

empathy plays a powerful role. The following story emphasizes this truth.

The joy evinced by Yaakov *Avinu*, upon hearing the news that Yosef was alive, was palpable. On the other hand, the joy is a strong indicator of the enormous pain that our Patriarch must have experienced when he was informed of the loss of his dear son. The pain suffered by a parent, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, over the loss of a child, is immeasurable. Therefore, one who has *Baruch Hashem* not suffered such a loss might find it difficult to understand what such a parent feels. Each and every time that a person or situation alludes in some way to their loss, it opens up the floodgates of pain and emotion, releasing a fresh torrent of tears and misery.

*Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, related the following story to his revered brother-in-law, *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*. A couple who had just been blessed with their first son came before *Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl*, with a *shailah*, question, concerning what they should name their son. The husband had just recently lost his father, so it was natural that he would want to name his son after his father. His wife refused to give that name because, a short time earlier in their apartment building, a young child with that name had died an untimely death. The mother feared that it was a bad sign to give her son that name. The husband argued that *Kibbud Av*, honoring the memory of his late father, was more important than her concern about a negative omen. She responded that under no circumstances would she put her son's life in "danger" by giving him that name.

*Rav Shlomo Zalmen* gave the matter some thought, then rendered his decision in favor of the mother – but for another reason. He said, "The baby should not be

named after his paternal grandfather, but not because of the mother's fears concerning a bad sign. It is just that a few years down the road, when her son will go out to play, and his mother will call out from the window, 'Yankele,' and her neighbor (who lost a child by the same name) will hear the name of her late child called out; she will be hurt. One cannot give such a name that quite possibly will cause pain to another Jew."

When *Rav Chaim Kanievsky* heard this *psak*, tears welled up in his eyes. This is what is meant by sensitivity in rendering a halachic decision. To most people, the halachic response to the dispute between husband and wife was "black and white"; to *Rav Shlomo Zalmen*, however, it was not.

## VA'ANI TEFILLAH

**Atah חונן – השיבנו אבינו לתורתך  
chonein – Hashiveinu Avinu l'Sorasecha.  
You grant us... Return us Our Father to  
Your Torah.**

We do not know what to *daven* for. We do not know what is important. When we ask for material abundance, food, livelihood, we pray with emotion. When we ask for spiritual qualities such as knowledge, repentance, Torah study, rebuilding of Yerushalayim, it is only a rare few who really *daven* from the bottom of their hearts. The *Chafetz Chaim* compared this to a foolish soldier in the Russian Army. One day the Czar visited the troops. The soldiers all stood at attention. The Czar walked up and down the aisle, looking at each one of them. Undoubtedly, they each wanted to make a good impression on their commander in chief. The Czar was reasonably impressed and expressed his satisfaction. He looked at the soldiers

and declared, "All of you have greatly impressed me. In return, I will grant each of you one wish. Suddenly, one soldier broke ranks and came forward, presenting himself in front of the Czar. "I ask the Czar to provide me with my daily meals!" The other soldiers were stunned by his declaration. "Are you a fool?" they asked. "Why would you trouble yourself with such a request? If you are a good, devoted soldier, your meals are a given. Indeed, everything – from uniform to food -- is provided by the Czar. It is part of being a soldier! He wanted to do something special for you."

"Are we any different when it comes to our prayers?" asks the *Chafetz Chaim*. We must realize that our primary request should be for *ruchinyus*, spirituality. Our physical needs are a given, because, after all, we are devoted servants to Hashem. As soldiers in Hashem's legion, our physical requirements are immediately addressed by Hashem. If we want more – spiritual ascendancy – then we must ask. That is something worth asking for.

*Sponsored in memory of our dear father and grandfather*

**צבי בן זאבל ע"ה Harry Weiss**

by

**Morry & Judy Weiss, Erwin & Myra Weiss and Grandchildren**

**Gary & Hildee Weiss, Jeff & Karen Weiss, Zev & Rachel Weiss, Elie & Sara Weiss, & Brian**

"Love and memories are gifts from G-d that death cannot destroy"

PENINIM  
ON  
THE TORAH



פנינים  
התורה

## Parashas Vayigash

תשע"ז

פרשת ויגש

**ולא יכל יוסף להתאפק לכל הנוצבים עליו  
Now Yosef could not restrain himself in  
the presence of all who stood before  
him. (45:1)**

Yosef was ready to reveal himself, to share his identity with his brothers, but he could not bear to do so in the presence of so many bystanders. He was concerned for his brothers' dignity, lest he shame them in public. Veritably, there was nothing holding him back from revealing himself – or was there? Furthermore, following his revelation, the Torah writes that he fell on Binyamin's neck. *Rashi* explains that, in this expression of emotion, Yosef wept over the destruction of the two *Batei Mikdash* which would be destroyed in Binyamin's portion of *Eretz Yisrael*. Why was mourning over the destruction of the two *Batei Mikdash* appropriate at this moment of reconciliation?

The *Imrei Shammai* quotes the *Sefas Emes* who gives a powerful explanation for what appear to be anomalies. The punishment which Heaven metes out for an individual's transgression is exact. Yosef was careful not to exact greater punishment from his brothers than they deserved. He sought for them to atone for his sale – no more – no less. Just shy of a few more moments, Yosef could no longer hold out. It bothered him so to see his brothers suffering so much that he revealed himself to them – prematurely.

That extra drop of misery that they would have experienced, had he held himself back, had to be paid. It was too late then. Someone had to be the surrogate for the *Shevatim* to accept the rest of the punishment that they warranted. Otherwise, their atonement would be incomplete. This occurred years later when the *Asarah Harugei Malchus*, Ten Martyred *Tanaaim*, were brutally murdered, taking the unfinished punishment

in the place of the *Shevatim*. That was not all. Added to that was the destruction of the two *Batei Mikdash* and the two thousand year exile which we continue to experience.

This is why, as soon as Yosef deferred to his emotions and revealed himself to his brothers, he fell upon his brothers and wept over the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*. He acutely felt the pain associated with their destruction, because he knew that, had he waited just a little bit longer... it would have had a different ending.

We see now how distant we are from the spiritual plateau of the *Shevatim*. In order for them to atone for all of the travail they had caused Yosef, they had to spend one week in Egypt, with the pain and misery which they would endure for one week sufficient to atone for their error. We, on the other hand, have suffered for thousands of years during which millions have died – all because of those few minutes that Yosef could no longer hold out. We pray daily and lift up our eyes Heavenward for the moment that Hashem will declare: "The *galus*, exile, is over. Atonement has been achieved!"

**ולא יכל יוסף להתאפק לכל הנוצבים עליו  
ויקרא הוציאו כל איש מעני**

**Now Yosef could not restrain himself in  
the presence of all who stood before him,  
so he called out, "Remove everyone from  
before me!" (45:1)**

Yosef was taking an enormous chance with his life. He was one person – not characteristically physically strong. Standing opposite him were his ten brothers, each of whose individual strength was without peer. Indeed, if any one of them would have lifted a finger

against Yosef – he would have been smitten. All ten together could easily have taken down Egypt. Yet, Yosef sought no protection, asking that no one remain in the room with him at this moment of truth, the moment in which he would reveal himself to his brothers. In his *Tiferes Yehonasan*, *Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl*, takes the question further. The brothers sought to do away with Yosef because they saw that *Yaravam ben Nevat* would descend from him. Now, they certainly had reason to buttress their earlier fears. Yosef was the viceroy of Egypt (from what little they saw), and he was married to *Osnas*, the daughter of a pagan priest. Bedecked in the garb of Egyptian royalty, with an Egyptian name and Egyptian wife, they had every reason to believe that Yosef would produce *Yaravam*. Why did he take the chance of being alone with them?

He did not want to embarrass his brothers in front of the Egyptians. Even in the decadent society that was the mainstay of Egyptian culture, it was considered very wrong to sell a brother into captivity – and certainly to want to kill him! To reveal the truth to the Egyptians would be most damaging and humiliating to Yosef's brothers. Thus, he took his chances. If they killed him – he was prepared to die, rather than publicly shame his brothers.

It is difficult to know what goes through a person's mind when he is overwhelmed with debt, with no way out. People will do just about anything, regardless of its effect on other innocent people, just to ward off the debtors who are breathing down their necks. The saintly *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, was once called to court concerning a loan upon which he had signed as a guarantor. The *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim (as he was

reverently called) did not have an extra penny to his name. It was inconceivable for him to be asked to sign on a loan which he certainly could not pay back. Yet, the court had before it a contract which indicated that he had affixed his signature in support of the loan. Now, if the borrower did not have the funds for repayment, *Rav Aryeh* must pay.

*Rav Aryeh* entered the courtroom to find the crooked borrower hiding himself in a corner, ashamed to confront *Rav Aryeh*. The judge asked *Rav Aryeh*, "Is this your signature?" The signature was clearly a forgery, but *Rav Aryeh* would never embarrass the borrower in court. He instead replied, "Yes, it is mine." As the result of his "signature," *Rav Aryeh* was ordered to pay back the loan which he had "guaranteed." There was one problem – *Rav Aryeh* had no money. He made a payment plan in which, over a number of years, every month 28 lira was paid to the lender, all because *Rav Aryeh* refused to embarrass a man who had forged his signature.

Great story – but does one have to refrain from embarrassing a thief? By forging *Rav Aryeh's* signature, the borrower had committed an act of larceny. Are we adjured to be sensitive to his feelings? Apparently, the answer is yes.

**ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם כי  
מכרתם אתי הנה כי למחיה שלחתי אלקיים  
לפניכם**

**And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you. (45:5)**

Does the realization that it was all part of Hashem's plan mitigate the evil that one has wrought against another person? Is it so simple to overlook, to forgive the evil, the hurt, the pain and misery that had been a constant accomplishment for years, just because one is aware that the perpetrator is G-d's agent? For most of us: probably not. For Yosef: the above *pasuk* states that he told them, "Do not lose sleep over what you had done; you were G-d's agents."

*Maavir al midosav*, "Passing over one's faults," disregarding the bad *midos*, character traits, of those who

hurt us requires effort – almost superhuman effort. Not only did Yosef not exhibit animus towards his brothers for the misery they had caused him, he even consoled them and told them not to worry, not to feel bad. This was Yosef *HaTzaddik*. A righteous person realizes that he – and his adversary – are both part of a Divine Plan.

*Horav Meir Chadash, zl*, was such an individual. He was a *baal mussar*, ethicist, who lived an exemplary life – of example. Episodes of *maavir al midosav* are strewn throughout his life. It did not just happen. He worked on himself his entire life – and he attempted to imbue his many students with this amazing character trait. While many of these incidents are well-known, a great many more were concealed and kept to himself. He would do anything in an effort to avoid hurting another's sensibilities. The following incident is a classic and lends the reader a small window of insight into the individual who represented *Slabodka*, who was the quintessential *talmid*, student, of the *Alter, zl, m'Slabodka*, who more than exemplified *mussar*, he was *mussar*.

It was World War I, a bad time for Europe and an even worse time for European Jews. As usual, the *yeshivah bachurim*, students, were at the bottom of the barrel. *Rav Meir* was a young man, a *yeshivah* student, running from place to place to seek refuge from the quickly approaching German army. He, together with a companion from the *yeshivah*, had just reached a certain village to catch their breath, when the news suddenly arrived that the Germans were on the way. In a panic, most of the villagers hitched up their wagons and fled.

The two *yeshivah* students were not waiting around. Anxious to leave, they went to the outskirts of the village and waited for a spot in one of the wagons. Suddenly, *Rav Meir's* friend remembered that he had left something important in the village. He rushed back, while *Rav Meir* stood his ground, waiting for his return.

One by one, the wagons laden with refugees and their belongings passed. The passengers called out to him, "Come

with us! Why are you waiting here? Join us!" He declined. After all, how could he turn his back on his friend and desert him? Soon there would be no more wagons left in the village, but he would not leave without his friend. He stood firm – waiting patiently for his arrival. At long last, he saw his friend running toward him from afar. Another minute, and he would arrive and they could hopefully still avail themselves of a wagon going out of town. At that very moment, a wagon approached with room for only one passenger. His friend leaped aboard with his bag in hand – and left *Rav Meir* standing in stunned silence.

*Rav Meir* had waited so devotedly for his friend. Yet, he was left alone to gaze at the dust left in the wake of the wagon's departure. At that moment, he must have had deep feelings of chagrin, and even anger. Indeed, as a result of the disappointment that enveloped him he said to himself, "If something like this ever happens again, I will not wait!"

Then, on the spot, he recanted. "*Chas v'shalom!*" Heaven forbid! he said to himself. "Despite everything, I do not regret having waited. It was worth it, for me, for the purity of my soul. It was worth it for me to have waited, not to have left a friend behind."

The *Mashgiach* would often use this story as a lesson to his students. He would tell them, "At that moment, when I decided that, despite the letdown, I would act similarly again, something within me changed. I became a different person – a better person."

It is not easy to train oneself to look away, to rise above one's natural feelings of insult or offense – not to be angered; rather to forgive – ignore the negative emotions welling up within him. Some do train themselves. The *Mashgiach* was one of the few. Perhaps, this is why he became the *Mashgiach*.

**ועתה לא אתם שלחתם אותי הנה כי  
האלקיים**

**And now: it was not you who sent me here, but G-d. (45:8)**

Veritably, on the surface, to the unlearned reader, it appears that the

brothers catalyzed Yosef's descent into Egypt. Yosef underscores the fallacy of such a viewpoint. Hashem pulls the strings; He manipulates events from behind the scene. We think that we are in charge, but we must be aware that we are not. We might make decisions, but Hashem's Will stands and is always executed. Hashem wanted the Jewish People to go down to Egypt as part of His Divine Plan. Thus, he manipulated events in such a manner that Yosef was the first to go down, with Yaakov *Avinu* and the rest of the family to follow.

When a person has the good fortune to look back, to employ hindsight as a perspective on how to discern events, he is granted an enviable opportunity on seeing the *Yad Hashem*, Hand of G-d, at work, guiding the events around him toward a specific goal. We then realize that man is unable to lift up his finger without it having been originally decreed by Hashem. This is neither the place nor the forum for entering into a deep philosophical discussion concerning cause and effect. Let it suffice to say that Hashem is in control. If we would only open our eyes, we would see that man is nothing more than a puppet with the strings being controlled by the Master.

It was the summer of 2001, and a Jewish businessman from America went to *Eretz Yisrael* for a number of business meetings. Prior to starting the workday, he decided to stop at a nearby restaurant on King George Street to have brunch. He was annoyed to see that there was a fairly sizable line of customers waiting in line ahead of him. As he waited, he constantly kept glancing at his watch, while making little noises with his mouth expressing his impatience. A number of times he began to leave his place in line, only to return immediately, in the hope that it would now move faster.

Suddenly, the man in front of him turned around and said, "You seem to be in a hurry. I am not. Why not switch places with me? It does not bother me to wait another five minutes." The man was at first surprised that someone would give up his place in line, but then he figured, who was he to complain? He readily and thankfully accepted his place in line. As soon as he received his

breakfast, he sat down to eat quickly – and left the restaurant.

The businessperson walked about 200 feet, when he heard a loud bang. He turned around to see the Sbarro Restaurant, where he had moments earlier been having breakfast, engulfed in flames. This was the infamous Sbarro Restaurant terrorist bombing that snuffed out the lives of fifteen Jewish souls and left hundreds of others injured, some seriously. It took a few moments for the enormity of the tragedy to settle into his mind, and, even more so, that the Jew who had changed places with him was probably a victim – in his place! Yes, he should have been having a meal at that moment. By trading places with him, the kind man possibly paid the ultimate price.

He immediately went searching through the rubble, following the first responders as they searched for victims. It took the American businessman two days of searching, visiting all the hospitals until he finally found the kind man. He lay in a hospital bed seriously injured, accompanied by his adult son.

"Your father saved my life!" he began. He followed up with the son, relating to him the entire story about how his father had changed places with him. As tears rolled down his face, the American businessman took out his business card and said, "I am a successful businessman in America. My offices are located on the 101<sup>st</sup> floor of the Twin Towers. I am returning home; this is my number. If there is anything I can do whatsoever to help your family, please let me know. Trust me. You gave me my life. I would like to help you."

Three weeks later, the American businessman received a call from the man's son. Apparently, his father's injuries required surgery that was beyond that could be provided for him in *Eretz Yisrael*. He required a specific surgery which was performed proficiently in Boston. Could their newly-acquired American friend help? Within a few hours it was all arranged – from start to finish. Surgery was scheduled for mid-September, and he would meet them in Kennedy Airport when they landed and be with them from there throughout the

process.

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the American benefactor left his office on the 101<sup>st</sup> floor of the Twin Towers at 8:00A.M. At 8:31, the first plane that took down the Twin Towers struck the 93<sup>rd</sup> floor. The Yerushalmi Jew had twice been the catalyst for saving the American businessman's life. We are all puppets on the world stage with roles in the play called "life." Hashem pulls the strings.

**רב עוד יוסף בני חי אלכנה ואראנו בטרם  
אמות**

**How great! My son Yosef still lives!  
I shall go and see him before I die.  
(45:28)**

True greatness is measured by how much one empathizes with the pain and joy of his fellow. At its simplest, empathy is the awareness of the thoughts and emotions of others, it is the ability to see the world through the eyes of others. It is the link between ourselves and others, because it is how we as individuals understand what others are feeling, as if we are feeling it ourselves. In cognitive empathy, one understands the thoughts and emotions of others in a very rational, rather than emotional, sense. We try to get into their minds, to attempt to understand why they feel the way they do. Then we can become emotionally attached to the point that we feel their pain. We must then act on these feelings to alleviate the pain that our fellow man is experiencing. We must learn to see the world through the eyes of our fellow man who is not as fortunate as we are. Sometimes it is necessary to "walk a mile in someone else's shoes in order to understand them." It is so easy to criticize when one does not know what the subject of his critique is experiencing.

When a *Rav* issues a *psak*, renders a *halachic* decision, he must take into consideration the emotions of the people who stand before him. This does not mean that *halachah* is altered due to emotion. It is just that how one presents the *halachah* can make a difference. Furthermore, in the event that the *halachah* is not clear, it is then based upon the common sense and discretion of the *Rav*. It is at such a juncture that