

## Yosef is Still Alive - A Lesson In Divine Providence

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*Published in Jewish Thought, OU Publications, Vol. 5, Num. 1 (5757-8)*

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### Introduction

The climactic meeting between Yaakov and his long lost son Yosef is one of the most dramatic and emotion laden episodes in the Torah. It strikes at the very core of our human emotion and evokes our base familial empathy. Yet beneath the emotionally charged surface, under every step that Yaakov took, from his first realization that Yosef was alive until their enigmatic reunion, lies a fundamental principle of creation, and maxim of Jewish existence - 'Whatever God does is for the good.'<sup>1</sup>

This notion is enshrined in the Talmud as follows:

It is incumbent upon man to bless over evil the same way as he blesses over good.

(Berachot 54a)

What is meant by being bound to bless for the evil the same way as for the good? Shall I say that, just as for the good one says the blessing 'Who is good and bestows good', so for the evil one should say the blessing 'Who is good and bestows good'? But we have learned that 'For good tidings one says, 'Who is good and does good'; for evil tidings one says 'Blessed is the True Judge'. Raba said [it means]: one must receive the evil with gladness. R. Aha in the name of R. Levi said: Where do we find this in Scripture? *I will sing of mercy and justice, unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing praises* (Tehillim 101:1); whether it is 'mercy' I will sing, or whether it is 'justice' I will sing. R. Shmuel b. Nachmani said: We learn it from here: *In the Lord (Hashem) I will praise His word, in God (Elokim) I will praise His word* (Tehillim. 56:11). In the Lord (Hashem) I will praise His word - this refers to good dispensation; *in God (Elokim) I will praise His word* - this refers to the dispensation of suffering. R. Tanhum said: we learn it from here: *I will lift up the cup of my salvation and call on the name of the Lord* (Tehillim. 116:13); *I found trouble and sorrow, but I called upon the name of the Lord* (Tehillim. 116:3). The Rabbis derive it from here: *The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken, blessed be the name of the Lord* (Iyov 1:21). R. Huma said in the name of Rav citing R. Meir, and so it was taught in the name of R. Akiva: A man should always accustom himself to say, 'Whatever the All-merciful does is for the good.'

(Berachot 60b)

The implication of this discussion is that though surely one does not bless God as “doing good” when bad occurs, nevertheless one must accept the bad in the same manner as one accepts actual good. Rashi elaborates that this acceptance requires a “*Lev Shalem*” - a whole heart.<sup>2</sup> After the fact, one must accept that in the big picture, it is all for the good. This is precisely the resolution of the Talmud which concludes its discussion of this concept with the case in point of R. Akiva:

R. Akiva was once going along the road and he came to a certain town and looked for lodgings but was everywhere refused. He said “Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good”, and he went and spent the night in the open field. He had with him a rooster, an donkey, and a lamp. A gust of wind came and blew out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the rooster, a lion came and ate the donkey. He said “Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good”. The same night some bandits came and carried off the inhabitants of the town. He said to them: Did I not say to you, “Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good?”

(*Berachot* 60b)<sup>3</sup>

After each negative occurrence, R. Akiva’s confidence in God’s providence allowed him to accept the event as part of a greater yet unseen picture. In the end, R. Akiva saw in retrospect that his having to sleep out of the town and having the light extinguished, the rooster and the donkey eaten all effected his eventual salvation.<sup>4</sup> Though it was not clear at the time, all of the bad occurrences eventuated his ultimate salvation.

## The Analysis

The reunion of Yaakov and Yosef comes as a profound epilogue to the traumatic separation which was effected by the sale of Yosef some twenty two years prior. The notion of acknowledging God’s goodness (even in the ostensibly bad) as the fundamental message of the sale is provided by Yosef himself in his self-assessment of the events that transpired. Yosef recognizes the guiding hand of God and he says so explicitly when he discloses his identity to his brothers:

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years has the famine been in the land, and there are five more years, in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So that it was not you who sent me here, but God....

(*Bereishith* 45:5-8)

In consonance with Yosef’s appraisal, Yaakov too recognizes the imperative of acknowledging God’s goodness in the events. Upon hearing of Yosef’s being alive, Yaakov’s first words were, “Great (*Rav*), my son Yosef is still alive” (*Bereishith* 45:28). The Midrash interprets Yaakov’s exclamation as acknowledgment that

righteousness itself is dependent upon perceiving the ultimate good of God in all experiences, and not questioning His ways:

Great (*Rav*) is the [moral] strength of my son who has experienced many misfortunes and yet adheres to his righteousness. For more than he have I uttered [cries of despair], for I said, ‘My way is hid from the Lord’ (Yishaya 40:27).

(*Ber. R.* 94:3)<sup>5</sup>

### **Be’er Sheva**

“And Yisrael took his journey with all that he had, and came to Be’er-Sheva and offered sacrifices (*vayizbach zevachim*) to the God of his father Yitzhak”

(Bereishith 46:1)

Yaakov immediately takes up his journey to see his son. Yet, contrary to the momentum of the text which suggests that Yaakov would continue uninterrupted until reaching his destination, he stops in Be’er Sheva. The Ramban (on Bereishith 46:1) explains that Yaakov went to Be’er Sheva to pray since that was the house of prayer of his forefathers.<sup>6</sup> By examining how his forefathers related to God there, a deeper understanding of the significance of Yaakov’s stop in Be’er Sheva can be gleaned.

### **Avraham at Be’er Sheva**

Be’er Sheva is recorded as the place where Avraham took an oath with Avimelech upon this king’s recognition of the Godly power vested in Avraham (Bereishith 21:22). Following this Avraham planted a tree and “proclaimed the name of Hashem, El Olam” (Bereishith 21:33). The Ramban explicates Avraham’s use of this name to underscore God’s “leadership over the entire world” in both space and time.<sup>7</sup> R. Hirsch notes that this particular name of God was employed by Avraham in order to emphasize the notion of God as “God of the Future”.

“Avraham teaches a Name which apparently points beyond the visible horizon of the present, and to God, as the God Who proclaims the time that is hidden from human eyes. For that is what עולם means, from עלם , to be hidden... In the Tanach the word עולם never means the world but [rather] the hidden time, accordingly, as a rule the whole future...”

(R. Hirsch, p.364).

R. Hirsch propounds that Avraham used this name of God to emphasize that it was only through Divine direction that a king would have some recognition<sup>8</sup> of the *future* greatness of Avraham’s descendants; thus prompting him (Avimelech), the king of the land, to come to a simple citizen to make an oath for *future* generations.<sup>9</sup> Thus Be’er Sheva is the place at which is immortalized the concept that God is not just a ‘God of the present’ but rather “the One Who sows the future with invisible seeds in the present” (R. Hirsch, p.365). For it is here at Be’er Sheva, that Avraham recognized “the first trace of God’s constructive work in directing human history” (R. Hirsch, p.365).

“At all times, when thunder rolls, lightening flashes, trees blossom, flowers smell, food nourishes, events mature, etc., [Haza] teach us to take the fact to heart that the present is already part of the future and to think of God as Melech HaOlam, as the Ruler and Director of the hidden future which is slowly maturing to perfection in the course of time.”

(R. Hirsch, p.366)

R. Hirsch goes further in explaining that the term עולם intimates the fundamental idea that the world, past, present and future, contains an element of hiddenness; “and it wants to accustom us to look at every occurrence beyond the actual visible to the invisible force that lies behind it, and up to God, the Ruler and Director of that force, the Melech Olam, to Whose Kingdom everything belongs which surrounds us in this ‘world of riddles’.” (R. Hirsch, p.366). Thus, Be’er Sheva is *the* place where God’s power over past, present and *future*, where God’s hidden hand in directing history is manifest.

### Yitzhak at Be’er Sheva

Be’er Sheva is the place where God (as Hashem) appeared to Yitzhak and assured him of His blessing and protection (Bereishith 26:24). And it is here that Yitzhak builds an altar to Hashem (Bereishith 26:25). It is the place, according to Ramban, where Yitzhak redug and renamed the well of his father Avraham. The naming of the wells contains a deeper symbolic significance than to simply catalog property. R. J.Z.Mecklenburg explains that the naming of wells by both Avraham and Yitzhak was done in order to spread the knowledge of God:

He [Avraham] called the well by a name that would drive home the lesson of the true existence of the One God. By this he would arouse in them an awareness of the truth by saying, ‘Let us go and draw water from the well of the eternal God!’ The wells were a public necessity, and in this manner, the people were initiated into a knowledge of the true God. ...Yitzhak followed in his father’s footsteps.

(*Haketav VeHakabala*, Bereishith 26:18)

R. Hirsch reasons that though superficially the name Be’er Sheva signifies the oaths taken there, the name also proclaims that “there God had been apparent as being in connection with the concrete earthly material affairs (the Invisible Seventh with the visible sixth)” (R. Hirsch, p.440).<sup>10</sup> Thus the name Be’er Sheva taken in this context is to impart upon those who come upon it, the Creator as an invisible Director of past, present and future.

Yaakov specifically chose Be’er Sheva to acknowledge the aspect of God that both his father Yitzhak and grandfather Avraham revealed and imbued in the place. It is here that he acknowledges his past as one directed by the Invisible Director. It is here that he takes solace in the knowledge that his painful past was a necessary evil for the ultimate future good of his family. It is here that he pays homage to the God who

planted in time the future salvation of his family via the temporary personal loss of his beloved son.

### **Zevachim**

Recognizing that Yaakov came specifically to Be'er Sheva to acknowledge God's mastery over the past, present and future, the question arises as to why he chose sacrifice, and more specifically *zevachim*, as the form of worship.

The objective of offering sacrifices in general is to bring about "man's spiritual regeneration and perfection".<sup>11</sup> Korbanot were brought to strengthen one's relationship with God.<sup>12</sup> As such, Yaakov's offering must be seen in light of this general objective. His intention was to strengthen his relationship with God.

More specifically, there are four classes of animal sacrifices: *Olah* (burnt), *Hatat* (sin), *Asham* (guilt), *Shlamim* (peace);<sup>13</sup> and one meal sacrifice known as the *Mincha* (gift)<sup>14</sup>. Yaakov is recorded as offering simply "*zevachim*". There is a general rule that the term "*zevachim*" when used without qualification, usually refers to *shlamim*.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the commentators interpret the *zevachim* offered here by Yaakov to be *shlamim*.<sup>16</sup>

R. Hirsch explains the impetus prescribed for bringing *shlamim* as follows:

"The *shlamim* ...offerings are brought out of our feelings of the **dependence of our fate** on God, and their whole purpose being the consecration of **our joy and happiness in the condition of our life**"  
(R. Hirsch Vay. 7:18, p.211)<sup>17</sup>

With this sacrifice Yaakov rejoiced in his cognizance of God's faithful providence. He was not rejoicing in the fact that his son was alive, in the sense that now he could see him, or that now his family was saved. Rather he was rejoicing in the fact that his son was alive, in that his being alive was tangible proof of God's immutable providence working ultimately "for the good."

That Yaakov's intention was not on the mere physical salvation of Yosef or his family is borne out by the midrash:

Raish Lakish maintains that the sacrifice was brought for the Covenant of the Tribes.

(Ber. R. 94:5)

Rashi (on *ibid.*) explains that, "[Yaakov] brought the sacrifice in that God maintained His promise concerning the tribes...that his seed would never be extinct... Since he saw all the [twelve] tribes whole, he brought a sacrifice to reaffirm the covenant."<sup>18</sup> Yaakov's joy certainly included happiness that his family was whole, but he brought the sacrifice "in that God maintained His promise"! The *Eitz Yosef* (on *ibid.*) specifies that the *shlamim* were "thanksgiving" *shlamim*. However even he maintains that the gratitude was not over the family being alive, but rather God's providence "for the good" being validated: "[Yaakov] offered a thanksgiving offering to God in that the

covenant of the twelve tribes was maintained.” Rejoicing over the covenant being maintained specifically refers to an appreciation of God’s fulfillment of His promise, of His providence, and necessarily, His doing “for the good”.

The Talmud (*Moed Katan* 15b, *Zevachim* 99b) characterizes the mental and spiritual state of one bringing *shlamim* by enjoining that “*Shlamim* [are to be offered] when one is *shalem* (complete).”<sup>19</sup> Rashi (on *Moed Katan* 15b) explains that one bringing *shlamim* must be “whole in his thought, his mind settled.”<sup>20</sup>

The *shlamim* offering is “the expression of a person who feels himself *shalem*, in a condition of completeness, lacking nothing and in this condition, and with it, he wishes to get nearer to God.”

(R. Hirsch, *Vayikra* 7:14, p.200; *Vayikra* 3:1, p.75)

No description could be more in consonance with Yaakov’s state of mind on his way to see Yosef. Yaakov is now spiritually whole, complete. As such he comes to offer *shlamim* in his name of Yisrael denoting completeness<sup>21</sup>, as the HaAmek Davar (on Bereishith 46:1) points out, “in the high spirit of Yisrael.”

The Torah records Yaakov going to Beer Sheva “with all he had” (Bereishith 46:1). The Meshech Hochma (Bereishith 46:1) notes that this “all” refers to having all his spiritual power complete within him. Yaakov’s spiritual power is known as *tiferet/emet* (beauty/harmony/truth<sup>22</sup>) - the balanced harmonious confluence of the powers of *hesed* (mercy/kindness) and *gevurah/din* (strength/judgment).<sup>23</sup> These are precisely the attributes conjured by the *shlamim* sacrifices, as the Ramban (*Vayikra* 3:1) explains that the name *shlamim* comes from the word *yashlim* (reconcile, harmonize); upon which the Biur HaLevush<sup>24</sup> comments that *shlamim* “... harmonize all the [Divine] attributes to one.” Consequently, the Ramban (Bereishith 46:1) ascribes precisely this intent to Yaakov:

Yaakov offered *shlamim* in order to bring all the Divine attributes into accord (*L’ha’shlim*) with him.

(Ramban on Bereishith 46:1)

By his use specifically of *shlamim*, Yaakov was invoking the reconciliation of the opposing attributes of Justice (*Din/Gevurah*) and Mercy (*Hesed*).<sup>25</sup> Yaakov’s comprehension of God’s always doing “for the good” had the added discernment that the “good” was effectuated by God’s attributes of justice and mercy operating in harmony.<sup>26</sup>

Yaakov’s offering was not brought to rejoice over his son’s well being, nor to thank God for the opportunity to reunite with his son, but solely to celebrate his own settled mind due to the recognition of God’s “whole” supervision of the world. Furthermore, it was not only to acknowledge God’s providence over time, but more specifically God’s oneness in fulfilling purpose over time through the use of both the attribute of Justice and the attribute of Mercy. That even at time when *Din* seems to be the manifest attribute, it is, in the “big picture”, operating in complete harmonious accord (*shalem*) with the attribute of *Hesed*.

## **Elokay Yitzhak**

The Ramban (Bereishith 46:1) explains that Yaakov's offering was made to the "God of Yitzhak" because it was to God's attribute of *gevurah*, as embodied in the person of his father Yitzhak, that he directed his sacrifice.<sup>27</sup>

I have seen this text in the Midrash of R. Nechunya ben Hakanah: 'And Yaakov swore by the Fear of his father Yitzhak.' Is there any one who swears by the belief of the Fear of his father? However, it was because Yaakov was not yet given strength, and so he swore by the Fear of his father Yitzhak. ... Thus far the Midrash. From the words of the Rabbis of this Midrash, we learn that it was not for this reason that it does not say here, "and he offered sacrifices to the Eternal," [but instead it says, 'to the God of his father Yitzhak'], because now in Be'er Sheva Yaakov had already become privileged to possess his own portion [and needed only to bring all Divine attributes into accord towards him], as it is said, 'Thou wilt give truth to Yaakov, mercy to Avraham, as Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.'

(Ramban on Bereishith 46:1)

The Ramban explains that though Yaakov had prayed in the name of his father in the past, he did so as a consequence of circumstance, since he himself had not yet been attributed with any specific power to pray with on his own behalf. However now, at this point in time in Be'er Sheva, Yaakov had in fact attained his own strength, his own attribute<sup>28</sup> from which to pray. Therefore, his use of the term "Elokay Yitzhak" is not attributable to any reason other than that he consciously wished to conjure that power embodied by his father Yitzhak.<sup>29</sup>

The reason Yaakov directed his sacrifices to this attribute was, as has been the contention of this thesis, that Yaakov specifically wished to acknowledge the symbiotic nature of the divine attributes. In that Yitzhak represents the divine attribute of strict justice, Yaakov (as Yisrael - in complete and perfected form)<sup>30</sup> offered sacrifices in praise<sup>31</sup> and joy to God's kindness (*hesed*) as effectuated through His trait of justice (*gevurah/din*).

Furthermore, Yaakov's sacrifice to God as "Elokim" is a rare instance of sacrifice offered to God in a name other than Hashem. R. B'hayay (Bereishith 46:1) notes the anomaly as follows, "It would have been appropriate for the verse to read: 'And he offered sacrifices to Hashem'."<sup>32</sup> Yet it was specifically to the divine attribute of *Din* (Judgment), as the name Elokim connotes<sup>33</sup>, that Yaakov intended his *shlamim*.<sup>34</sup> Again, as further emphasis on his acknowledgment of the attribute of justice as integral element to God's operating His world for its ultimate good.

Also striking in Yaakov's offerings to God as Elokim is the glaring contrast to his forefathers who in that very place of Beer Sheva communed with God in His aspect of Hashem.<sup>35</sup> This can be seen as further expression of Yaakov's reconciliation of the two ostensibly opposing attributes. In the very place that the attribute of *hesed* has been conjured, he calls upon the attribute of *gevurah* as a subtle yet cogent affirmation of their inseparable nature.

## ***The Dream***

Following the sacrificial rites, God appears to Yaakov:

And God (Elokim) said to Yisrael in a revelation of the night, and said, “Yaakov Yaakov.” And he said, “Here am I.” And He said, “I am God, the God of your father; fear not to go down to Egypt for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you and I will surely bring you up; and Yosef will put his hand upon your eyes.”  
(Bereishith 46:2-4)

## **Fear**

In consonance with previous divine revelations in Be'er Sheva<sup>36</sup>, God appears to Yaakov in a dream to assure him of his auspicious future. The one question which evokes much commentary (and ostensibly grates on our thesis here) is that God begins by allaying Yaakov to “fear not”.

One is not told ‘fear not’ unless he is afraid.  
(Hizkuni on Bereishith 46:3)<sup>37</sup>

If Yaakov now had such a powerful comprehension of God’s direction of His world “for the good” - what then did he have to fear?

The answer derives from a review of the Talmudic discussion on the principle, “Whatever God does is for the good”. Ultimately, God works His plan toward its successful happy conclusion, such that in the end, in the context of the full view of history, the “good” will be discerned in what previously seemed unredeemably “bad”. The “bad” may be understood as a necessary stage to achieving what all would recognize as true good (e.g. the sale of Yosef for the future salvation of the nation); or that the bad was a necessary negative ramification of the free will needed to provide man the venue to achieving the ultimate good (*Derech Hashem* 4:4:1, 1:2).<sup>38</sup> Rav Dessler’s words on this point are especially poignant given that they were written in Europe shortly after the outbreak of WWII:

However numerous and grievous the hurts and persecutions the [Jews] suffer and have suffered for thousands of years, we do not give up. We know in our hearts that all is for the best. There is an ultimate good towards which all is tending and which will make all worthwhile. Then we will discover that everything that befell us, everything that appeared so terrible and meaningless, was evil only in its outward form, not in [spiritual] reality.

(R.Dessler, *Strive for Truth*, Vol.1, p.58)

Having a keen perception that God’s direction is always “for the good” does not preclude the fear that some real “bad” may occur; yet it *does* compel acceptance of bad just as one accepts good,<sup>39</sup> with the faith that whatever God does is for the ultimate good.<sup>40</sup>



## Consolation

### *A great nation*

Given Yaakov's legitimate apprehension, the Ohr HaHayim (Bereishith 46:3) questions the efficacy of God's promises to mollify those concerns. He reasons that Yaakov had two primary fears: 1) The beginning of the exile with him; and 2) being buried in exile. To this God promised that: 1) Yaakov would not personally be a slave; and 2) that he would be buried with his forefathers. However, the Ohr HaHayim is still forced to admit that the core fear<sup>41</sup> of the exile beginning for his children could only be allayed by the promise for the ultimate good:

[God's] intent in telling him the reason that He desires the servitude and affliction in Egypt, for it will be very heavy on his children, [nevertheless] it is [in order] to become a great nation, and so it must be.

(Ohr HaHayim on Bereishith 46:3)

Similarly do the other commentaries interpret the consolation as being one "for the ultimate good", but not that bad won't happen<sup>42</sup>:

If the days of servitude and affliction approach, so too does the blessing that 'I will make you into a great nation'.

(Hizkuni on Bereishith 46:3)

For if your children were to dwell here [in Canaan] they would intermarry and assimilate with the pagans of the land, but in Egypt this will not occur 'for the Egyptians can not eat with the Hebrews' and thus they will be a separate nation.

(Sforno on Bereishith 46:3)

'In to a great nation will I make you' and this through the affliction ... the affliction was the reason to make them into a great nation.

(Kli Yakar on Bereishith 46:4)

Thus the fundamental consolation given by God<sup>43</sup> to assuage Yaakov's fear of exile was that ultimately it was "for the good." R. Hirsch (Bereishith 46:2) puts the very words in God's mouth: "...have no fear, ...the ultimate object of the move is ... happy greatness." The idea of the necessary intermediate evil for the sake of the ultimate good is again thematically prominent.

### *Bring Up*

The second component of the promise reads, "I will go down with you and I will surely bring you up." Though many of the commentators view this as a promise to Yaakov that he will be buried in his homeland,<sup>44</sup> the midrash sees it as containing the extended assurance that God will redeem Yaakov's children from exile:

Said the Holy One Blessed be He to Moshe: I said to their father Yaakov: "I will go down with you into Egypt, and I will surely bring you up again." Now I have come down here to bring out his

descendants, in accordance with My promise to their forefather  
Yaakov.

(*Sh. R. 3:3*)<sup>45</sup>

Once again, the promise does not mitigate evil but rather guarantees ultimate good.

### ***Covered Eyes***

The last component of the divine promise, “Yosef will put his hand upon your eyes”, is one which seems not to have any logical connection to the circumstances of going down to Egypt or coming up therefrom.<sup>46</sup> The Meshech Hochma provides a contextually relevant explanation for this expression, proposing that it is intended metaphorically to elucidate the principle of God’s providence:

It is possible that [God] was telling [Yaakov] not to investigate with perspicacity and with rational eyes the purpose and essence of the matter of going down to Egypt...The whole matter [of Yosef]<sup>47</sup> is to be closed to your eyes, that you can not investigate and not discern after the ways of God’s providence, for it is lofty. For who would have dreamed that the sorrow of Yosef would lead to such a desirable end...

(Meshech Hochma on Bereishith 46:4)

In this final component of the dream, explains the Meshech Hochma, God Himself (as Elokim) acknowledged that providence can indeed only be completely understood with a full view of its historical consequence.

Every aspect of God’s communication to Yaakov was in direct response to his new found realization of God’s providence. A perception of God which now included an understanding of Elokim - dispenser of justice for the ultimate good.

### ***The Genealogy***

The event of going down to Egypt was a turning point in the history of the nation, consequently a genealogy is placed in the middle of the narrative to fulfill the technical necessity of stating who it was that actually went.<sup>48</sup> That the genealogy is mentioned due to historical necessity, yet extraneous with respect to the story line of Yaakov going to see Yosef, is indicated by its being offset from the text as a traditional closed section (*parsha stuma*). Nevertheless, if viewed in the light of the principle that “all God does is for the good”, the genealogy brings into greater relief just how great was that “good” in this case.<sup>49</sup> For not only did it effect the salvation of one individual or one family but rather the salvation of the righteous core of people who were to become God’s chosen nation.

### ***Sending Yehuda to Yosef***

And he sent Yehuda before him to Yosef, to show the way before him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen.

(Bereishith 46:28)

Yaakov's sending Yehuda ahead to meet Yosef is interpreted midrashically to espouse the eschatological vision that in the end of days all will be good.

The lion (Yish. 65:25) alludes to Yehuda, as it says, Yehudah is a lion's whelp (Bereishith 49:9); Like the ox (Yish. 65:25), to Yosef, as it says [And of Yosef he said...] His beauty is that of his firstling ox (Devarim 33:13,17). All these were found eating together, as it says, And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright...and the portions were taken, etc. (Bereishith 33:33). "And the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Yish. 65:25) - therefore we read: "And he sent Yehuda before him to Yosef."

(Ber. R. 95:1)

Just as Yehuda and Yosef, who were kings at odds and made peace,<sup>50</sup> so will it be in the ultimate future that the tribes living at odds with each other will live in brotherly love.<sup>51</sup>

The midrash furthermore uses the verse to expand on the theme of the ultimate good destined for the end of days, describing the process wherein all will be healed of their various afflictions suffered: "Come and see how all whom the Holy One, blessed be He, has smitten in this world He will heal in the future that is to come" (Ber. R. 95:1).

Even here, in Yaakov's seemingly utilitarian act of sending one son to the other, the notion of Yaakov's recognition of God's ultimate good is given expression.

### ***The Meeting***

Finally, Yaakov meets Yosef for the first time after twenty two years. The text simply states, "... and he [Yosef]<sup>52</sup> fell on his neck, and wept on his neck much." Rashi, quoting a Midrash Agada, explains:

[Yosef] wept greatly and continuously - more than usual. Yaakov, however, did not fall upon Yosef's neck nor did he kiss him. And our Rabbis said, [the reason is] that he was reciting the Shema.

(Rashi on Bereishith 46:29)

Though the fulfillment of an obligatory precept (i.e. recital of the Shema) can be seen to explain why Yaakov was not crying, one is still left in a quandary as to why Yaakov chose specifically that moment and that precept.

Many super-commentator's have grappled with Yaakov's ostensibly peculiar reaction. The Be'er Yitzhak explains that, "Love, however intense must never make one forget the supreme object of all love - the Creator blessed be He. ... By a deliberate effort of the mind, he directed his intense love to the Creator." Yaakov found it necessary to redirect the intense love of the moment toward God; he did this by performing the most available precept - recital of the Shema. Though one might concur with the theological concept invoked here, this explanation leaves unaddressed Yaakov's specific use of the Shema to channel his emotions.

The *Gur Aryeh* begins to shed light on to this question:

At the sight of Yosef, Yaakov's heart was filled with love and awe of God [**in that he realized**] **how Hashem's attributes are good and complete (*shleimot*)** ... And this is the [significance of the] Shema in which is mentioned the unity of God's kingship and the love for Him. [As such] it was fitting to recite the Shema when he came upon Yosef after the great sorrow he had undergone because of him; and now upon seeing him as king, he loved God for what He had done and accepted His rulership with love and awe. [Emphasis added]

(*Gur Aryeh* on Bereishith 46:29)

To understand how the Shema was in fact the only appropriate form of accepting God's mastery at that moment in Yaakov's life, a deeper look into the actual phrase of the Shema itself is essential.

*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Ehad.*

(Devarim 6:4)

R. Hirsch explains the verse as follows:

... [T]he full Jewish Truth which our saying Shema brings home to our minds declares that God's "Oneness" does not merely mean that what the polytheistic conception regards as the spheres of two opposing godheads [i.e. one ruling good and one ruling evil] are really both of them the ways of the One and only God, ... but that His Rule only appears to our shortsightedness as dual, in reality it is one only. His judgment when it denies or punishes us is itself only a manifestation of His Love. Not only Hashem Elokeinu Ehad, but Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Ehad, even as Elokim He is Hashem!

(R. Hirsch on Devarim 6:4)<sup>53</sup>

Rav Menahem BenZion Zaks elucidates in most precise terms how the Shema uniquely fulfilled the channeling of emotions of that particular moment in Yaakov's life:

... [Yaakov] recited the verse "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Ehad", which means "Hashem" - God acting through his attribute of mercy - because "whatever the All-Merciful does is for the good" (*Brachot* 60b). The attribute of Justice which was responsible for Yosef's being taken away from Yaakov, in the end proved to be the attribute of Mercy, as Yosef himself declared, "For you thought evil for me, yet Elokim thought it for good." So too did King David say, "I will praise Elokim, I will praise Hashem" (*Tehillim* 56); both aspects, Elokim which is the punishing aspect, and Hashem which is the beneficent aspect, "I will praise" (*ibid.*); for both were done for my benefit. When Yaakov met Yosef he recited the Shema because the positive outcome of the events with Yosef proved the veracity of the verse.

*(Menahem Tzion, com. on Bereishith 46:28, p.178)*

Upon being reunited with his son, he was not only joyful over the reunion but even more so over being able to comprehend God's complex providence.

## **Conclusion**

And Yisrael said to Yosef, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art still alive."

*(Bereishith 46:30)*

Rashi (on *ibid.*) explains that Yaakov's expression, "Amuta HaPaam" (now let me die) should be understood as the Targum Onkelos interprets: "If I were to die now, I should die with the comforting knowledge that you are still alive." Given our analysis of the deep source of Yaakov's comfort in seeing Yosef alive, this statement provides an incisive conclusion to the whole encounter. For Yaakov, the events surrounding Yosef served as an object lesson of the dictum: 'Whatever the All-merciful does is for the good.' With this profound comprehension of God, he felt himself at the zenith of his life<sup>54</sup>; as such he made this ultimate statement as expression of his feeling his life complete.<sup>55</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Though many commentators chose to look at this narrative in the context of Yaakov's moving his family to Egypt, the fact is that Yaakov never had any intention of moving his family. His only intention was to see Yosef. This is his only explicit declaration of intent, "I will go and see him" (Bereishith 45:28). And so confirms the HaAmeik Davar, "*I will go and see him* - the meaning of this language is 'see for a number of days'." (Similarly Sforno) Furthermore, this is the opinion of Chazal (on the Hagadah): "*And he went down to Egypt* - Forced by God's word"; upon which the Abarbanel elaborates, "Yaakov did not intend to live in Egypt. He merely wanted to see his beloved son once again and then get on with the task of settling the land of Canaan."
- <sup>2</sup> The Netziv explains that it is not within man's nature to bless the bad as he does the good and thus one who does so has risen above his nature and is called 'Hasid' (HaAmeik Davar on Devarim 33:8).
- <sup>3</sup> See also *Taanit* 21a for same attitude evinced by Nachum ben Gamzu. Derech Hashem 2:3:12. See *Mesilat Yesharim*, Ch.19, (Feldheim, p.247).
- <sup>4</sup> Rashi on *Berachot* 61a, D"H Ha'kol L'tova.
- <sup>5</sup> The Matanot Kohanim emphasizes that Yaakov recognized that Yosef did not "question God's ways (Lo Hihireir Achar Midotav Yitbarach)" (com on *ibid.*. Also *Eitz Yosef* on *ibid.*). Furthermore, the *Eitz Yosef* writes that, "the righteous individual (*tzadik*) is one who, though fraught with sufferings, still maintains his righteousness" (com on *ibid.*).
- <sup>6</sup> The Rashbam (on Bereishith 21:33) states that Be'er Sheva was an orchard for prayer. Also Rashi (on Bereishith 21:33) quoting *Sotah* 10a, writes that through the Eshel (Pundak) at Beer Sheva, people called on God - Ruler of the World.
- <sup>7</sup> See also Sforno (on *ibid.*) - God over time.
- <sup>8</sup> Rashbam (Bereishith 21:22) - Upon the birth of Yitzhak, Avimelech deduced that God performs miracles for Avraham, and consequently he came to make a covenant. Similarly Hizkuni (*ibid.*) points out that Avimelech recognized that just as God performed on the birth of Yitzhak, so too would He fulfill his oath to give the land to Avraham's descendants in the future. Sforno (*ibid.*) - Avimelech feared that God was with Avraham. Radak, Rashi (*ibid.*) - Avimelech's recognition of the miracles surrounding Avraham drove him to make the covenant.
- <sup>9</sup> "Swear...and don't deal falsely with me, nor me son, nor my grandson...according to the kindness I have done..." (Bereishith 21:23). The Bechor Shor on the Hizkuni comments, "When you [Avraham] will rule the land, don't expel my descendants."
- <sup>10</sup> Hirsch explains that the act of swearing, שׁבוע, is formed from the word שבע, seven, which intimates a "giving up of oneself to the seven."
- As the creation of the world was completed in six days and the seventh became the memorial and reminder of the Invisible One being and remaining in connection with the visible world as its Creator and Master, so the number seven remains altogether as the symbol indicating and referring to this invisible Master. Now taking an oath means: submitting yourself and all your visible material world to the Invisible One. (R. Hirsch, Bereishith 21:23, p.360)
- <sup>11</sup> R. Epstein, Intro to Seder Kodashim, Mesechet Zev., p.2.
- <sup>12</sup> See R. Hirsch (Vayikra 1:2, p.6) - the root of korban is "to come near"; Bahir #109; Meam Loez (Vayikra 7:11, p.142); Gur Aryeh (Bereishith 46:1).
- <sup>13</sup> Rambam, *Hil. Ma'asay Hakorbanot*, 1:2.
- <sup>14</sup> Rambam, *Hil. Ma'asay Hakorbanot*, 12:1.
- <sup>15</sup> R. Steinsaltz, *The Talmud, A Reference Guide*, p.267. Also R. Hirsch, Bereishith, p.627; Vayikra p.74. Also R. Chavel in English Ramban, p.542. Other examples see Radak on Tehillim. 40:7 "zevah"; Ibn Ezra "zivchay-tzedek" (Tehillim. 51:21).

16 Ramban, R. B'hayay, R. Hirsch, HaAmek Davar, Meshech Hochma (on Bereishith 46:1).

17 "To seek God, just when, and just because, one wants nothing special from Him, has not even to thank Him for some special joy or fortune, that is the idea of a *shlamim*" (Hirsch Vayikra 3:1, p.75).

18 *Matanot Kohanim* (on *ibid.*) similarly remarks, "... since he saw that the tribes were whole and secure he brought a sacrifice on his covenant."

19 R. Hirsch notes that this ruling regarding *shlamim* is extended to apply to all offerings (Vayikra 3:1, p.75).

20 Similarly Torah Temimah on *Zevachim* 99b (Vayikra 3:1, n.1).

21 Zohar II:175b.

22 Ramban (Bereishith 48:15). Bahir #135.

23 Bahir #137, #190. Zohar II:175b-176a. Likutei Amarim, Part 3 "Igeret Hakodesh", ch. 15.

24 quoted on Ramban Vayikra 3:1 in Torat Hayim edition n.64

25 See Biur Halevush on Ramban Bereishith 46:1 n.38. "The *shlamim* come ... to reconcile the attribute of justice." Rekanati quoted in Chavel (Torat Hayim Edition) in n.64 on Ramban (Vayikra 3:1).

26 On God's good being a result of the harmonious accord of *hesed* and *gevurah*, see: Likutei Amarim, Part 3 "Igeret Hakodesh", ch. 6; Mesilat Yesharim, ch.4; Strive for Truth, Vol. 1., p.63.

27 Also R. B'hayay (Bereishith 46:1).

28 See Maor V'shemesh 32 quoted by Chavel (Torat Hayim Edition) in n.44. Also Ramban (Bereishith 48:15). Or HaLevush L'Rekanati 37:1 quoted by Chavel (com. on Ramban Bereishit 48:15, Torat Hayim Edition) in n.34.

29 See R. Chavel note on R. B'chayay (Bereishith 46:1) א"א "Mipnei zeh" (quoting Rekanati).

30 Zohar II:175b. HaAmek Davar on Bereishit 46:1).

31 Ramban states of *shlamim* that one does not make any confession for sin but rather says praises to Hashem (Hil. M. Korbanot 3:15).

32 "[T]he Torah always speaks of a 'sacrifice to Hashem'" Meam Loez (Vayikra Intro. p.2). "R. Yossi (in Torat Cohanim): everywhere where it talks of offerings, the four-lettered name of God is used (YKVK)..." R. Hirsch (Vayikra 1:2, p.7). "Korbanot are offered to Hashem" (HaAmek Davar on Bereishith 46:1).

33 *Sh. R.* 3:6. Every mention of Elokim refers to Din (Rashi on Shmot 14:19 quoting Mechilta). See also Rashi on Shmot 20:1 quoting Mechilta.

34 Not in attempt to appease (though this is the way the Ramban and the HaAmek Davar take it), as this was precisely what was decried by R. Yossi (quoted in R. Hirsch, Vayikra 1:2, p.7) as heresy, but in acknowledgment and praise as demanded when offering *shlamim*.

35 Though Avraham made his oath with Avimelech on the name of Elokim, Avraham's personal communion with God was made to Hashem. The Malbim (on Bereishith 26:25) explains that Yitzhak specifically chose Be'er Sheva to commune with God in His name "Hashem" as that was the name made manifest in that place by Avraham.

36 To Yitzhak (Bereishith 26:24). To Hagar, upon her losing all hope in possible positive future for her son, she casts him out as lost to the world (Bereishith 21:14). It is here at Be'er Sheva that an angel appears to the despondent mother and promises the future greatness of her son.

37 Also Abravanel (Bereishith 46:1).

38 That is not to say that the bad is not bad, but rather it can be viewed as a justifiable necessity to achieving the ultimate good. However, justifiable does not imply forgivable. Much evil is

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- perpetrated in the world which is certainly unforgivable, and will remain so. R. B'hayay (Bereishith 50:17) notes that Yosef never fully forgave his brothers for their selling him even though he explicitly assuaged them saying that 'It was God who sent me'. Though one can see God's hand of salvation, one is never reconciled to the evil perpetrated. Nevertheless, with the perception that will be obtained during the final perfection of the world, one will be able to justify the evil (see *Strive for Truth*, Vol.2, p.31). At that time, all the history of the world will appear peaceful. The *Kli Yakar* (Bereishith 46:30) states that the 17 years of peaceful living Yaakov had in Egypt made his whole 147 year life of difficulties seem peaceful in retrospect.
- 39 Rambam, Hil. Brachot 10:3. *Kitzur Piskei HaRosh* Ch.9, No.25.
- 40 Rambam on Mishna Brachot 54a.
- 41 "he feared that he must leave Israel" Rashi (Bereishith 46:3). "the days approach ... of the servitude and affliction on my children in exile" Hizkuni (Bereishith 46:3). "Yaakov feared his children would assimilate and not develop as Torah Jews" HaAmek Davar (Bereishith 46:3).
- 42 In fact he implicitly promises him sorrow: "Perhaps the intention of [And I will go down with you to Egypt] is like the verse, 'I am with him in his suffering (Tehillim. 91) to hint to him that He [God] will, as it were, suffer in his [Yaakov's] sorrow' " (Ohr HaHayim on Bereishith 46:4).
- 43 God as Elokim, dispenser of justice, can only provide consolation in terms of an ultimate good.
- 44 Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam (on Bereishith 46:4).
- 45 Radak (Bereishith 46:3-4) notes both interpretations (burial for Yaakov, redemption for children).
- 46 R. Coppermen on Meshech Hochma (n.1 on Bereishith 46:4).
- 47 R. Coppermen on Meshech Hochma (n.4 on Bereishith 46:4).
- 48 Ramban (Intro. to Shmot) explains that the names were listed in Bereishith (46:8-27) since that was the beginning of the exile.
- 49 The Hizkuni (Bereishith 46:8) explains that the names were listed to emphasize God's miraculous salvation: "The people are counted to tell of the great miracle of increase from 70 to 600,000 in such a short time."
- 50 *Yefe Toar* on *Ber. R.* 95:1. *Matanot Kehuna* (ibid.) D'H V' Ain Haya. Rashi (ibid.).
- 51 *Eitz Yosef* on *Ber. R.* 95:2 D'H Amar. *Peirush Maharz'u* (Ber. R. 95:1) - D'H Aymatay. R. Freedman in *Soncino Midrash* (95:1) n.4 p.881.
- 52 The commentators interpret this ambiguous "he" to mean "Yosef". See Rashi, Radak, Hizkuni, Hirsch. (Ramban takes issue).
- 53 See also *Likutei Amarim*, Part 2 "*Shaar Hayihud*", ch.6. Ohr HaHayim (Shmot 20:2) " 'Anochi Hashem' - that is Hesed and Rachamim even in a time of 'Elokecha' - that is when I afflict you."
- 54 R. Hirsch, Bereishith 46:30, p.633.
- 55 Mizrachi (on Bereishith 46:30) explains that this is an expression of joy not a request to die.