

Sometimes You Also Have to Cry – Parshat Vayigash

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For twenty-two years, Jacob did not see his son Joseph. Why, exactly at the moment of their meeting, did he need to recite Shema? And why did Joseph weep on Jacob's neck while he was in the middle of reciting Shema? We will reveal this wondrous secret in this week's discourse on the parsha.

This week's Torah portion is *parshat Vayigash*. In this *parsha*, all the events and mysteries of the past several *parshiot* are clarified and make up a spectacular mosaic of *hashgacha pratit* (Divine providence). Joseph's dreams had been fulfilled. Joseph was appointed viceroy of the entire land of Egypt and

was the “chief economist” during the years of famine, after having bravely overcome the difficult moral test with the wife of Potiphar.

In our *parsha*, Joseph kept himself estranged from his brothers until he accepted that they wholeheartedly regretted his sale, and then he revealed himself to them. Joseph’s brothers returned to their father Jacob and happily informed him that Joseph, their lost brother, was alive and that he was the viceroy over the entire land of Egypt and was the chief economist of the whole world. Joseph requested that Jacob come down to Egypt and undertook to support the entire family during the years of famine.

These good tidings revived the soul of Jacob after he had not seen Joseph for twenty-two years. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* encouraged Jacob to go down to Egypt and promised to bring him back from there at the appointed time. The Torah gives a detailed accounting of all the seventy souls of the house of Jacob who went down to Egypt.

All’s well that ends well. At that point, the moving encounter between Jacob and Joseph took place, after they had not seen each other for twenty-two years. And what actually happened when they met? Joseph fell on the neck of his father Jacob, while Jacob did not fall on the neck of his son and did not weep together with him. Why? Our sages explain that Jacob was reciting the *Shema* (Rashi on Genesis 46:29).

The truth is, I never understood this explanation. Did he really have to say the *Shema*, right then? Would it not have been more fitting for Jacob to rejoice with all his heart that Joseph had remained faithful to G-d despite all the hardships he had undergone, honoring this occasion by expressing his excitement at finally being with his son and thanking G-d? Why did he have to recite the *Shema* exactly at this exciting moment?

Some Torah commentators explain that Jacob wanted to express his immense love for the Creator, so precisely at this touching moment, he conquered his love and dedicated this time to the Creator. It's a nice explanation. But this then raises a question about Joseph. How could it be Jacob his father was saying *Kriyat Shema* while he is busy hugging and kissing his father and crying from excitement? Surely we need a clear explanation as to what is happening here.

Would it not have been more fitting for Jacob to rejoice with all his heart that Joseph had remained faithful to G-d despite all the hardships he had undergone, honoring this occasion by expressing his excitement?

There is one particular lesson taught by Rabbi Nachman that with its help we will be able to understand what happened at this special meeting between Jacob and Joseph. Rabbi Nachman teaches:

The seventy souls of the House of Jacob correspond to the seventy faces (aspects) of the Torah. "Faces" symbolize the ways of understanding and attaining the Torah. Every Jewish soul is rooted in one of the seventy souls of the house of Jacob. Correspond to them are the seventy nations and Gentile languages. Every nation has its own dominant character trait and desire that no other nation has, which conflicts with their attainment of the holiness included in the seventy facets of the Torah.

There is a general rule that before a person attains a new revelation in Torah, he must pass a test, and only after that will he be able to achieve a new attainment in Torah. Just as it is not possible to reveal the fruit until the shell or peel is removed, so too, before a person merits to a new attainment from the seventy facets of the Torah, he must undergo the test of exile amongst the seventy nations, meaning, he must be tested and succeed in standing up to the base desires and

character traits of the seventy nations. And only after he succeeds in withstanding the test will he then merit to a new revelation and higher level of understanding the Torah.

A new revelation of Torah is compared to a birth. The *Zohar* teaches that before giving birth a woman shouts out at least seventy cries. So too, when a man falls into the exile of the seventy tongues of the Gentiles, he is actually falling into the seventy types of desires. In order to be saved from them, he must shout from the depths of his heart seventy cries to escape from these base desires and to reveal the mysteries of wisdom.

But there is one desire—lust—which is the root of all the desires of all the nations, and therefore, it is considered to include within it all the types of desire and all the bad character traits of all the seventy nations. When a person wants to discover the totality of the wisdom of the Torah, the general aspect of the seventy facets of the Torah, he must undergo a test of lust, and when he withstands it, he will be purified from all the desires of all seventy nations and be worthy to receive the revelation of wisdom and attainment of the entire Torah. Therefore Joseph, before he merited to the revelation of the wisdom of the Torah, had to withstand a trial of committing adultery with Potiphar's wife. And when he withstood the test, the Torah says about him: "There is no one as perceptive and wise as you" (Genesis 41:39).

The best advice for withstanding the test of lust is to say the verses of acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven with great concentration, which are: "*Shema Yisrael*" and "*Baruch Shem Kavod*" ("Hear O' Israel" and "Blessed be the glory of His Majesty"). These two verses contain twelve words corresponding to the twelve tribes. When a person accepts upon himself the light of faith in G-d and is included in His Oneness, he connects himself to the holiness of the twelve tribes of G-d who represent the Kingdom of Holiness. This corresponds to the "woman who fears God." And in this way, he

uproots the Kingdom of Evil which corresponds to a “an evil woman (*zonah*),” i.e., the desire of lust.



*The best advice is to say the verses of acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom “Shema Yisrael” and “Baruch Shem Kavod”!
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However, Rabbi Nachman teaches, this advice is only useful when the test is a one-off test. When the tests increase with great intensity, one must also harness the power of weeping, crying to G-d with fiery tears, to be saved from this desire of lust and merit to the paths of holiness and the revelation of the wisdom of the Torah. We learn this from the story of Zimri ben Salua when he sinned with the Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and the people. The verse says: “They were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” (Numbers 25:6), and the *Targum Yonatan* explains that they were “crying and reciting *Kriyat Shema*,” because the power of the weeping combined with *Kriyat Shema* has the power to nullify this base desire (*Likutei Moharan* I, 36).

Now we can return to our *parsha*, and we will be able to understand the momentous encounter between Jacob and Joseph:

Joseph said to his brothers, "G-d sent me ahead of you in order to save your lives" (Genesis 45:5). Joseph didn't want his brothers to be overly regretful about selling him, because it was from G-d that this happened so that he would be able to sustain the entire world. On a deeper level, Joseph was hinting to them that G-d sent him to Egypt before them to stand up to the test with the wife of Potiphar, and thus, he paved the way for the entire Nation of Israel to withstand the test of the exile of Egypt, a country which was saturated in the basest desires and included within it the exiles of all the seventy nations.

And in truth, succeeding in standing up to the test of the exile of Egypt goes against all logic. The Midrash relates that the nations of the world were convinced that all the Jews who were born in Egypt were *mamzerim* because they were born as a result of illicit relations between the Egyptian men and the Jewish women. They had a seemingly logical claim: If the Egyptians had complete control over the Jewish men, isn't it all the more so true regarding their wives?" And yet, contrary to all logic, the entire Nation of Israel successfully guarded themselves against so much as a trace of forbidden relations.

This is what was in the minds of our forefather Jacob and Joseph the tzaddik when they met after twenty-two years. They knew that the Nation of Israel was about to descend into the exile of Egypt, a country which was immersed in lust and included the exile of all the seventy nations. Their only thoughts were about how to save the Nation of Israel from immorality. That is why Jacob recited *Shema* with his maximum concentration: in order to increase the holiness of the twelve tribes of G-d and thus save the Nation of Israel from lust and immorality.

But Joseph knew that the impurity of Egypt was so severe, that it was not enough just to recite *Shema*. He understood that he had to also add the power of tears and weeping to increase the power of faith and holiness. This is why Joseph wept over the

neck of Jacob: in order to increase the holy power of faith and the holiness of the tribes so that the entire Nation of Israel would have the ability to stand up to the test. Indeed, in their merit, the entire Nation of Israel withstood the test, as *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* testified about them Himself. We will quote the words of Rashi on the verse, "The tribes of G-d, testimony to Israel" (Psalms 122:4):

"The other nations were disparaging them when they left Egypt, saying that they were the offspring of adulterous unions. If the Egyptians had complete control over the Jewish men, isn't it all the more so true regarding their wives? Said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'I attest that they are the [true] sons of their [true] fathers' [meaning that none of them were the result of immorality]. He bestowed His Name upon them: the Reubenites (רֵאֵוִן), the Simeonites (שִׁמְעוֹן) (Numbers 26:7, 14). He added the letters of His Name, at both ends. The result is that this name י-ה is testimony to Israel."

Now we can understand why it is said: "Jacob and Joseph are considered *k'chada*." Jacob and Joseph are considered one (*Zohar, Vayishlach*, 176b). Jacob said the *Shema* and Yosef completed the intention of Jacob with his crying.

(Based on to *Likutei Halachot, Kriyat Shema* 4: 15)