

# RECONCILIATION

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vayechi

## Reconciliation

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Near the end of our parashah, after Yaakov's death, Yosef's brothers were afraid that Yosef would take revenge for what they had done to him. The Torah relates (50:21), "He [Yosef] comforted them and spoke to their heart." The midrash Yalkut Shimoni comments on this verse: It is a kal va'chomer-- if Yosef consoled his brothers, certainly when Hashem comes to console Yerushalayim, as it is written (Yeshayah 40:2), "Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim," how much more so will he console them? Thus it is written (Yeshayah 40:1), "Be consoled, be consoled, My people." Furthermore, it is written (Yeshayah 51:3), "For Hashem shall comfort Zion, He shall comfort all her ruins, He shall make her wilderness like Eden and her wasteland like a garden of Hashem; joy and gladness shall be found there, thanksgiving and the sound of music." [Thus ends the Yalkut Shimoni on Sefer Bereishit]

R' Zvi Hirsch Halevi z"l (Plonsk, Poland; 18th century) asks: How is it logical to infer that just as Yosef consoled his brothers, Hashem will console the Jewish People, about whose suffering it is written (Eichah 2:13), "To what can I liken you to comfort you, maiden daughter of Zion? -- Your ruin is as vast as the sea; who can heal you?" As hurtful as the actions of Yosef's brothers were, they do not meet this description! Furthermore, why does the above midrash switch back-and-forth between the consolation of Yerushalayim, then of the Jewish People, and then, again, Zion? R' Zvi Hirsch explains: Our Sages teach that G-d destroyed the Bet Hamikdash in order to pour His wrath on sticks and stones rather than on His people. The midrash thus teaches: If Yosef consoled his brothers, who sinned, certainly Hashem will console Yerushalayim and Zion, who were punished for no sin of their own. As for the Jewish People, we are consoled by the knowledge that Hashem punished the structures of Yerushalayim instead of punishing us fully. (Zemach L'Avraham)

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"He blessed Yosef and he said, 'Elokim before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked-

-Elokim Who shepherds me from my inception until this day'." (48:15)

Many commentaries ask: Where in these verses do we see that Yaakov blessed Yosef? Rather, he blessed Yosef's sons!

R' Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudlikov z"l (1748-1800; grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov z"l) writes: Although it obviously is G-d who sustains man, He does so through natural means--one person succeeds in business, another is sustained by gifts from a relative, etc. "Elokim" is the Divine Name that represents this attribute of G-d, for the gematria of Elokim (86) equals the gematria of "Ha'tevah" / "the natural order."

In Yaakov's case, the agent of G-d who supported him during the last 17 years of his life was Yosef. Thus, when Yaakov referred to "Elokim Who shepherds me from my inception until this day," it had a double meaning--it referred to G-d, but also to His agent, Yosef, who was the conduit for G-d's support. [Ed. note: The Torah also uses the word "Elohim" to refer to man, as in Shmot 22:7.] (Degel Machaneh Ephraim)

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"May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they proliferate abundantly within the land like fish." (48:16)

Why did Yaakov pray for the blessing of an angel rather than G-d's blessing? R' Menachem ben Shlomo z"l (Italy; 12th century) explains Yaakov's prayer as follows:

"Master of the World before Whom my fathers walked and Who shepherded me--may it be Your Will that the angel who came from Heaven as Your agent to accompany me and who redeemed me from all evil, from the evil of Lavan and the evil of Esav, as it is written (31:11), "An angel of Elokim said to me in the dream," and (32:2), "Yaakov went on his way, and angels of Elokim encountered him"--this refers to Micha'el, the 'Sar Ha'gadol,' who guarded me and my father and my grandfather, and who is destined to serve my descendants--since I see through ruach ha'kodesh that Hashem appointed him to watch over me and my descendants, I ask Hashem to give him permission to bless my [grand]sons Ephraim and Menashe." (Sechel Tov)

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"Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days'." (49:1)

The Gemara (Pesachim 56a) relates: Yaakov wanted to reveal to his sons the End of Days, but the Shechinah left him. He said, "Perhaps there is impurity among my children, like Avraham, from whom Yishmael came, and my father Yitzchak, from whom Esav came."

Yaakov's sons answered him: "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad -- Just as you, Yisrael, have only The One in your heart, so we have only The One in our hearts."

To this Yaakov answered, "Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va'ed." [Until here from the Gemara] R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania) writes: The Jewish People are like a human body, whose every organ and limb has a unique function. Similarly, every Jew who ever existed, now exists or will exist has a unique purpose. Only by each person doing what he was created to do can the Shechinah rest upon the People as a whole. This is why our Sages say, "If one preserves the life of a single Jew, he preserves the whole world." Hashem created exactly as many Jews as there are tasks to be accomplished; if one is missing, the whole nation cannot achieve its mission.

It follows that when there is love and brotherhood among the Jewish People, the Shechinah can be revealed amongst us. This full unity can be achieved only in the Holy Land, and is a reflection of the soul of our father Yaakov, which "shines" within each of us. That is why both the nation and the land bear his name--Yisrael. This explains also why, when there was a lack of brotherhood among the brothers and they sold Yosef, the Shechinah departed from Yaakov, returning only when Yosef was "found" and the brothers made peace among themselves (see Rashi z"l to 45:27). This also is the meaning of the statement, "Our father Yaakov never died," for as long as there is peace among his descendants, it is as if the parts of his body still function.

The Gemara (Yoma 9b) teaches that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed and our long exile continues because of wanton hatred and lack of brotherhood between Jews. Therefore, when Yaakov saw (in our verse) that he was unable to reveal the date of the redemption, he assumed that this sin was found among his sons as well. His sons answered him, however: We are still united together to serve your G-d. Rather, the Shechinah left Yaakov in order to indicate what would happen in the future, i.e., there would be senseless hatred and a lack of brotherhood among his descendants and the Shechinah would depart from them for a long time. (Siach Yitzchak: Drush L'parashat Shekalim)

A related thought:

In an address delivered on this past Motza'ei Shabbat, R' Ovadiah Yosef shlita (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) observed: A twig is easily snapped in half, but a bundle of twigs is unbreakable. The same is true of the Jewish People; as individuals, we are fragile, but if we are united, we are unbreakable.

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"They instructed that Yosef be told, 'Your father gave orders before his death, saying - Thus shall you say to Yosef: Please, kindly forgive the spiteful deed of your brothers and their sin for they have done you evil.'" (50:16-17)

Rashi z"l writes: They altered the facts for the sake of peace, for Yaakov had given them no such command since Yosef was not suspect in his eyes.

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995) asks: How can Rashi write that Yosef's brothers merely "altered the facts" when it seems they told an outright lie? This is not like other cases where the Torah "altered the facts" for the sake of peace, for example, when Sarah said (18:12), "my husband is old!" and Hashem altered it (in the next verse) to, "I [Sarah] am old!" There, Sarah had also said (verse 12), "After I have withered, shall I again have delicate skin?" She did allude to her own old age. Here, Yosef's brothers made up a story!

R' Auerbach answers: "Your father gave orders" does not have to mean that Yaakov literally spoke the words that follow. If the words contained a message that was consistent with Yaakov's way of life and with which he would have agreed, it is only "altering the facts," not an outright lie, to say that he had said these words. (Minchat Avot p.39)

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## Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written by R' Shimshon David Pincus z"l (1945-2001; rabbi of Ofakim, Israel) in response to someone who complained that his prayers were not being answered and he had therefore lost the urge to pray. It is printed in Nefesh Shimshon: Igrot U'Ma'amarim p.44.

I received your letter, thank you. You asked: What is the precise application of the teaching, "Whoever prays for his friend is answered first"? I don't think there is a way to be precise, other than to take the words at face value.

Regarding your specific problem, I don't know what advice to give. This is because prayer is "service of the heart," and the heart is very personal. How is it possible to give advice when no two hearts are the same? Nevertheless, I will try to dissect the problem.

The problem is that we view prayer as a wonderful "spiritual" experience. I am not saying that this is wrong; sometimes it is so. But, besides this, there is something more fundamental and wonderful-- prayer is a chance to speak to G-d. It's as simple as that.

It all begins with emunah / faith. Emunah means knowledge of the simple fact that there is a G-d. Just like there are tables and chairs, there is a G-d. I don't say that you should know this because it is a lofty level or, conversely, because one who doesn't know it is lowly or a heretic or anything else. It's just a fact. And, since He exists, it's possible to talk to Him, even without having a spiritual experience.

When you wrote me a letter, was that a spiritual experience? Not at all! Rather, it's a fact that there's a man in Ofakim named "Pincus." It's also a fact that that man [R' Pincus is referring to himself] wrote a book about prayer. And, it's a fact that there is a postal service. Therefore, it's possible to write to

him; maybe he can help. In the same way, it's a fact that there's a G-d; it's a fact that He hears everything; it's a fact that He created everything; it's a fact that He is extremely pleasant to deal with; it's a fact that He cares about me and is concerned about my welfare even more than I am. Therefore, it is possible to turn to Him, whether one feels it in his heart or his mind, or feels nothing at all. A fact is a fact, reality is reality, and that's all!

And yet, granted that it's possible to speak to Him, but sometimes, G-d forbid, a person does not feel like he wants to speak to Him.

At such times, one must turn to the reality that was just mentioned. One does not cut off his nose to spite his face; certainly, one will not throw away his life out of spite.

... In short, make peace with G-d. Although He is very great--capable, for example, of making a camera, the human eye, with an incredible number of parts--nevertheless, He does not hold a grudge. Rather, He is waiting longingly and with open arms for your return. . .

I add my own blessing of a simple person that G-d will fulfill your desires in the best way. -  
Shimshon David Pincus

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page.

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