

PORTENTOUS CRIES & KISSES

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Hagar cried when Yishmael became critically ill (21:26). Avraham cried when he eulogized Sarah (23:2). Yitzchak kissed Yakov and blessed him (27:27). Eisav cried because Yitzchak had not blessed him (27:38). Yitzchak did not kiss Eisav, although, he did then bless him (27:39). Yakov kissed Rachel and cried (29:11). Lavan kissed Yakov (29:13). Lavan accused Yakov of not letting him kiss his grand-children (31:28). Lavan kissed his daughters and grand-children (32:1). Eisav kissed Yakov, and both Yakov and Eisav cried (33:4). Yakov cried over Yoseph's presumed death (37:35). Yoseph cried before imprisoning Shimon (42:24). Yoseph cried upon seeing Binyamin. (43:30) Yoseph and Binyamin cried on each other (45:14). Yoseph kissed all of his brothers (45:15). Yoseph cried on Yakov, but Yakov did not cry because he was saying Shema (46:29). Yakov kissed Menashe and Ephrayim and blessed them (48:10). Yakov blessed his sons (49:1) but did not kiss them. Yakov died and Yoseph cried and kissed him (50:1). Yoseph cried when his brothers accused him of possibly wanting revenge (50:17).

Let us analyze the instances of kissing, and or crying, that are recorded in Sefer Bereishis and see what they can teach us.

There is a fundamental difference between kissing and crying. Kissing is a deliberate and aggressive act, whereas crying is an autonomic and reactive response. The instances of crying recorded in Bereishis are responses to emotionally charged situations such as: fear, anger, pain, loss, extreme happiness and relief. The instances of kissing recorded in Bereishis are acts initiated by motives ranging from love and desire to cunning and deception.

Considering that crying is an autonomic reaction to an external set of circumstances, it can not be judged as good or bad. Whether they are the tears of Avraham over the death of Sarah or the tears of Sisra's mother over the death of her son, tears are tears. Regardless of whether or not you feel the tears are justified, tears are tears. The tears in Bereishis were all motivated by extreme circumstances and emotions - some more noble than others. Kissing, on the other hand, is a deliberate act that reflects the motives of the participants and can be judged as either good or bad. What determines a good kiss or a bad kiss?

The ultimate good kiss is mentioned by Rashi at the time of Moshe Rabbeinu's death. "And Moshe the servant of G-d died... by the mouth of G-d." (Divarim 34:5) Rashi explains the term, "by the mouth of G-d" to mean, "with a kiss." G-d's kiss is the reserved method for taking the souls of the greatest

Tzadikim. It is an act of such intimacy and love that it is considered the highest commendation that G-d bestows on a human. It is befitting that G-d Himself should lovingly take back from the Tzadik the treasure which had been entrusted to the Tzadik, and which the Tzadik had perfected through a lifetime of commitment and sacrifice. Therefore, a good kiss is a kiss that openly acknowledges completion, wholeness, perfection and welcome.

A bad kiss, on the other hand, is intended to hide the true intentions of the initiator and fool the recipient into thinking that he is welcomed, appreciated and acknowledged. Lavan kissing Yakov is juxtaposed to Yakov kissing Rachel. Lavan's kiss was disingenuous and misleading, appearing to be open and welcoming while he searched Yakov for hidden wealth. Yakov's kissing Rachel acknowledged his soul mate, their singular destinies, the future of the Chosen People, and the joy and perfection of their intended union.

Eisav's kissing Yakov is contrasted with Yakov not kissing Eisav. Eisav's intention, as noted by Rashi, was to harm Yakov. His kiss was not genuine and Yakov knew it. Yakov, who was the quintessential "man of truth", could not after 36 years joyously and openly greet his brother. For Yakov, Eisav represented the failure of what could have been. Eisav could have been a progenitor of the Jewish people. Eisav could have married Leah and given birth to Yoseph. Instead, Yakov felt compelled to purchase the birthright and removed Eisav's option for being part of the Jewish people. All in all, Yakov's struggles and ultimate success in accomplishing his mission of birthing the Jewish people paralleled Eisav's failure to accomplish his intended destiny. Such an encounter deserved tears, not kisses. Therefore, they both cried.

The most perplexing scene is Joseph's reunion with Yakov. Yoseph cried, Yakov davened, and neither kissed.

Yakov davened instead of crying because the reunion signified G-d's never ceasing love and protection of the Bnai Yisroel. During the 22 years of their separation, while Yakov had vented his pain and loss through tears, unknown to Yakov, G-d had lovingly protected every member of his family. Therefore, the reunion was a time to praise and thank G-d, not to cry. Yoseph, on the other hand, had been aware of G-d's ongoing protection for the past 22 years. For Yoseph, it was a time to cry and vent his pent-up pain and newfound joy; it was not time to daven.

Yakov and Yoseph do not kiss each other because it was not yet a time of wholeness and completion. Both knew that the Bnai Yisroel were just beginning the difficult period of exile and slavery. The future would be difficult and dangerous. Additionally, Yakov did not know if Yoseph had completely maintained his righteousness. Therefore, it was not yet a time for kissing.

In next week's Parsha, when Yakov prepared to bless Menashe and Ephrayim, the sons of Yoseph, Yakov knew that Yoseph had truly maintained his righteousness. To have raised such sons amidst the amorality of Mitzrayim demanded the vigilance and strength of a real Tzadik. It was then time for Yakov to bestow kisses.

When Yakov died (next week's Parsha), Yoseph cried and kissed him. He cried because of his obvious pain and loss. He kissed him because Yakov's mortal fears for his children and grandchildren had ended. Yakov was finally at peace. Furthermore, it is only at the time of death that a person can be acknowledged as being truly perfect and whole. Yoseph's kiss was the most eloquent expression of love and admiration for a father who had attained perfection. Just as G-d acknowledges and greets his Tzadikim at the time of death with a kiss, so too did Yoseph acknowledge and bid farewell to his father, Yakov.

Tenth of Tevet