

VAYIGASH (GENESIS 44:18-47:27)

When GOOD Things Happen to Good People

2002 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

"Where was G-d during the Holocaust?" "Why do children die?" "Why do evil people succeed?"

Difficult questions. Painful and gut-wrenching questions. Questions that I won't even try to answer.

But there is another set of questions that are not asked as often: "Why did G-d miraculously save a particular person or family during the Holocaust?" "The cancer was all over the patient. We had extensive x-ray and biopsy results. Why did the cancer disappear?!" "Why did those two missiles miss that Israeli airplane in Kenya?"

Isn't it a shame that we tend to remember G-d only when things aren't going right?

Jacob was amazed. He had spent the last twenty-two years mourning his beloved son Joseph. Joseph's ripped and bloodstained robe had been brought to him. His son had surely been torn to shreds by a wild animal. Now he received the message that Joseph was alive and well in Egypt.

Jacob packed his bags. *"How wonderful! My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die!"* (Genesis, 45:28)

Try to imagine the feelings of joy and excitement. For twenty-two years Jacob had refused to be consoled. ...*"I will go down to my grave mourning for my son."* (Ibid. 37:35)

His sorrow was so all-encompassing that it caused his spirit of prophecy to depart from him. His life had been spent in constant depression. And now, he was going to Egypt to see his long-lost son! What a *Simcha!*

This was obviously a very emotional time for Joseph as well. The Torah describes the reunion: *Joseph . . . went to greet his father . . . he appeared before him, and threw himself on his shoulders, and wept on his shoulders for a long time.* (Ibid, 46:29-30)

Interestingly, the Torah seems to describe only the emotions of Joseph. There is no mention of what Jacob did. No tears. No hugs. No kisses. Jacob appears to be the stoic recipient of Joseph's impassioned embrace.

Rashi tells us that while Joseph was crying on Jacob's shoulders, Jacob was reciting the *Shema*. These passages, confirming our belief that there is but One G-d, are recited every morning and evening. Jacob was fulfilling the Mitzvah of saying this prayer.

This is amazing. You haven't seen your son in twenty-two years. You thought he was dead. The last twenty-two years of your life have been torture. Your years of torment are over. You have your son back. Couldn't you wait a few minutes and find a better time to *Daven*?!

NO! Jacob could NOT find a better time. This was the high point of his life. This was a time of unbridled joy and thanksgiving. G-d had just given Jacob a new lease on life. His sorrow was over. Jacob was overwhelmed with ecstasy and exhilaration. But there would be time for celebration and socializing later.

This moment belonged to G-d.

Have a great Shabbos.

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