

PARASHAT VAYIGASH & THE FAST OF THE 10TH OF TEBET

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"He then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them" [Beresheet 45:15]

The climax of the intrigue woven through the series of parashiyot [weekly Torah portions] that tell of the story of Yosef and his brothers, is the emotion packed scene when Yosef revealed his identity to his brothers with the words, "I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" The brother's initial shock and fear was relieved by the gentle words of consolation that Yosef offered. Yosef kissed his brothers and cried.

Why did Yosef cry? At a time of success the emotion should have been joyful laughter. Why didn't the brothers shed any tears? The behavior needs explanation.

When his brothers sold Yosef into slavery, he was ripped away from the life of spiritual purity that all enjoyed in the house of Yaakov, and in contrast was cast into the land of Egypt -- a place steeped in immorality and vice. In the beginning it certainly was difficult for him, however, with the passage of time, as is human nature, he was able to adapt to the environment. He was a dot of purity in an ocean of impurity -- but he made the best of the situation. When naming his firstborn, he himself testified, "G-d made me forget all my hardship and all my father's household." (Beresheet 41: 51).

And so the years passed until his brothers came to Egypt. When Yosef was confronted by the holiness of the house of Yaakov he realized the stark contrast to the spiritually empty existence he was suffering in Egypt. The tears began to flow over all that he was lacking and all that he had missed during his long exile. The brothers, on the other hand, had just recovered their lost brother and felt only feelings of joy -- not tears.

The Ktav Sofer, zt'l, writes that the principle of "What happened to our patriarchs is a portend for the future generations" may be applied here. While we suffer in this long exile we do not have a concept of the suffering we are experiencing. The human faculty that allows one to adapt to any situation has numbed our spiritual sensitivity. Our attachment to physical pleasures and our pursuit of our desires distract us from the pain of exile. We have grown accustomed to the situation. When the redemption comes -- may it be speedily and in our days -- our blindness to spirituality will be cured and we will realize all that we are missing in our centuries of exile. We will burst into tears -- tears of mourning over the past -- over time wasted in delusion because of our failure to meet the standards Hashem demands of us. May we all work towards lives of Kedushah -- holiness -- through learning of Torah and adherence to the misvot so that we may bring the geulah -- redemption -- amen.

Shabbat Shalom

The 10th of Tebet is a fast day on which we say additional selihot in our prayers in order to remember the sad events that took place in the Temple Era during this time of year. Tzidkiyahu, the last king from the family of King David ruled over the Kingdom of Yehudah. The Temple stood in its glory in Yerushalayim, a bustling metropolis full of an active populous. Yirmiyahu, the prophet, went from place to place throughout the city begging people to make repentance and return Kedusha -- holiness -- to their lives. He said that if the people refused to heed Hashem's warnings -- the results would be disastrous. The people ignored the holy messenger and some even made fun of him. Nevuzardan, a high officer of King Nebuchadnezzar, came with many battalions and laid siege to our holy capital. The siege began on the 10th of Tebet and resulted in the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash 2 1/2 years later.

The purpose of fasting almost 2500 years after the events of the destruction took place is to awaken our hearts today to repentance. Our sages teach that anyone who lives at a time when there is no Bet Hamikdash must realize that had he or she lived when the Temple stood that his or her behavior would contribute to its destruction. Should we mend our ways and remove from our lives the behavior that brings destruction we will bring about the construction of the third Temple -- the one that will never be destroyed -- and the coming of Mashiah speedily in our days. May we all spend the day productively contributing to that end -- Amen.

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