

Parshas Vayigash – Jonathan Sykes (reprint)

ה' טבת תשע"ה – 26 December 2014 – שבת פ' ויגש

This week's parsha includes some of the most significant 'meetings' in the whole of Sefer Bereishit:-

- 1) Yosef meets /reveals his identity to Yehuda and his brothers (45:3)
- 2) Yosef meets Yaakov for the first time following 22 years apart (46:29)
- 3) Yaakov meets Pharaoh - the head of the super power of the age (47:7).

I would like to elucidate a few key messages from the way in which these meetings were conducted . This will hopefully give some insight into how we should relate to others within our own day to day lives.

- 1) '*Ani Yosef! Ha'Od Avi Chai?* - I am Yosef - is my father still alive?' This revelation according to Rashi citing *Bereshit Raba* stuns Yehuda and his brothers into silence, not out of surprise but out of **Busha - embarrassment**. Is this harsh? Surely this stunned silence would be an appropriate response given the number of years that Yosef had been missing and the circumstance to which he reveals himself to his brothers.

However, Yosef knew that his father was alive from the earlier statement by Yehuda - '*Yaish Lanu Av Zaken* - We have an old father (44:20)' . The Seforno emphasises this point "Ee Efshar Shelo Mait Midaagato Ailai, "How is it possible that you did not worry about father's health when you sold me?" (45:1) Yosef was almost mocking Yehuda by asking after the wellbeing of his father? - Why is it only now that you consider my father's feelings and not when you sold me?

Perhaps a striking message here is that even in this highly emotional circumstance the main motivation of Yosef is to ensure that there is a complete **Teshuva** for his brothers and that they consider their actions despite the long timeframes. He also cares passionately about his father's wellbeing and despite knowing he is alive, he needs to ask again.

- 2) When Yosef first sees Yaakov he is overcome with emotion and starts to cry on his father's neck - *Vayipol al tzavarav, vayeivk al tzavarav od*. Yaakov at this point is not crying but is involved in acknowledging **Malchut Shamayim** by reciting krias shema (midrash aggada).

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that Yaakov sought to channel the profound love that he now experienced towards Hashem. His feelings of this chesed could only be expressed by the recitation of "shema". He therefore turned his personal experience into a profoundly spiritual one.

We are blessed with the opportunity to embrace our own children far more frequently than every 22 years – an opportunity so often taken for granted. Yaakov's response should motivate us in our appreciation of Hashem for all the seemingly small things in life.

- 3) When Yaakov meets with Pharaoh (*Vayevarech Yaakov et Pharaoh* - "Yaakov blessed Pharaoh" in accordance with the usual way to meet a king (Rashi) . Pharaoh asks him "how many are the days of the years of your life?" Yaakov responds to Pharaoh as a **yirei shamayim** - as a Jew. "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained the days of the years of my fathers in the days of their sojourning".

Yaakov knew what would be required for the survival of his family over the coming years in Goshen: the toil of staying Jewish in a foreign land. It would be tough for his family as it had been for him (hence his old appearance - Ramban).

Yaakov knew and stressed that it would be essential to focus on the success of his father and grandfather over the coming years to help his family develop.

This meeting set the tone for the years to come and gave an insight into the outlook required for the family of Yisrael to maintain their identity through this Galut.

In summary we can see from the examples of these 'meetings' when we meet different people in our passage through life, be they family or friends, Jewish or non-Jewish, leaders or peers , it should be with the understanding that this is an opportunity for the creation of a Kiddush Hashem be it through speech , through tears or just silence.