

Parshas Vayigash

Rabbi Shmuel Soussan

In this week's parsha the Torah recounts the emotional reunion of Yaakov and Yosef. "And Yosef hitched up his wagon and went up to greet his father, Yisrael, towards Goshen, and he appeared before him, and he fell on his neck and he wept, and he fell on his neck more."

Yosef was the most beloved of Yaakov's sons. All of the Torah that Yaakov learned, he taught to Yosef. Yaakov saw in Yosef brilliant intelligence and wisdom. In Yosef he saw all of the attributes of his beloved wife Rachel. The kindness, the beauty, and the leadership qualities needed to head a nation. Yaakov recognized all of his own life events playing out over again in the life of Yosef.

When the brothers came back with the report that Yosef was dead, Yaakov was inconsolable. The tragedy was so overwhelming that none of his children could comfort him. For twenty two years, the intensity of mourning didn't leave Yaakov. His beloved son was gone forever.

Finally, after all those seemingly endless and painful years, father and son were reunited. The joy and emotion of the moment is difficult to imagine. Yosef was so moved that he kissed his father, and then hugged him and cried, not just with tears, but with cries that seemed as if they would never cease. However, Rashi comments that Yaakov did not kiss Yosef, nor was Yaakov crying. Rather he was reciting the prayer of Shema, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad."

The question begs to be asked, of all times, why did Yaakov choose to recite the Shema right now at this moment? What was Yaakov trying to convey through this seemingly strange action?

Rabbi Bentzion Shafier shlit"א explains that Yaakov was feeling such intense emotions at that moment, possibly more intense than he had ever experienced before, and he wanted to capitalize on those feelings. He didn't want them to simply fade away, rather he wanted to lock them in, to put them into a concrete form so that they would become part of him forever. He wanted to take that extreme sense of joy and completion that he felt and use it to reach a new spiritual level. With the high that he experienced, he proclaimed G-d's control of all. "You, the Master of the universe, have brought my son back to me." He now recognized G-d with a unique sense of appreciation and

is one of the keys to spiritual growth. If a person has a dramatic awareness, or if an event occurs that is the undeniable result of the direct involvement of Hashem in their life, a person will surely feel a sense of appreciation or recognition of G-d. But that feeling may pass. That sense of clarity may leave.

Sometimes we are so moved by a sudden turn of circumstances that we think, "This is the hand of G-d!" However, as obvious as it may be at the moment, within a matter of minutes that sense of clarity is lost. The only way to prevent it from passing is to put that emotion into an action, to take that understanding and eternalize it. Through saying the Shema at that moment,

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proclaimed the majesty of Hashem with a renewed level of clarity.

Obviously this wasn't the first time that Yaakov had said Shema. He had accepted Hashem's authority on a daily basis for decades. However, this was a new level of understanding that he was only able to attain through these powerful emotions.

This concept has great relevance for all of us. Throughout the course of our lives, we will experience highs and lows, times of great joy and times of deep sorrow, times of excitement and enthusiasm, and times of dullness and disinterest. There are times when we are passionate, and there are times when we are unmotivated. None of these states remains for long. Like waves of an ocean, they come, they go, and when they are gone, we remain the same as before, generally unchanged.

The ability to capture the moment and convert it into something permanent,

Yaakov was teaching us this lesson.

Sometimes even the most basic action can have a profound effect, something as simple as saying thank you. If a person would say, "Hashem, I recognize that these events were not by chance. I see that it is You who directs this world and I thank You for that," this statement can take a fleeting recognition and make it lasting. Even though the concept was already clear, going through this process can have a dramatic impact on whether this understanding actually remains and changes the entire outlook of a person permanently.

By training ourselves to lock in these peak moments, we can take life experiences and moments of unique clarity, and make them a part of our essence. Often all it takes is a small conscious action or decision to turn an emotional high into something permanent that can change a person forever. Shabbat Shalom! ♦