

THIS NATION TO THAT NOTION

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Yosef harnessed his chariot and went up to meet Yisrael his father, to Goshen; and they came to the land of Goshen; and he appeared to him, fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck excessively. Then Yisrael said to Yosef, "I can die this time, after having seen your face, because you are still alive." (Breishis 46:29-30)

That's the grand reunion?! Yosef does everything. He goes to greet his father. He falls on his shoulder and he cries. What's Yaakov doing? Our sages tell us "he's saying-"SHEMA!" Then he states his readiness to die. Is this not an odd encounter? I would expect some hugs and more conversation. How can we understand our Patriarch seeming so emotionally detached at that ultra-dramatic moment of reunification with his beloved son Yosef, after twenty two years of estrangement?

Viktor Frankel concludes in his Magnus opus, Man's Search for Meaning; "When we spoke about attempts to give a man in camp a mental courage, we said that he had to be shown something to look forward to in the future. He had to be reminded that life still waited for him, that a human being waited for his return. But after liberation? There were some men who discovered that no one awaited them. Woe to him that found that the person whose memory alone had given him courage in the camp did not exist anymore. Woe to him who, when the day his dreams finally came, found it so different from all he had longed for! Perhaps he boarded a trolley, traveled out to the home which he had seen for years in his mind, and only in his mind, and pressed the bell, just as he had longed to do in thousands of dreams, only to find that the person who should open the door was not there, and would never be there again.

We all said to each other in camp that there could be no earthly happiness which could compensate for all we had suffered. We were not hoping for happiness- it was not that which gave us courage and gave meaning to our suffering, our sacrifices, and our dying. And yet we were not prepared for unhappiness. This disillusionment, which awaited not a small number of prisoners, was an experience which these men have found very hard to get over, and which for a psychiatrist, is also very hard to help them overcome. But this must not be a discouragement to him; on the contrary, it should be a stimulus.

But for every one of the liberated prisoners, the day comes when looking back on his camp experiences he can no longer understand how he endured it all. As the day of his liberation eventually came, when everything seemed to him like a beautiful dream, so also the day comes

when all his camp experiences seem to him nothing but a nightmare.

The crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear anymore - except his G-d!"

Perhaps the realistic expectation for Yaakov was to be resigned to the fact that he might never see Yosef again. As for Yosef, he had been yearning for his father that he knew with certainty was still alive. Yisrael, having accepted his fate, long ago, was fully prepared for "the crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man- the wonderful feeling that, after all he had suffered there is nothing he need fear anymore- except his G-d!" He was actively drawing ever closer this nation to that notion. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.