

Yosef's Journey of Tears to Emotional Openness



By Rabbi Benzion Scheinfeld

In this week's parsha, the riveting story of Yosef Hatzadik reaches its climax as Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers with the famous words "Ani Yosef, haod avi chai." To fully appreciate what transpired in this incredible moment, let us take a step back and address a question that must bother anyone learning the story of Yosef.

How is it that Yosef did not contact his father and family once he became the vice-roy of Egypt? How could he not try to make contact to stop the suffering that Yaakov had experienced for the 22 years he was separated from Yosef and thought he had died?

Many meforshim address this issue. I would like to suggest an approach that sheds light not only on why Yosef did not contact his home but also gives us a powerful insight into the inner world of Yosef Hatzadik and the amazing transformation he underwent.

Perhaps Yosef was so hurt by what happened in his father's house that he wished to forget his family and escape to his new life in Egypt. Yosef, although loved by his father, was all too aware of his brothers' hatred toward him—that culminated in the terrible crime of his kidnapping and almost murder. Yosef was deeply hurt by that trauma. And now after years of pain and suffer-

ing due to the alienation he felt at home, he had finally achieved success. He built a new life for himself, found a wife, had children, and achieved unthinkable power. He thought that he finally found his true identity and was happy to bury his connection to his family deep in his heart and start a new life. This suggestion is strongly supported by the startling name Yosef gave his first child, Menashe. The Torah explains that name to mean "thank You, Hashem, for helping me to forget my father's home and all the pain it brought me." It seems that Yosef had closed his heart to his family and it wasn't until the visit of his brothers that he was forced to confront the deepest truths. In fact, it was this process that allowed Yosef to return and take his place in klal Yisrael.

Let us take a closer look at this process that can be traced through the progression of Yosef's tears.

The First Time Yosef Cries

When Yosef first meets his brothers, he seems very calculated. He recognizes them and they don't recognize him, and he decides to take advantage of that. We are not sure of his true motives, but he seems to have a plan and to be in full control of the situation. But all that begins to change when he overhears Reuven's speech to his brothers that attributes their misfortune in Egypt to their insensitivity to their long-lost brother's pleas. Yosef, who thought he had moved on, is suddenly and

unexpectedly deeply touched by his brother's words. He begins to realize that although he has spent the last 22 years trying to forget, his brothers have spent the last 22 years unable to forget. The Torah describes **וַיִּסָּב מֵעַל יְדָם וַיִּבְכֶּה**, he turns away and he cries. Yosef loses control of his emotions and is forced to turn away to hide his tears. Yosef manages to hide the burst of emotion and carries on with his conversation with his brothers. But, his journey of tears has just begun. For despite his best efforts to bury his family connections, his deeper inner true self is just beginning to emerge. And as he witnesses his brothers' remorse, Yosef himself begins to change.

The Second Set of Tears

Yosef is again ambushed by his emotions when he finally encounters Binyamin.

Bereishit (43:30): "and Yosef ran out of the room for his heart was bursting with care and love for all his brothers and he needed to cry, and he went to the next room and burst out crying, and he then washed his face and got control of himself and ordered the servants to serve a meal..."

Although the emotion was triggered by seeing Binyamin, it was directed at all of his brothers. Rashi quotes an amazingly powerful midrash that tells us a bit more about what triggered this uncontrollable outburst of emotion by Yosef.

The Midrash says that when Yosef met Binyamin, he asked Binyamin if he had any other brothers from the same mother. Binyamin answered yes, he does, but he does not know where he is. Yosef continues to ask Binyamin if he has any children. Binyamin answers him that he has 10. Yosef then asks their names, and when he is told the rather strange names, Yosef asks why Binyamin chose such strange names. Binyamin tells him how each of the 10 names was chosen to commemorate a different aspect of the pain and suffering and tragedy that his older brother Yosef must have experienced.

One can only imagine what is swelling up in Yosef's heart as he hears the love and sensitivity Binyamin has been expressing for 22 years through his children's names, especially as it contrasts to the name Menashe, that Yosef chose for his own son.

This time Yosef's crying is too intense to hide. He is forced to rush out of the room in what must have been a rather awkward scene. And in one of the most touching and relatable human details mentioned in the Torah, the Torah describes how he is forced to wash his face before reappearing before his brothers. It is becoming apparent that Yosef's heart is opening to his true feelings.

The Final Tears of Emotional Openness

Yosef's transformation is completed in this week's parsha. Yosef witnesses Yehuda's impassioned speech of care for Yaakov his father and his refusal to abandon Binyamin, *the same Yehuda who years ago in cold blood had led the charge to sell him to the Egyptians!* This is the final step of Yosef's emotional journey. After Yosef witnessed Yehuda's transformation, he can no longer keep up the masquerade and hold in his tears. He bursts out crying in front of his brothers, saying the most honest words he has uttered in 22 years

"Ani Yosef, ha' od avi chai!" The real me is Yosef and all I really cared about for the last 22 years was father and my family.

Yosef's journey of tears allowed him to open his heart, forgive his brothers and reconnect with his truest self. He didn't do it alone. For it was the brothers' teshuva and transformation that allowed Yosef to reach that honest place.

Learning From Yosef: Our Mission

Staying emotionally open despite hurts and disappointments that might have caused us pain is one of the greatest and most important challenges we face in our lives. Hashem gave us all delicate and beautiful hearts. All too often we close our hearts to others and even to ourselves because of the pain we might have experienced. But that is a tragedy. For there is no greater gift and responsibility than to live with emotional openness to others, to Hashem and to ourselves. May we learn from Yosef's tearful journey to do our best to keep our hearts open so that we can give and receive to our highest potential throughout our lives.

Rabbi Scheinfeld is a Judaic studies teacher at SAR High School and is founder of Camp Kanfei and Camp Bnos Kanfei, a ski and travel adventure camp founded in 1994.

Seventeen, Again



By Steven Genack

We know Yaakov lived until 147 and that he descended to Egypt at 130. The question then becomes why the Torah had to go out of its way in the beginning of this week's parsha to say that Yaakov "lived in Mitzrayim for 17 years," and furthermore, why not use the language "vayeshev" or "vayagar," instead of "veyechi." The message is powerful and wonderful. Yaakov lived with Yosef for 17 years before he was sold, as we know Yosef was sold at 17 years old. It may be said

that these original 17 years "were" Yaakov's life, his happiness and pride. He then descends into mourning. So, the verse in this week's parsha is saying "vayechi," to indicate that not only did Yaakov now enjoy "17" years of existential joy with Yosef that mimicked the original "17," but also years of "chiyus," a spiritual nirvana, because he sees Yosef has withstood exile and didn't lose his spiritual chiyus. Indeed, two sets of 17 personified all of Yaakov's joy.

Steven Genack is the author of the upcoming book "Articles, Anecdotes & Insights," Genack/Genechovsky Torah from Gefen Press.

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