

When Compassion is Misplaced

Genesis, Chapter 45

1. Now Joseph could not bear all those standing beside him, and he called out, "Take everyone away from me!" So no one stood with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.
2. And he wept out loud, so the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard.
3. And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" but his brothers could not answer him because they were startled by his presence.
4. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me," and they drew closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.
5. But now do not be sad, and let it not trouble you that you sold me here, for it was to preserve life that G-d sent me before you.
6. For already two years of famine [have passed] in the midst of the land, and [for] another five years, there will be neither plowing nor harvest.
7. And G-d sent me before you to make for you a remnant in the land, and to preserve [it] for you for a great deliverance.
8. And now, you did not send me here, but G-d, and He made me a father to Pharaoh, a lord over all his household, and a ruler over the entire land of Egypt.
9. Hasten and go up to my father, and say to him, 'So said your son, Joseph: "G-d has made me a lord over all the Egyptians. Come down to me, do not tarry.
10. And you shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children and your grandchildren, and your flocks and your cattle and all that is yours.
11. And I will sustain you there for there are still five years of famine lest you become impoverished, you and your household and all that is yours." '
12. And behold, your eyes see, as well as the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth speaking to you.
13. And you shall tell my father [of] all my honor in Egypt and all that you have seen, and you shall hasten and bring my father down here."
14. And he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.

Genesis, Chapter 46

9. And Joseph harnessed his chariot, and he went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and he appeared to him, and he fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck for a long time.

And his brothers could not answer him, for they were terrified before him (45:3)

Talmud, Chagigah 4b

When Rabbi Eleazar would come to this verse, he would weep: "Now if the rebuke of flesh and blood be such, how much more so the rebuke of the Holy One, blessed be He!"



פרק מה

א. וְלֹא יָכַל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק
לְכָל הַנֹּצְצִים עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא
הוֹצִיאוּ כָּל אִישׁ מֵעָלַי וְלֹא
עָמַד אִישׁ אִתּוֹ בְּהִתְנוּדַע יוֹסֵף
אֶל אָחָיו:

ב. וַיִּתֵּן אֶת קִלּוֹ בְּכִי וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁמַע בֵּית
פְּרָעֹה:

ג. וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הַעוֹד אָבִי חַי
וְלֹא יָכְלוּ אָחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהָלוּ מִפְּנָיו:
ד. וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אָחָיו גִּשׁוּ נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגְשׁוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֶחְיֶיכֶם אֲשֶׁר מִכְרַתֶּם אֹתִי
מִצְרָיִמָּה:

ה. וַעֲתָה אֵל תַּעֲצֹבוּ וְאֵל יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי מִכְרַתֶּם
אֹתִי הִנֵּה כִּי לְמַחְיָה שְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹקִים לְפָנֵיכֶם: ו. כִּי
זֶה שְׁנַתִּים הָרַעֵב בְּקִרְבֵּי הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד חֹמֵשׁ שָׁנִים
אֲשֶׁר אֵין חֵרִישׁ וְקִצִּיר:

ז. וַיִּשְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹקִים לְפָנֵיכֶם לְשׁוֹם לָכֶם שְׂאֲרֵית
בְּאֶרֶץ וְלְהַחְיֹת לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה גְדֹלָה:

פרק מו

כט. וַיֵּאָסֶר יוֹסֵף מִרַבְּכָתוֹ וַיַּעַל לְקִרְאֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל
אָבִיו גִּשְׁנָה וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וַיַּפֵּל עַל צַוְאָרָיו וַיִּבְכֶּה עַל
צַוְאָרָיו עוֹד:

The Rebbe

We can learn from Yosef's example not to seek revenge against a person who causes distress or damage; rather one should repay even a guilty offender with kindness (Tanya). Why? Because whatever that person did to you ultimately stems from G-d. The person was merely an agent from G-d, who decreed this thing should occur.

And he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept (45:14)

Rashi

Over the two Temples that are destined to be in the portion of the tribe of Benjamin and whose end is to be destroyed.

Midrash

With regard to the other brothers, it says of Joseph only "he wept on them." The references to the neck in this verse allude to the Temples, which are referred to as the neck.

...and Benjamin wept on his neck (45:14)

Rashi

Over the Tabernacle of Shiloh which is destined to be in the portion of Joseph (i.e. in the Tribe of Ephraim, which is descended from Joseph), and whose end is to be destroyed.

The Rebbe

Why did Joseph and Benjamin cry over the sanctuaries which were to be destroyed in each other's territory and not over the destruction that was to occur in their own territories? Eliminating other people's problems ultimately depends on the other person's own free will. Friends can help with their prayers and advice, but the person himself must take the necessary action. When Joseph and Benjamin perceived that they were powerless to solve each other's problems, they cried in sympathy. Nevertheless, they did not cry over the future destruction of their own sanctuaries, because they had the responsibility to find a solution to their own problems and not merely sit and cry.

And Joseph went up to meet Israel his father... and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck (46:9)

Rashi

But Jacob did not embrace Joseph and did not kiss him; our sages tell us that he was reading the Shema.

The Chassidic Masters

Why did Jacob choose that particular moment to read the Shema? Because Jacob knew that never in his life would his love be aroused as it was at that moment, the moment of reunion with his most beloved son after twenty-two years of anguish and loss. So he chose to utilize this tremendous welling of emotion to serve His Creator, channeling it to fuel his love for G-d.

SUMMARY

- We can educate, inspire and assist another to develop and improve himself; but ultimately, the only one who can effect any real and lasting change is the person himself. We pray and we cry when there is nothing else left to do.
- When it comes to ourselves, there is no time for weeping. Instead of giving vent to pain, direct your inner turmoil toward the endeavor of rebuilding.
- While being gracefully compassionate towards others, we may need to be insistently demanding of ourselves.

