

vayigash

perceptions / eight hundred & seventy-five

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THERE ARE MANY stories in which important historic moments have come and gone, basically unnoticed. For example, there is one of a rebi who was teaching his students when, all of a sudden, their rebi told them, "Too bad. Moshiach could have come this moment, but we did not merit it."

Probably the students had no idea what their teacher was talking about at the time. It was probably a day like any other, and the class was also nothing out of the ordinary. So, when the rebi made the statement, they probably

wondered to themselves, “Why that moment, what should we have done instead, and how did our rebi know?”

Who knows how many such moments have come and gone like that throughout history? There is one however that we DO know about, and it is in this week’s parsha, although many probably don’t realize that is what it was. On the contrary, it seems like such a happy moment that came to fruition exactly as intended.

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Finally, at long last, the play was over. The suffering was over, Yosef’s, his brother’s, and soon their father’s as well. After 22 years of separation, a family union was at hand. What had gone wrong was now being made right. It was a dream ending to what had been a nightmare.

Yah? Really? Actually, not, and the verse hints to this. It says:

Yosef wasn’t able to restrain himself . . .

as if he was compelled to PREMATURELY reveal himself. Really he had wanted to hold out longer, but his brothers’ pathetic situation forced Yosef to spill the beans before . . . Before what?

Personally, the answer to this question changed my life. I first learned of it 30 years ago, at my oldest son’s Bris.

My Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Noach Weinberg, zt”l, who recited the brochos at the Bris, gave it over just prior to the Bris. It was part of a short Dvar Torah he gave to put everyone there into the proper mindset.

“What was Yosef waiting for?” Rav Noach asked us. “What was left to be accomplished? Yosef had already brought his brothers to the point of desperation,” he explained, “so why hold out any longer?”

No one gave an answer, so the Rosh Yeshivah gave his: “Yosef was waiting for them to say, ‘You are Yosef! You have to be! Who else could know what you do about us . . . would ask so many questions about our family . . . would put us through all of this?!’ But they just didn’t get it, and to avoid all-out war, Yosef had to reveal himself to them instead!”

The answer blew many of us away, as many of our Rosh Yeshivah’s insights tended to do, but this one especially. Over the years I not only found great supports for this explanation, but I used it as the basis of some of my most important presentations.

The Rosh Yeshivah explained that saying those words, “You are Yosef,” would have fixed everything, and ushered in the Messianic Era. It would have meant that the brothers had expanded their way of thinking in order to see below the surface of people and situations, to know and do what God really wants. It sounds simple, but we still haven’t mastered it and this is the reason why we have gone through all we have, and still await Moshiach’s arrival.

In fact, this is really what made Chanukah possible. There was a moment in time that the Chashmonaim took advantage of, and they won the war against all the odds as a result. Had they let the moment pass, the situation

would only have worsened, and fighting back would have become more than impossible.

But after victory, when the moment came to give the kingship back to Yehudah, they let that one pass. The result was their loss of independence to Rome, and the rest of the torturous history that followed. Had they used the moment properly and restored the Malchus to Yehudah, history would have been different, perhaps even Messianic.

But how is someone supposed to even know when such an epic moment has arrived, and how to respond to it?

You can often sense something is special about a moment, even if you can't figure out what. But, if you stay sensitive, then often you will get a better picture of the opportunity as it reaches its climax. As the Talmud says:

Rebi Abin HaLevi said: If one is pushed off because of the moment, the moment will be pushed off because of them. (Brochos 64)

A person has to respect the moment. Normally moments in life just whiz right past us and go unnoticed, but that's a mistake. If we don't respect time, and appreciate how each moment has its own potential to allow us to accomplish big things, then when the really big ones come, we won't recognize them either. That is, until after they have passed, and the next moment becomes one of regret.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Issue #12: The World-to-Come

DO YOU BELIEVE in the World-to-Come? I mean, REALLY believe, with ALL your heart? Before you answer that question, read this.

When the Talmud speaks about the WTC (World-to-Come), it refers to the place that “no eye has even seen except for God’s (Yeshayahu 64:4)” (Brochos 34b). The Maharal says that this is the reason why such a central concept such as the WTC is not mentioned in the Torah. The Torah is prophecy, what Moshe Rabbeinu was able to envision, and that did not include Olam HaBa (Gevuros Hashem).

The Leshem discusses the various stages of the WTC, but mostly in terms of the shifting positions of the sefiros as Creation reverses itself. History has moved away from God, which is why people can deny His existence. Once Moshiach comes, Creation will start moving back in the direction of its Source, and becoming increasingly more spiritual as it does. But what does that mean for us?

The Zohar is more explicit about what it is going to look like in the WTC, and what will happen once we get there. The sefer “Yesod v’Shoresh HaAvodah” relies upon these sources to encourage people to work hard in life to earn a place there. But it is not clear whether or not the Zohar is to be taken literally, or if it is just speaking about the unexperienced in terms of what we do recognize.

The truth is, we have no idea what to expect after 6000, and it is VERY hard to relate to something you know nothing about. We’re the proof of that. People push themselves to the point of exhaustion to get a degree that they

hope will earn them a good living, or to excel at an activity in hope of receiving great reward for their success. But, when it comes to earning reward in the WTC, we'd rather take it easy, and save our strength for things we DO relate to.

But imagine someone asking you for a simple favor, like helping them load their car with some groceries. Then, after helping you, they turn around and give you a check for \$5 million dollars. What would you think, besides that the check is a joke?

"No, it's real," the person tells you. "Take it to a bank and cash it. You'll see."

Stunned, you ask, barely getting the words out of your mouth, "But what's it for?"

"For helping me with my groceries to my car, obviously."

Unsure of whether or not you are dreaming, you further ask, "But how is that worth SO much money to you?" wondering if your benefactor has lost their marbles.

"It just is," they answer, getting in their car. "Thanks again," they say as they casually drive off, leaving you with your mouth wide open and your brain short circuiting."

What's the analogy? Let's go a little further.

Years back I wondered why Bill Gates was able to earn so much money. "What's the question?" people asked me. "He developed a product everyone wanted, and made a killing off it. Steve Jobs too, and all the other incredibly rich people in the world. That's the beauty of Capitalism," they told me.

"Of course," I explained. "On a simplistic level, that is 100 percent true. But," I told them, "lots of people develop great ideas, and work really hard to turn them into money-making successes, but fail. Often the person with the

idea does not succeed, and the second guy to develop it does. Why? Obviously mazal plays a role, and something else as well . . .”

Then one day it occurred to me, around the time that all kinds of Torah institutions began taking advantage of the Internet to further the cause of Torah. I all of a sudden realized how much computers developed by Apple and programs developed by Microsoft have helped me, and so many others, to develop Torah ideas and share them with others.

The computer age, for some many reasons now, has greatly helped the spreading of Torah. Thanks to Amazon, I can publish books at a rate I never have before. Thanks to their data base, I have a far larger market than I could ever have on my own. And, thanks to the great penchant for improvement, they provide for me, and so many other teachers of Torah wisdom, with excellent marketing reports and insights basically for free.

Now, I know what you’re probably thinking. You’re probably thinking that it is awfully presumptuous to think that THEIR wealth is because of ME. And it would be, but that’s not what I am saying. I am saying that it is because of Torah that this is the case, and if THAT sounds presumptuous, then you should read even further . . . next week, b”H.