

SHABBAT SHALOM - VAYIGASH – 2009

While the Jewish People in this week's portion prepare to leave Israel and enter the Diaspora, Charlotte and I will again be privileged to head for Israel on our semi-annual family visit. Reunion with family and invariably running into a host of colleagues and friends now living in Israel makes for an exciting and meaningful two weeks.

With skype and phones we are not that cut off from family but it can't compare to the real thing. I can therefore feel for Jacob who had suffered unexpected separation from his son Joseph. And now, after years of separation, separation of a father and his favorite child, there is finally the great reunion between YAAKOV & YOSEF in Egypt.

Putting aside the Divine hand theory of Yosef's being sold by his brothers and being brought to Egypt as the way to bring YISRAEL and BNAI YISRAEL, namely Jacob and his family of seventy, into eventual slavery in Egypt, we dare not forget the pain of the separation of YAAKOV & YOSEF for all of these years and now the emotion of their meeting. I know the feeling at Ben Gurion Airport each trip and for us it's only five months. I can just imagine Jacob!

You can just feel the emotion. VAYERA AILAV—He appeared on the horizon; VAYIPOL AL TZAVARAV—he fell upon his neck; VAYEVK AL TZAVARAV OD—he wept upon his neck even more. Amazing! What a reunion! A two box Kleenex experience! And rightly so; a family reunion.

But some of our sages have a different take. The crying and the hugging was one sided. Joseph hugged. Yosef cried. And what about YAAKOV?

Says Rashi—he recited the KRIAT SHMA. Of all times! Your long lost son Yosef is in your arms and what do you do? Recite Shma Yisroel? Is that the time to daven? All of a sudden HIGIA ZMAN KRIAT SHMA? Not to knock davening but there is a time and a place!

But when you think about it, our sages have shared with us tremendous insight into the understanding of life and its unfolding events. We are normally crisis oriented. We hit a pothole in life and we scream out with fervor—'SHMA YISRAEL—G-d help us'. We lament G-d's absence and call out for G-d's presence in times of trouble and despair. It's normal; it's natural.

Yet we tend to forget G-d's presence when good things happen. Those things we take for granted and give no thought to them being a gift from above, a blessing from on high. And so YAAKOV at his greatest moment of joy, filled with emotion, says TIME OUT! Let's take a moment and put it all into perspective. SHMA YISRAEL—I want all of Israel to know that I acknowledge G-d's hand in this moment. I do not take it for granted. I offer thanksgiving for enabling me to experience this moment of reunion.

We tend to stay up at night, sleepless, because of all the problems and frustrations we faced or will be facing. We silently pray for G-d's providence to see us through. I suggest as did YAAKOV that at that moment we should stop and thank G-d for something good that occurred that day or be excited about something good I am going to accomplish the next day. It creates a different mindset and enables us to see past the tzarot.

Throughout the day we are invited to pause and relish the moment and make the connection reciting a Bracha or davening a mincha or just by saying THANK G-D—BARUCH HASHEM— because we remember that we do have an ongoing partnership. YAAKOV set the tone by reciting SHMA, telling the world, don't just curse the darkness, bless and acknowledge the light.

The portion begins with the words—VAYIGASH AILAV YEHUDA—and using poetic license we translate, we come closer to G-d through Hodaah, acknowledging the good; being grateful for our blessings; counting them and building upon them. As we travel to Israel again this coming week, we offer thanksgiving for the privilege and the sheer pleasure of visiting family in our home away from home...or is it the reverse?

With our office closed this coming week, we will be sharing some thoughts with you from Israel in two weeks...Parshat Shmot...a new Book in a New Year...Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Dr. Mordecai E. Zeitz...
rabbi@bethtikvah.gc.ca