

# Doctor of the Soul – Parashat Vayeishev

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For some reason, people think that spiritual matters are to be taken lightly. They assume that if they have some kind of spiritual issue, it suffices to go to their local Rabbi – like the guy who sells their *chametz* before Pesach!

But this is a huge mistake. If, God forbid, one were deathly ill, he would certainly not be content going to his family doctor for cancer treatment. Only the very best specialist

will do. Considering that spiritual issues are no joking matter, as our very afterlife depends on them, shouldn't we look for the greatest expert to cure our non-physical maladies?

When the spiritual is not taken seriously enough, we become sick, to the extent that we may no longer realize we're in a spiritual coma. We go through "life" either sleepwalking or giving up religion altogether. When we do have a brief moment of reckoning, we blame ourselves for not listening carefully enough to the instruction that we were given. In truth, we were never properly instructed with the necessary advice to succeed.

Those who have studied the intricacies of a page of Talmud understand that Gemara learning is not for the uninitiated. One must first have a Rebbe to teach him the *aleph-bet*, basic Chumash, Mishnah, Jewish law, and many other important Jewish concepts before he can even begin to grasp a Talmudic debate. Similarly, in any relationship, one must study and understand the other person before they can truly grow close.

How much more does this apply when we want to grow close to God! When we feel distant or struggle to navigate life meaningfully, it's because we don't know how to break down the spiritual barriers that make it hard for us to relate to God. We need a Rebbe to hold us by the hand and explain to us the deepest "subject" of all. After learning from this great teacher, no matter how far we may be or however difficult life may seem, we will be able to draw close and grow ever higher.

Such a teacher was Joseph. Our *parashah* says, "These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph, at the age of seventeen, was a shepherd with his brothers by the *Yock*, but he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives" (Genesis 37:2). Rashi explains that Joseph is called Jacob's "generations" because he was the epitome of what Jacob represented. Just as his father brought those who were distant

near, so did Joseph. He is called "shepherd," the Torah's epithet for every true Jewish leader. His age of seventeen is specified because it is the numerical value of *TOV* (goodness). Joseph was completely good and kind toward all.

He was therefore able to identify the good points of even the lowest of the low and bring them back to God. To do so, he lowered himself by playing with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the children of the concubines, who represent the lowest Jews. Joseph understood that for them to rise to great spiritual heights, he would have to share his knowledge of God with them on their level. This is what made him greater than his brothers who were also shepherds.

Only the true Tzaddik who perceives Godliness on the most sublime level can radiate spirituality and Torah to us no matter how ill we may be. Only he can truly heal us so that we can finally live a life of accomplishment. This Tzaddik exists. May we merit finding him and attaching ourselves to him. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hashkamat HaBoker 4*