



# TAL

## VAYIGASH

### 5775

## THE COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET

### Shema Yisrael!

**Rabbi Jonathan Tawil**



Twenty two long years have passed and finally Yosef meets his father: "He [Yosef] fell on his [father's] neck, and wept exceedingly" (46:29). Yosef poured out his heart in a sea of tears at the emotional release of seeing his father after so many years. Yaakov's reaction, however, is not mentioned at all. In fact, at that very moment, the Mefarshim state that Yaakov was reciting the Shema.

On the surface, this seems strange. We know that there are certain times that we have to say the Shema – namely, in the morning Shacharit prayer and at night in the Arvit prayer. Perhaps this was the time to recite the Shema?

But, if it was the time to recite the Shema, then how come Yosef didn't do so? If, on the other hand, it was *not* the time for Shema, why did Yaakov recite it? R' Moshe Shick z'l ("Maharam Shick"; 1805-1879) answers that it was not the time for reciting the Shema, and Yaakov recited it for a different reason. He explains: One of the basic lessons of the verse Shema Yisrael is that "Hashem is Elokeinu." By saying Shema, we acknowledge that there is only One G-d, despite

the fact that we see various manifestations of Him. For example, Hashem is sometimes merciful and sometimes strict. (The Name "Hashem" represents G-d's Attribute of Mercy, while the Name "Elokim" represents G-d's Attribute of Justice.) Although we rarely understand how this is so, what we perceive as G-d's strictness is ultimately for our own good; in the long-run, it is merciful.

For twenty-two years, Yosef was missing, and Yaakov saw only the strict side of G-d's actions. But when he saw Yosef's royal entourage, he understood that Yosef's disappearance was part



of Hashem's plan for saving Yaakov and his family from famine. Ultimately, everything that had happened was for the best: "Hashem is Elokeinu."

Realizing this, Yaakov recited the Shema. Yosef, however, had already learned this lesson when he was freed from jail and appointed viceroy. He had no reason to recite the Shema at this moment. R' Asher Zelig Schwartz z'l offers another answer to the above question: In verse 28, immediately preceding Yaakov's reunion with Yosef, we read: "[Yaakov] sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare the way ahead of him in Goshen." Rashi explains that Yaakov sent Yehuda to establish a yeshiva for the arriving immigrants. In verse 30, immediately following Yaakov's reunion with Yosef, we read: "Then Yisrael said to Yosef, 'Now I can die, after my having seen your face'." What is the connection between verses 28 (establishing a yeshiva), 29 (reciting the Shema), and 30 (being willing to die)?

Gemara (Brachot 5a) R. Levi b. Chama said in the name of R. Shimon b. Lakish: "A person should always try and stir his yetzer tov against his yetzer hara, as it says: 'Tremble and sin not.'" (Tehillim 4:5) If he defeats it – good, and if not, he should study Torah, as it says: "Reflect in your hearts." (ibid.) If he defeats it – good, and if not, he should recite Shema, as it says: "While on your beds." (ibid) If he defeats

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it – good, and if not, he should remind himself of the day of his death, as it says: "Be utterly silent, selah." (ibid.)

Says R' Schwartz: Yaakov was afraid that seeing Yosef in all his glory as Prime Minister would make him (Yaakov) feel pride, or would bring out some other improper feeling. Yaakov, therefore, took all of the steps suggested by the Gemara: he established a bet Midrash, he recited the Shema, and he imagined the day of death.

R' Schwartz adds: If imagining the day of death is an effective means of conquering the yetzer hara, why is it only the fall-back strategy? Why does the Gemara suggest first learning Torah and reciting Shema? The answer is that we are expected to serve Hashem with joy, something to which the third strategy does not

lend itself. For implicit in declaring that "G-d is One" is acknowledging that "His watchful concern and His ability extend over all and everything" (Sefer HaChinuch) – that His Providence governs what happens in this world. And when we serve Hashem with this knowledge, then we do so out of joy. The Gur Aryeh answers further and states that a tzaddik harnesses every opportunity and emotion in the service of Hashem. When Yaakov felt a supreme surge of joy and love at the sight of his beloved son, his first wish was to suppress his own personal joy and channel his emotions into a sublime expression of his love for his Creator. Thus, he recited the Shema, the ultimate acceptance of Hashem's sovereignty: "And you shall love Hashem, your G-d with all your

heart..." At a moment of supreme and almost unimaginably great joy in Yaakov's life, he makes sure to connect it back to the One Who gave it, to acknowledge that everything has come, and comes, from Him Alone. "Ma'aseh Avot Siman LeBanim", the Shema has been a symbol of our existence facing against the odds of time, Jews throughout history have held this slogan high. Whether on their death beds, or in prayer, in the morning and the evening, in their Tefilin and in their Mezuzot, this statement has been exclaimed loud and clear. The next time we say the Shema, may we all try to do the same; to strive to reach the level of Yaakov, who, in all moments of life, "clung to the Source of Life. Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokenu Hashem Echad!

In the recent parshiyot we read about how Yosef's brothers came down to Egypt and, having not seen him for 20 years, failed to recognise him. The last time they had seen Yosef was when they sold him to a passing caravan as a slave. Unbeknown to the brothers, Yosef had since become the viceroy of Egypt, and they now found themselves standing before him in his palace. Of course, there was no reason for them to suspect that this powerful overlord was their little brother. Or was there? Hadn't he prophesied that one day he would be a king? Didn't they know that their father Yaakov had always placed great stock in those prophesies? Wasn't it striking that he seemed to know so much about their family and was actually able to line them all up in order of age

(Bereishit 43:33)? The Midrash even tells us that Yosef revealed to them the nature of the cots they had slept in when they children, which would seem that Yosef was awaiting for them to identify him.

**"Like Yosef's brothers, we all find it hard to admit that we could have or should have acted differently."**

But most of all, who would not recognise their own brother – even after many years – just because of a bit of facial hair? Of all the brothers, Yosef was the one

that most closely resembled their father. How could they not see it? R' Chaim Shmuelevitz, former Rosh Yeshiva of Mir (1902-1979) explains that they could not see it, because they did not want to see it. To accept that Yosef had indeed become king would be to accept that they had been mistaken in their judgement, and it was simply too hard for them to accept that they had mistreated their little brother and sold their own flesh and blood down the river.

Like Yosef's brothers, we all make mistakes. Like Yosef's brothers, we all find it hard to admit that we could have or should have acted differently. Greatness, though, is

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## Parasha Insights

### Rabbi Danny Kada





defined by a person's ability to face up to the truth. Naturally, we shy away from the truth, imagining that it will be painful to be confronted with the facts.

Introspection, though, is not about being critical of ourselves; it is about being honest with ourselves. If we have made mistakes,

we should identify our mistakes and fix them. If we have achieved success, we should recognize our successes and build on them. That way we can become better friends, better parents, better students or simply better people. So when we read how Yosef's brothers could not see the truth,

though it stared them in the face, let us stop and think: How many times in our lives have we failed to see the truth, even as it was staring us in the face? Let us try and utilise the light we have absorbed over the last eight days of Chanuka to always see the truth in all of our life's endeavours.

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?

**44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham; alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.**

2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?

**44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.**

3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?

**44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.**

4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers "Go up to my father"?

**45:9 - We learn that Eretz Yisrael is higher than all other lands.**

5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?

**45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke lashon hakodesh.**



6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?

**45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of Mishkan Shilo built in Yosef's territory.**

7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?

**45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.**

8. What did Yosef mean when he said "Don't dispute on the way"?

**45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.**

9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?

**45:27 - His ruach hakodesh (prophetic spirit) returned.**

10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?

**46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.**

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**QUESTION:** Binyamin was accused of stealing a magical silver goblet. How did Yehudah hope to defend him with this statement?

**ANSWER:** Yehudah said to Yosef, "Even if your allegations about Binyamin are correct — which they are not — I don't understand why you are making such an issue over an ordinary goblet." Yosef responded, "This is a priceless magical

goblet; through it I can see the past and future. Therefore, Binyamin committed a major crime and deserves slavery."

Yehudah said to Yosef, "This is not true! The goblet is an ordinary one with no special value." He proved this by reminding Yosef, "You asked us if we have a father or a brother. If you have a magical goblet, why did you have to ask us questions? Could you not have known all about us by looking into your magical goblet?!"

**"His soul is bound up with his soul." (44:30)**

**QUESTION:** How did their souls become connected?

**ANSWER:** The word "keshurah" — "bound" — has the numerical value of 611, which is the same numerical value as the word "Torah." Yaakov taught Binyomin Torah and through their Torah study, their souls became connected.

Torah is the language that unifies Jews of past, present and future generations.



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A beggar once entered the town to collect money, and was provided with shelter in the Jewish community's inn for poor travellers. The very first evening, as he was undressing, a huge wad of paper money fell from his pocket. When the other beggars in the room saw the value of the paper money – far more valuable than anything he could have collected in Kovno – they realized that this beggar was actually a wealthy man! The news soon spread throughout the entire town. The people of the town were angry that a "millionaire" disguised as a beggar had tried to exploit them, especially since the majority of the Jews of Kovno were poor

working people who were struggling to survive.

The Jewish City Council therefore decided to pass a new law, forbidding beggars from collecting tzedakah in Kovno.

The Rabbi of Kovno, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spector, was a leading sage of the generation. When he heard about the proposed law, he immediately went before the council and asked for permission to speak. He began by assuring the members of the council that he truly understood their anger and frustration. "But," said the sage, "before you take action, it would be wise to think. Who, would you say, deceived whom?"

## Our Chachamim



The council members replied: "That strange beggar from another town fooled us. Dressed as a poor beggar, he took our tzedakah money right and left – and he is really quite rich!"

"True," replied Rabbi Spector, "but in that case, you were fooled not by a poor man, but by a wealthy man. It is therefore unfair to retaliate by passing a law against poor beggars. Pass a severe law, if it pleases you, that tzedakah may never again be given to the rich, but only to the needy!"



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