

And he (Yosef) went up to meet his father.....He appeared before him. (46:29)

Yaakov *Avinu* could not wait to see his long-lost son, Yosef. Yosef had left home a boy, and now he was viceroy over the people of Egypt. He went from challenge to travail and emerged as righteous as when he left home. The image of his father had kept him holy. Now, after all this time, after all the *tzaros*, troubles, that Yosef had endured, he was finally going to embrace his father. This would be the script as presented by a secular author, a playwright who seeks to capture the drama of this face-to-face interaction between father and son. *Chazal* teach that the imagery was quite different. Yosef did not just go to see his father, but to appear to him. He went for the sole purpose of fulfilling the *mitzva* of *kibud av*, so that his father could see him. *Maharal (Gur Arye)* writes that Yaakov *Avinus's* attitude toward seeing his son was also quite incongruous with the secular line of thinking. *Chazal* say that Yaakov recited *Kriyas Shema* when he met Yosef. *Maharal* explains that Yaakov was so excited, so overjoyed and thankful that he could finally see his son, he wanted to apply all of this joy to serving Hashem. What better way to be *mekabeil Ole Malchus Shomayim*, accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven.

Neither Yaakov nor Yosef took anything for themselves. It was all for Hashem. All the emotion, excitement and drama of their meeting were dedicated solely to the Almighty. The obvious question is: What harm would it have caused if father and son had allowed their natural emotions to prevail? They would have embraced, wept, laughed and then returned to their respective lives of *avodas Hashem*. To ask this question means that one does not understand the importance of using every Heavenly-gifted moment for Hashem. When one uses an experience for his own sake, it is soon gone. If he uses it for Hashem's, he eternalizes it and renders it worthwhile.

Ibn Ezra's maxim, "The past no longer exists; the future is not yet a reality; the present is but a fleeting moment," should be our approach to life. We must make the most of every moment. This idea can be realized one way, by: eternalizing it, by devoting it to *avodas haKadesh*. Veritably, in order to succeed at this endeavor, one must live intellectually, rather than emotionally. Every experience must be well-thought-out, asking ourselves: What does Hashem want of me? Why am I here when others are not? When a person survives a traumatic experience while others do not, the survivor can react with guilt; he can be angry that he was compelled to endure such travail during which others paid the ultimate price; or he can be grateful for being spared and use the opportunity for growth and purpose. While survivor guilt and anger are natural responses, channeling them toward positive action can transform a painful experience into a force for good.

Every life is meaningful. Survival is a signal that one has a unique mission. What that exact mission is will be played out in life, as the survivor makes the most of every opportunity Hashem grants to him. Holocaust survivors channeled their experience into educating future generations of the dangers of hatred and apathy. They demonstrated how they clung onto any vestige of hope, because a Jew never despairs; a Jew does not give up hope.

While the burdens of guilt can weigh heavily on some, dedicating oneself to helping others can ease that burden. Cultivating an attitude of gratitude to Hashem for his granting a second lease on life, coupled with prayer, will help one find peace with his survival, allowing him to move forward with life and living. Recognizing that one's survival is a Divine gift is, in, and of itself, sufficient reason to reframe guilt into positivity, anger into love and support for others.

HaRav Yechiel Meir Tzucker, shlita relates the following story. In 1929, Arab murderers, crazed by their hatred of our people and their chronic bloodlust, attacked the Chevron community and slaughtered members of the community, A number of students of *Yeshivas Knesses Yisrael* were murdered in cold blood. When the *bachurim* who survived returned to the *Yeshiva*, the *Mashgiach*, *HaRav Leib Chasman, zl*, approached one student and asked him, "How many survived from your *chaburah*, group of students who studied together?" The student thought for a moment, then replied, "No one else survived." The *Mashgiach* heard this and immediately made an about-face, leaving the *bachur* in a state of incomprehension. Three days passed, and the *Mashgiach* came over to him and asked, "Do you understand what I wanted from you?" (Do you realize what I expected of you?)

The *bachur* replied, "Truthfully, I did not understand why the *Mashgiach* walked away from me" "I wanted you to make a *chesbon ha'nefesh*, accounting of the soul," the *Mashgiach* said. "You lived through a Heavenly decree of *Din*, Strict Justice. Everyone else in your *chaburah* was slaughtered. Why were you the only one to have survived? Did this question catalyze you to think? If Hashem allowed you to live, it means that He expects something special of you."

By today's educational standards, I am certain some psychologists might feel that the *Mashgiach* was too demanding and perhaps even counter-intuitive. I am just as certain that *Rav Leib Chasman*, who was one of the premier *Mashgchim*, knew what he was doing. This was his *daas Toraah*, and, as the *bachur's* spiritual advisor, he felt it was a prudent question which would shape his student's life trajectory. He had a choice before him: "Do I fall into depression and guilt, or do I realize that I was left to live for a purpose which Hashem knows that I can fulfill?"

The choice of taking a positive approach, as opposed to falling into the abyss of negativity and guilt, is underscored in the process of *teshuvah* (loosely translated as repentance, but actually means return). One who has sinned can, after experiencing significant guilt concerning his past, become morose, feeling he is "done"; nothing can be done to repair his past. One can, however, heal from past errors by focusing on personal growth. This is the process of returning to one's true self, the way Hashem wanted/expected him to be, and reconnecting with Hashem. Sincere *teshuvah* transcends time and allows a person to erase past indiscretions, even transforming them into merits.

Teshuvah provides a person with immense hope and optimism. Regardless of how far or how low one has digressed, *teshuvah* offers a way back, not only as a path to rectification, but also to a place of deeper connection and understanding than before. *Teshuvah* is about rising up from the

fall stronger and more spiritually aligned. The process does not just happen. It involves sincere and candid introspection, commitment to one's betterment and spiritual growth, and last-but not least, the profound conviction that healing is possible. Even after experiencing hardship, trauma and the spiritual ravages of sin, a person maintains the power to change and transform for the better.