵף עֲשָׂרָה לְשֹׁכֵר בַּר מִמִּצְרַיִם: ד וְאֶת-בְּנֵימִין אֶתִּי יוֹסֵף לֹא-שָׁלַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת-אֶחָיו כִּי אָמַר פֶּוֹ-יִקְרָאנוּ אֶסּוּן: ה וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְשֹׁכֵר בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּאִים כִּי-הִנֵּה הָרַעַב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: ו יוֹסֵף הוּא הַשְּׁלִיט עַל-הָאֶרֶץ הוּא הַמְּשַׁבֵּיר לְכָל-עַם הָאֶרֶץ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶתִּי יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ-לּוֹ אַפְּיִם אֶרְצָה: ז וַיֵּרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת-אֶחָיו וַיִּכְרַם וַיִּתְנַכֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אֲתָם קְשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֵאֵינּוּ בָאתֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְשֹׁכֵר-אֶקָּל: ח וַיִּכַּר יוֹסֵף אֶת-אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָהוּ: ט וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֵלֶם לְמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם לָרְאוֹת אֶת-עֶרְוַת הָאֶרֶץ בָּאתֶם: י וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לֹא אֲדֹלְגִי וְעַבְדִּיךָ בָּאוּ לְשֹׁכֵר-אֶקָּל: יא כָּלָנוּ בְנֵי אִישׁ-אֶחָד גִּחְנוּ כְּנִיִּם אֲנַחְ-נוּ לֹא-הִינוּ עַבְדֶּיךָ מְרַגְלִים: יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם לֹא כִי-עֶרְוַת הָאֶרֶץ בָּאתֶם לָרְאוֹת: יג וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁנַיִם עֲשׂוֹר עַבְדֶּיךָ אַחִים | אֲנַחְנוּ בְנֵי אִישׁ-אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְהִנֵּה הַקֶּטֶן אֶת-אֲבִינּוּ הַיּוֹם וְהָאֶחָד אֵינָנוּ: יד וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵכֶם לֵאמֹר מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם: טו בְּזֹאת תִּבְחָנוּ חַי פְּרַעֲה אִם-תִּצְאוּ מִזֶּה כִּי אִם-כִּבּוֹא אֲחִיכֶם הַקֶּטֶן הִנֵּה: טז שְׁלַחוּ מִכֶּם אֶחָד וַיִּקַּח אֶת-אֲחִיכֶם וְאֲתָם הֶאֱסְרוּ וַיִּבְחָנוּ דְּבַרְיֵכֶם הֲאֵמַת אֲתָכֶם וְאִם-לֹא חַי פְּרַעֲה כִּי מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם:

In the MT, we read the manner in which Joseph tested his brothers according to *Bereshit / Genesis 42:13-15*, עֲשׂוֹר עַבְדֶּיךָ

אַחִים | אֲנַחְנוּ בְּנֵי אִישׁ־אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְהִנֵּה הַקָּטָן אֶת־אֲבִינוּ הַיּוֹם וְהָאֶחָד
 אֵינָנוּ: יָד וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵכֶם לֵאמֹר מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם:
 טו בְּזֹאת תִּבְחָנוּ חַי פְּרֹעֶה אִם־תִּצְאוּ מִזֶּה כִּי אִם־בָּבוֹא אַחֵיכֶם הַקָּטָן הַנֶּה:
*42:13 But they said, 'Your servants are twelve brothers in all, the sons
 of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is with our
 father today, and one is no longer alive.'* *42:14 Joseph said to them, 'It
 is as I said to you, you are spies; 42:15 by this you will be tested: by
 the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your young-
 est brother comes here! (NASB)* Based upon the narrative, his broth-
 ers considered Joseph to be dead. Joseph tested them by having them
 prove his youngest brother was alive. Joseph called them to action, to
 have one of them go and retrieve their brother for him. This is one of
 the major presuppositions of the Torah, and of Judaism, more emphasis
 is placed upon actions than on intentions, on the acts we perform rather
 than on the emotions we feel. In a similar way, the Lord is calling us
 to a life of action. This is also a foundational component of Teshuvah
 (repentance) to seek forgiveness from the Lord God our Father in heav-
 en and to turn (actions) from our sins. This is why the Tanach writes
 according to *Joshua 1:8 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out
 of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou
 mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then
 thou shalt make thy ways prosperous, and then thou shalt have good
 success. (KJV, הַסֵּפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּי וְהִגִּיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה,
 לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל־הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ כִּי־אָז תִּצְלִיחַ אֶת־דְּרָכְךָ וְאָז תִּשְׁקִיל:*
 Spiritual maturity takes discipline, and is the point of what is written
 according to *Midrash Tehillim 119, Part 1.*

Midrash Tehillim 119 Part 1

*1. Blessed are the upright in the way, who walk in the
 Torah of the Lord. King Solomon, may he rest in peace,
 said, The just man walks in his integrity, his children
 are blessed after him (Mishley / Proverbs 20:7). Now,
 if the children of a just man are blessed because of him,
 all the more so is the just man himself blessed. The Holy
 One blessed be He, asked of Abraham only that he be
 upright, as is said, Walk before Me, and be you upright
 (Bereshit / Genesis 17:1). So, too, Moshe said to Israel,*

You will be upright with the Lord your God (Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:13). The verse does not say, Before the Lord your God, but with the Lord your God. That is, If you are upright, you will be with the Lord your God. Wherefore? Because God Himself is upright, as is said, The Rock, His work is perfect, Just, and Upright is He (Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:4). The children of Israel are also upright, and the Torah is upright, as is said, The Torah of the Lord is upright (Tehillim / Psalms 19:8). Hence, it is said, Blessed are they that are upright in the way. The people of the generation of the wilderness were upright and saintly. According to Rabbi Eliezer, they are the saints referred to in the verse, Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice (Tehillim / Psalms 50:5). To receive the Torah, the children of Israel had to walk twelve miles forward for each of the Ten Commandments and twelve miles back. Hence, it is said, Blessed are they that are upright in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord. And so, purified, the children of Israel received the Torah. God said to them, You will eat no fat, of ox, or sheep, or goat (Vayikra / Leviticus 7:23), and though He did not tell them why not, they took obedience to the command upon themselves. God said to them, And when you will come into the land, and will have planted all manner of trees for food, then you will count the trees thereof as forbidden; there years will it be as forbidden unto you (Vayikra / Leviticus 19:23), and though He did not tell them why it was forbidden, they took obedience to the command upon themselves. And even after they took obedience to these commands upon themselves, they did not ask, what is to be the reward for our doing them? Hence, it is said, Blessed are they that are upright in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord.

The Rabbis in the Midrash on *Tehillim / Psalms 119* state that those

who walk upright are those who walk in the Torah (instruction) of the Lord. (see *Romans 3:31, Romans 7:12*) Solomon said those who walk in integrity, their children will be blessed. The rabbis point out the significance of *Devarim / Deuteronomy 18:13* which speaks of walking “with” the Lord your God, as opposed to walking “before” the Lord your God. The significance of “walking with” is that the Lord is upright, righteous, and holy. In parallel fashion, we too are to do the same. The Lord provided us with a plumb line for our lives, the Torah, which explains to us how to be righteous, holy, and upright, walking in the footsteps of our Father in heaven, and of Yeshua the Messiah, we are walking “with” them as a people who represent and bear the testimonies of God. Those who have done this are those who have entered into a covenant with God in blood through the sacrifice. Today this is accomplished through His Messiah Yeshua. Note how the rabbis speak of the receiving of the Torah, that the people walked ten miles forward for each of the ten commandments, and twelve miles back. The point is that living our lives for the Lord is not an easy task but is paralleled to one who takes steps forward, and then takes steps backward to evaluate where he has traveled, whether what he has done is pleasing to the Lord or not, and learning from his experiences. Did Joseph’s brothers learn from their experience and treatment of Joseph? They had to witness their sorrow of their father Jacob and perpetuate a lie for 30 years. Walking upright before the Lord is to do so according to His will and word, and not according to our own word, which may be the reason the people took twelve steps backward after having taken ten forward in their obedience to God’s Word. Midrash Tehillim 119 Part 1 concludes saying, “*And even after they took obedience to these commands upon themselves, they did not ask, what is to be the reward for our doing them? Hence, it is said, Blessed are they that are upright in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord.*” The significance of this is that we live our lives because of our love for the Lord God in heaven and not to receive a reward. True love takes this kind of approach to what we do in our relationship with others. Above all things, the Lord God of Israel wants us to demonstrate our faith (*Hebrews 11:6*). Faith is trusting in the character of God before we see how He is going to work things out. He has given us His Word, and His promises still stand. As we apply His ways to our lives He brings His promises to fulfillment by our trust

in His faithfulness. Just as our trust in other people grows with daily interaction, our trust in the Lord grows the same way.

In *Tehillim / Psalm 108:4*, the Psalmist says, הַ כִּי-גְדוֹל מַעַל-שָׁי 108:4 *For Your lovingkindness is great above the heavens, And Your truth reaches to the skies. (NASB)* We give thanks unto the Lord and offer praises because of His loving kindness. What does the psalmist mean that the truth of God reaches to the heavens? What is the truth the psalmist is speaking of? The modern theological approach to the “*truth*” of God is to direct us to believe in the Tanach (OT) man earned his salvation, and in the NT all we have to do is believe in the Messiah (the So’odic approach, i.e. hyper-grace movement). What was this truth the psalmist speaks of? The term *emunah*, rendered in English as “*faith*” or “*belief*,” occurs for the first time in the Bible in connection with Abraham in the Torah. After obeying God’s command to leave his family and home, Abraham is led to the land of Canaan which the Lord God promises to give to his descendants. The narrative tells us that a famine forces him to sojourn in Egypt, where Sarah’s beauty causes Pharaoh to take her as his wife, when Abraham claims she is his sister. Pharaoh blesses Abraham and sends him and his wife away. Back in the land promised by God, Abraham and his nephew Lot find that they cannot live together in peace, and each goes his own way. Lot is captured by enemies and then freed by Abraham. After these things, the Torah tells us, *Bereshit / Genesis 15:1-6* saying, 15:1 *After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.’ 15:2 Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ 15:3 And Abram said, ‘Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’ 15:4 Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ 15:5 And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ 15:6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (NASB)* Through the life of Abraham, the Lord promised him that he would have a child, and that the land would be given to his descendants. The Lord uses the stars as

a way to describe to Abraham so numerous will be your descendants that you will not be able to count them. What was Abraham's response to the Lord's promise? The Torah says *'15:6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (NASB)* What was the nature of Abraham's belief which the Lord God counted as righteousness? Was it simply a list of propositions? Was it simply a matter of Abraham accepting the Lord's statements as true, a sort of intellectual understanding (a So'odic faith) and belief to the truth of a series of propositions such as the following?

- *God exists.*
- *God communicates with individuals and makes promises to them.*
- *God has the power to keep the promises He has made.*
- *God may be relied upon to keep His promises.*

No, the context makes it very clear! Abraham's act of righteousness was found in the demonstration of his emunah (faith) and trust in God. If you think about this for a moment, there can be no doubt had Abraham been asked, he would most assuredly have affirmed the truth of these four propositions listed just above. The Torah, however, gives us no reason for thinking that Abraham ever asked himself the sort of questions that would bring into question these four propositions. The emunah spoken of in Scripture is more than the belief that certain statements about God are true; it is the belief in the Lord God of Israel that is coupled to trust and reliance upon Him, all of which call forth a behavior that is consistent with our faith, trust, and reliance upon the Lord. The point is to understand the meaning of emunah; where emunah is not something new in the NT as the modern theologies of Dispensationalism would teach, man *"earned"* his salvation in the OT, and now he lives by faith in the NT. I heard this nonsense for 10 years while attending a church in Ohio. The fact is, Emunah can be seen from



the text of the Torah. What we need to understand about *“the truth”* that is taught in God’s Word, this truth that reaches to the heavens, is not about an intellectual exercise. This truth is about who the Lord God our Father in heaven is, and the meaning of emunah, to trust and rely upon Him, that is coupled with the belief and practice of His word in our lives. Was this what had happened to Joseph’s brothers, they learned from their past actions and their faith had increased over the years due to the expectation the Lord would one day pay them back for Joseph’s life?

The Lord God is described as a God of emunah in Parashat Ha’azinu when Moshe writes *“The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of faithfulness [emunah] and without iniquity; just and right is He”* (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 32: 4*, הַצֹּרֵר תְּמִים פְּעֻלוֹ כִּי, כָּל-דַּרְכָּיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאֵין עֹל צְדִיק וַיִּשֶׁר הוּא:). The Lord God is not being described here as agreeing to the truth of certain statements. The verse itself teaches us of God’s character which makes it possible to appeal to a *“God of faithfulness,”* where He is faithful, He is upright and just, and He is righteous and holy. Notice the difference here, the Hebrew text speaks of a *“belief that He is able”* as opposed to a *“belief in His ability.”* Studying the context almost always reaffirms the point being made here about the interpretation of emunah according to the Torah. In *Devarim / Deuteronomy 9:23* Moses berates the children of Israel saying, וּבְשַׁלַּח יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם מִקְדֵּשׁ בְּרַנְעָה לֵאמֹר עָלֶיךָ וּרְשׁוֹ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָכֶם וַתִּמְרוּ אֶת-פִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלֹא הִאֲמַנְתֶּם לוֹ וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹלוֹ: *9:23 And when the LORD sent you on from Kadesh-barnea, saying, “Go up and take possession of the land that I am giving you,” you flouted the command of the LORD your God; you did not put your trust in Him and did not obey Him. (NASB)* Note how the Hebrew text is written, it says *“you believed him not”* using the word ve’lo he’emanatem (וְלֹא הִאֲמַנְתֶּם) saying that they did not listen to His voice, where emunah is faith that leads to what we do, how we live, and how we demonstrate our trust in the Lord God of Israel. The point is that the Torah teaches a believe in God as opposed to having a belief about God. The Scriptures automatically assume the existence of God. Nowhere do the Scriptures say that He exists, or that there is a command to believe that He exists. The Torah teaches clearly that the Lord God

is one in the Shema (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4*), and that He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. There is no question in the Scriptures about doubting the existence of God, as we see being posed in our modern times. The Torah does not teach or demand that emunah is a belief system, or that only certain statements are true. The fact of the matter is the Torah teaches us to trust in the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which finds its expression in our behavior (living out our faith). Judaism emerged from a the people's struggle with idolatry and the biblical command that demands loyalty to the one true God, creator of the universe. This loyalty is found in obedience to God's will as it is expressed according to His Word. Note that throughout the history of Israel, little attempt was made to inquire closely into the doctrines that one believed about God. Additionally, no attempt was even made to establish exactly what doctrines one ought to affirm. Furthermore, Judaism developed as a religion that was intimately connected with a distinct community of faithful people. The truth the psalmist speaks of in his psalm is of the Lord seeking a people to live by faith, to trust in Him, and to live righteous, holy, and just lives towards one another. This process of spiritual growth and maturity in faith involves more than just reading the words of a text, or going to church. These things require a deep reflection of who we are as the children of God which is coupled with a practical interaction with the Scriptures in our lives. The on-going encounter with the biblical text gives each of us an opportunity to take ten steps forward, and twelve backwards as we learn to grow as individuals in God's Word, and to strengthen our connections with one another which directly impacts our relationship with the Lord God of Israel. This is very likely what had happened in the lives of Joseph's brothers who fearfully expected the Lord God to bring judgment down on their heads because of Joseph's life. This is what it means to learn to be mature in our faith and to seek His Kingdom! To draw near to the Lord in faith, by studying His word, in prayer, humbling our lives, and the practical application of God's word in our lives.



