

"..and Joseph's hand will close your eyes"

When Rabbi David Wolpe came to speak in Charleston, he said anything that he wrote that was really good was probably not original and anything that he wrote that was original was probably not very good.

Well, for what it's worth, this is original. Whether it is good, however, I leave that up to you.

In tomorrow's Torah portion (Genesis 44:18-47:21), our patriarch Jacob is told by his sons that his beloved son Joseph, who he assumed was killed by beasts years ago, was still alive and well in the land of Egypt. Jacob hears for the first time that Joseph was really sold by his own brethren as a slave and by an unbelievable turn of events

is now one of the most powerful men in Egypt. After twenty-two years of mourning, his sons explain to Jacob all that had happened to Joseph.

The build up to this moment is amazing. As a result of a famine in Canaan, Jacob allowed his remaining sons, all but Benjamin (his only remaining child from his beloved wife Rachel), to go to Egypt to get food for the family. Jacob couldn't bear to lose Benjamin, so the rest of the children go to the man in power, "Soph-nat Paneach". Unbeknownst to them, this was their long lost brother Joseph. Joseph recognizes them, accuses them of being spies and imprisons one of them, Simon. Joseph promises them that Simon will be set free if they produce the youngest child they claim lives in Canaan with their father, Jacob. When told of this, Jacob absolutely refuses but

after much emotional pain and sadness reluctantly allows Benjamin to go.

There is so much more to the story, but when Joseph is certain that they have learned their lesson, he reveals himself and tells them to all come join him in Egypt. The brothers go back to their father and tell him that Joseph is alive. At first, Jacob refuses to believe them, but then cries out: “Oh, my G-d! My son Joseph still lives! I shall go and see him before I die.”

It is a powerful moment and one can scarcely imagine the emotional impact the news that Joseph was still alive had on Jacob. I can only imagine what must have gone through his head that night before the family goes off to Egypt: absolute joy, incredible anticipation, unimaginable relief.

And **intense** anger.

I haven't come across any commentators who say this, but I am a parent and a human being. And for all the happiness that I would feel if I were Jacob, in those moments when I was left to think about what was going on, anger would probably overwhelm me. After the initial shock and then euphoria, here is what I would be thinking:

“Wait a minute! Joseph has been alive for 22 years, most of them in luxury and power. In that entire time, he never *once* tried to contact me! Does he realize how much pain I have felt, how much suffering I have experienced! Joseph was my favorite son, the beloved child of my wife Rachel. Not once did he send a single person at his disposal to find his family and let me know. What son could do that to a father?”

And I would also be thinking: “And these past few months, Joseph knew I was alive and that my time on earth was short. Instead of calling for me, he first decides to get his revenge on his brothers. He demands that they bring Benjamin to him, even after being told by his brothers that the shock could kill their father. When I had to choose between saving Simon and losing Benjamin, it broke my heart! Does he have any idea how much suffering I have experienced as a father? For him to inflict such pain on me, I don’t want anything to do with him!”

If I were Jacob, I would not just be mad at Joseph; I would be pretty “ticked off” at my other sons as well. They *knew* all along that a wild animal didn’t killed Joseph. They lied to me about that! They sold Joseph as a slave and they knew he was in Egypt. For twenty two years, they

have seen me mourn and not once did they ever seek after him or at least tell me the truth.”

After the joy of knowing Joseph was alive wore off, I think I'd be pretty upset at all my children. I had suffered what no parents should go through and it was a direct result of my own children. I would be sorely tempted not to go to Egypt and tell all my children that they could all go to hell, as far as I'm concerned.

And so I find it interesting that on that night, Jacob has visions of G-d who tells him everything is going to be all right. G-d tells him: “Don't dread going to Egypt. I will make you a great nation there. I will be with you and I will one day take the people up from out of there. And Jacob, *Joseph's hand will close your eyes.*”

I love that expression: “And Joseph’s hand will close your eyes.” That is a powerful statement. At that time, the dream of any parents was to be surrounded by one’s entire family at the time of death and for a beloved child to close one’s eyes for the last time.

I suggest to you that G-d was addressing the deep anger that Jacob was feeling for his sons, especially Joseph. I think G-d was telling Jacob:

“Jacob, your children have terribly disappointed you. I know the pain you have felt. But do you realize what is about to happen? Joseph will soon place his hand on your eyes. You would have given anything, *anything*, to have heard those words these past 22 years. This nightmare you have endured is about to end and the dream every parent wishes to see at death is at hand. You are going to

be surrounded by your *entire* family when you pass from this world. Do you think you should really hold onto your anger and not go? Jacob, your family has issues and there will be time to discuss them one day, but go to Egypt! Don't let your anger, justified or not, destroy what you are about to witness."

Is this what happened? I don't know, but I do know this. I have seen anger destroy lives, families, and the possibilities of ever finding joy. I cannot tell you how many times I have been with parents who will not speak to their adult children because of some awful "incident" that happened years ago and I have seen it with children toward their parents. I have been with siblings who haven't spoken in years because of something that they have never forgotten or forgiven. I have seen lifelong

friendships and relationships destroyed because of a mistake that happened 20 years ago.

I am not saying that anger is never justified. My G-d, I have counseled children whose parents have done wrong, who have really messed up their lives. I know of siblings who are right to be angry for something that was done to them by a brother or sister.

Jacob was feeling justified anger. His son Joseph *did* put him through intolerable emotional stress and his sons did cause him to lose 22 years of his life. These were not misunderstandings; these were devastating blows inflicted by children upon an undeserving father.

Yet, G-d told him: “Jacob, Joseph will lay his hand on your eyes.” That is still your son in Egypt, the son you have loved, longed for and dreamed of one day being

united in peace. I know you feel angry, but that is no way to live. Jacob, you are going to die soon; you can die alone or the people you have always loved can surround you. It is your choice.”

And it is our choice as well.

We live with people, people whom we love but people who often cause us pain and suffering. We naturally and understandably will feel anger and no one can imagine the anger Jacob must have felt as a result of his children. But G-d reminds him, and us, that life comes to an end one day and it is not good to die in anger, in pain, and alone. G-d tells him to go to Egypt, go with his family and go see his son.

I don't know about you, but if that is what the Torah is teaching here, it is a valuable lesson for life. And in the

next chapters, when we see Jacob on his deathbed surrounded by children and grandchildren at his side, how he has a chance to speak to each of them and say farewell, we see the wisdom of holding back anger. That is the way to live and that is the way to leave this world.

May we, the children of Jacob, learn the great blessing of letting go of anger and embrace the people we love.

AMEN