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Parshah

DRAWING CLOSER AT TIMES OF DISTRESS

As the much-awaited reunion between Yaakov and Yosef takes place, Yaakov chooses to say Shema. Why was Yaakov reciting *Krias Shema* just at that pivotal moment? Why was Yosef's emotional cry not mirrored by his father's own cry of joy at seeing his long-lost son?

The Netziv in Ha'amek Dovor explains that Yosef had been driven by a sense of responsibility to oversee the fulfilment of his dreams. By his own design, the brothers had already bowed to him and all that was missing was that Yaakov should now join in too.

Yosef's plan to achieve this was to approach Yaakov wearing royal clothing. From a distance, Yaakov would be under the impression that it was the King coming to meet him, and thus he would bow.

This plan had its shortcomings, however, as if Yaakov would bow to Yosef under false pretences, it could be argued that this would not be considered a true fulfilment of the dream.

When Yaakov did eventually bow to his son, it was, as Yosef had plotted, because Yaakov mistakenly identified him as Pharaoh. This realisation brought pain to Yaakov, and he was troubled by the fact that his own son had proactively caused him pain. Yaakov may have suspected that the dreams would be fulfilled, but did not share Yosef's view that they should be proactively achieved, and suffered some pain at the thought that his own son had tricked him into bowing.

Yosef recognised his own mistake and cried.

The Netziv points out a further twist to be found in Chazal. The *Braissa* (Maseches Derech Eretz) teaches us to put our own will aside in favour of Hashem's desire. This virtuous *midda* is cited as having its source in the emotional meeting described in our *pesukim* – as Yaakov refrained from kissing Yosef. Why is refraining from kissing his son seen as a fulfilment of Hashem's will?

Yaakov, despite his momentary pain would surely have been overpowered by the joy of the moment – as he reunited with his beloved son and any of his son's shortcomings would seem easy to forgive at that joyous moment. But Yaakov chooses to protest his son's actions – Yosef's kiss is not reciprocated. A father can free his son of the proactive responsibilities such as standing for him, but any slight or *bizayon* is unforgivable; he is simply not empowered to be *mochel*. Hence Yaakov expresses his disapproval by refraining from kissing his son. It is not emotions which carry the day for Yaakov; nothing besides for *Ratzon Hashem* counts.

Krias Shema, according to the Netziv came as a form of self-consolation. Yaakov needed to detach himself from the momentary *tza'ar*, by finding comfort in our only true source of strength – *Ahavas Hashem*.

Finding strength in Emuna in Hashem is not only a remedy for suffering, it can effect unprecedented change as we read earlier in the Parsha. *Binyamin* having been framed and found to be guilty of stealing Yosef's cup, was taken into Egyptian slavery. Yehuda, having guaranteed *Binyamin's* safe return won't let this happen, and daring to stand up to the Egyptian Viceroy's authority, stepped forward to speak.

A close look at the content of his words, shows that Yehuda's speech contained little substantive argument. In fact, of the 16 *pesukim* devoted to his words, it is only the last few which contain Yehuda's request; the rest – a detailed review of the story to date. Even if Yehuda chose to add emotive appeal to his

argument, does the Torah itself need to quote introductory sections of the script?

Sfas Emes offers a deeper meaning to Yehuda's words and says that Yehuda was doing more than pulling on the heart strings of an apparently ruthless ruler. Yehuda was superficially conversing with the human being in front of him, but the internal Yehuda was negotiating directly with *Hakodosh Boruch Hu*.

Yehuda carefully revised the story and convinced himself that each twist and turn is *rotzon Hashem*. As his belief is established firmer than ever before, he recognises that his entire destiny in Hashem's hands and puts his own wishes aside in favour of Hashem's wish. As he does so, he resolved to offer selflessly offer himself in *Binyamin's* place – as this too is clearly Hashem's will.

Yosef was profoundly affected by these words, and at this point could not withhold his identity any longer. Sfas Emes explains that it is Yehuda's self-improvement which has effected this change. Having himself undergone a process of connection to Hashem, he is cleansed and the effects of previous *aveiros* are removed.

The brothers had demonised Yosef, they had treated him as a stranger; and until now Yosef's actions towards his brothers had been mirroring that estrangement. Now, as Yehuda drew close to his own true inner self, and the effects of his *aveiros* dissipated, Yosef's façade naturally faded away – and Yosef could no longer withhold his identity.

Reconnecting to Hashem doesn't just dull the pain, but puts everything into perspective and allows the *yeshua* to arrive.

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