

## **We Are All Brothers**

*By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz*

Former President Donald Trump appeared at the recent Torah Umesorah Presidents Conference. In his message, he read excerpts from an excellent article by Rabbi Dov Fischer that listed Trump's many accomplishments for the Jewish people and the State of Israel. The audience clapped as the former president listed what he had done. Stopped the Iran deal. *Clap*. Moved the embassy to Yerushalayim. *Clap*. Shut down the Palestinian embassy. *Clap*. And so it continued until he mentioned his commutation of Sholom Mordechai Rubashkin's sentence five years ago on *Zos Chanukah*. With that, the audience rose and gave him a sustained, standing ovation.

The president didn't understand why. He asked, "Is that more important than Iran?" And again, he wondered aloud, "Why is this getting the most applause?" He came back to it a few more times in his speech.

There wasn't an opportunity to answer his question and explain it to him, but everyone in the audience knew the answer.

Because he is our brother.

Because at the end of the day, despite our differences, we care deeply about each other, as brothers do. When Sholom Mordechai was away, we *davened* for him, followed the case, attended rallies, wrote letters, contributed to the legal fund, and were genuinely disturbed by the injustice.

Rubashkin was personal. He is our brother.

Decades ago, when a plane carrying many Jews to Israel was hijacked and held in Entebbe, Jews around the world *davened* for the welfare of the hostages. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, the *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim, arrived in the *bais medrash* to deliver a *shmuess* about the situation, but he never said it.

He stood at the *amud* in the front of the large room and began to speak. He said two sentences and then became so overcome with emotion that he was not able to say more.

This is what he said: "If the prisoners would be your brothers, think about how much *kavanah* you would have as you say *Tehillim* for them." After expressing that thought, he began to weep. Through his tears, he cried out, "And they *takeh* are your brothers."

That was all he said. He didn't have to say more.

This week, in *Parshas Vayigash*, Yosef finally breaks down and ends the charade he had been pulling with his brothers. Each time they had come to Mitzrayim in search of food for their families, he had found ways to torment them. In last week's *parsha*, we learned how he forced them to bring with them their youngest brother, Binyomin, and then how he threatened to jail him along with Shimon.

But Yehudah would not go along with it. He spoke up to Yosef for the first time after having accepted various conditions and demands until now. When the stipulations related to the *shevotim* who were appearing before him, they were

able to accept them, but now that Yosef was jeopardizing the freedom of their brother Binyomin, Yehudah, as leader of the brothers, stood up to him.

Yosef was overcome when he saw how much the brothers cared for each other. True, they had sold him, but as Yosef Hatzaddik was a man of faith and *bitachon*, he knew that they were only Hashem's messengers and what they did was for a higher purpose. A *baal bitachon* doesn't bear grudges.

Besides, Yosef had heard them discussing between themselves their regrets that they sold their brother into slavery and did not feel Yosef's pain (*Bereishis* 42:21-21). While they had a serious *halachic* discussion before the sale and ruled that Yosef deserved to be sold, nevertheless, as bad things were happening to them during their Mitzrayim trip, they began thinking that they had erred in their ruling and repented.

With their brotherly feelings toward Yosef restored and the concern they had for Binyomin clearly portrayed, Yosef perceived that his objective had been accomplished and there was no further reason to pain his brothers. The brotherly love and feelings had been restored, and now the *shevotim* would be able to proceed to the next step in the formation of *Am Yisroel* and carrying out Hashem's plan.

Yosef and Binyomin fall on each other's shoulders and cried. *Chazal* teach that they were not crying over the pain of separation and the joy of reunion. They weren't mourning their mother, whose tears would define a nation. They were crying over the *churban* of *Mishkan Shiloh* in the *cheilek* of Yosef. They were weeping over the destruction of the two *Botei Mikdosh* that would be built in the *chelkah* of Binyomin.

As brothers, they cried over events that would take place well ahead in the future, but were foremost on the minds of these great people who were concerned about their brothers and sisters, sons and daughters throughout the ages, to the times of great tragedy and destruction. They wept just as their mother Rochel would, and great people like Rav Chaim Shmulevitz did all through the centuries of our *golus*. They put aside their own personal feelings and concerns and became consumed with their brethren, because that is what being a Jew is all about.

The *Chashmonaim* were the same. They saw what was happening to their brothers and sisters and how *Am Yisroel* was getting swallowed up by the *Yevonim*, and they went to war, despite the great peril to themselves. With millions of Jews in danger of becoming lost, they didn't think about their own personal welfare, but rather went to battle against a powerful army, armed with faith that *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* would cause them to emerge victorious, for when a brother is threatened, we do whatever we can to save him.

The lights of *Chanukah*, which brought joy and hope into our homes, proclaimed this message for eight days, providing us with energy to face our daily struggles. As the glow of the *menorah* fades, we struggle to hold on to its illumination.

One of the many lessons that emerge from analyzing the *maasei avos* in the *parshiyos* of *Sefer Bereishis* is that our forefathers viewed their experiences not as isolated incidents, but as part of something much bigger crafted by Hashem to lead us to the ultimate redemption. There are bumps along the way as well as periods and happenings of great elation. Our challenge is to always consider

the fact that whatever course we are upon was charted by *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* for reasons larger than us and our circumstance.

Avrohom Avinu was on his way to the *Akeidah* when he saw *Har Hamoriah* looming in front of him (*Bereishis* 22:4). He visualized the future, the *nitzchiyus*, the smoke of the *korbanos* being *olah lereiach nichoach*, and all the glory that would yet come forth from that exalted spot.

He turned to his companions and inquired if they saw this as well. When they told him that they didn't see anything up ahead, he told them, "*Shevu lochem po im hachamor* – Stay behind with the *chamor*, while I go up with Yitzchok on the mountain you don't see or are aware of."

*Chazal* explain that Avrohom was comparing his co-travelers to an "*am hadomeh lachamor*," a donkey. Those who failed to see the mountain are similar to the animal that symbolizes base instinct, with neither depth nor vision. They are people who cannot see beyond the moment. The donkey sees what is directly in front of him and has no concept of the past and the future.

We read later in this week's *parsha* of the emotional reunion between a father broken by longing for his son and the son torn from his father's side while still a teenager (46:29). Yet, at this time, as they met, they didn't discuss each other's wellbeing, or catch up on the years spent apart, or simply say how happy they were that this moment finally arrived, but rather, *Rashi (ibid.)* tells us that Yaakov Avinu's reaction upon meeting Yosef was to recite *Krias Shema*.

Yaakov had feared that he would never again see his beloved son. He was undoubtedly overcome with joy to see and hold him once again. But when he

saw Yosef together with his brothers, Yaakov was witnessing a much larger picture than a reunion of individuals.

When he saw the *achdus* between the brothers, he perceived that his mission of creating the *shivtei Kah* could proceed. He saw how a circle that could only have been drawn by Hashem was coming together, and he knew that although they were now beginning another exile, Hashem brought them there for the greater purpose of founding *Am Yisroel*.

Thus overwhelmed, the words of *Krias Shema* sprang forth. The greatness and *Achdus Havayah* was plainly evident, and Yaakov celebrated the present and the future at that moment.

By seizing the perspective of the *avos*, we can rise above the seemingly endless stream of negativity, pessimism, grim prognoses, and dire warnings.

Similarly, Rabi Akiva was able to smile when he saw foxes making their way out of the holiest spot in the world, for he understood that as sad as the sight was, it had positive connotations, indicating that the world was a step closer to where it is ultimately headed.

So too in our personal lives, quite often, things do not go as we had planned. There are many bumps in the road. Things don't turn out the way we want them to. Relationships sour, children don't excel, jobs and careers go south, we don't make enough money, we lose money, and we are under too much constant pressure. The list goes on and everyone has their own stories and *pekel*.

The *avos* call out to us and say, "Don't get down." The message of *Chanukah* reinforces us and our belief.

Moreover, Yosef's message to his brothers (45:4-11) is relevant to each one of us in our situations. He told them not to become despondent over what they had done, selling him to a group of *Yishmoelim* so many years prior, because it was Hashem who had arranged for him to get to Mitzrayim years before so that he would be able to set up a place of refuge for them and feed them during the great hunger.

We need to learn his lesson and seek to put bygones out of our memories, relating to our brothers without rancor, for doing so is for the greater good and will help get us to the *geulah*. We mustn't become angered and upset when things don't go our way. We must recognize that it was planned so by Hashem for a higher purpose and to create good for us and our loved ones.

Through it all and everything that he had been through, upon revealing himself to his brothers, Yosef's primary concern was their wellbeing, as he cautioned them not to be pained by what they had done. Their act had brought him years of untold suffering, yet he didn't want them to be pained. His concern now was that his brothers should not suffer for their actions.

A Jew's primary concern is the welfare of his brothers. And we are all brothers.