

THE SHEMA YISROEL AND KINGDOM

Parshas Vayigash

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

One cannot find a Chumosh learner, reaching the anecdote of Yaakov and Joseph meeting again after twenty-two years, and not become bewildered at Yaakov's behavior at that precious moment. Joseph, fully overwhelmed with emotion, runs over to his father, embraces his father, kisses him tearfully; "And he wept on his neck excessively" (46:29). What about Yaakov? "But Yaakov", quotes Rashi from Midrash, "did not embrace Joseph and did not kiss him, for he was then preoccupied reading the Shema". Amazing. This was the son for whom he yearned for twenty-two years, with sleepless nights, imaging, as he thought, his painful death, which he relived a thousand times, the child "he loved more than all his sons" (37:3). Here stood his son alive and well, at that very auspicious moment, Yaakov becomes preoccupied reading the Shema.

Upon deeper reflection, however, we realize that the recital of that SHEMA was more than the individual observance of reading the SHEMA. It was the very fundamental establishment of the future people of Israel as the cornerstone of the Kingdom of Hashem. It embraced the whole gamut of the relationship between Hashem and Kneseth Yisroel. To appreciate this fundamentality, the far reaching consequence of that SHEMA, let us turn to the historic dialogue between Yaakov and the tribes, as related in the Talmud (Pesochim 56a):

When Yaakov bestowed his blessings upon his children before his death, he intended to include his prophetic visions about the end of days and redemption, Acharith Hayomim (Beraishis 49:1). However he digressed from that subject, as the Shechina departed from him (Rashi ibid). Said Yaakov to his sons: "Perhaps it is because you are not worthy of these revelations. Is it possible that there are among you some whose

faith in the Al-mighty is not wholehearted?" They all responded in one voice: "Shema Yisroel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem the One and Only." "Just as your faith in Him is intact, so is ours!"

It is clear that "Yisroel", even though it is a reference to Yaakov, it is also a solemn declaration and reassurance of total and unqualified faith of the tribes and generations to come, unto eternity. Yaakov responds: "Blessed is the name of His glorious KINGDOM forever." Here Yaakov expounds the work "Elokainu" "our King". He is Creator, G-d, of all humanity, but as King He is "Our king." "So saith Hashem King of Israel and his redeemer" (Isaiah 44:6). In this response Yaakov praises Hashem for His special relationship as King of Israel. Indeed in the Rosh Hashono Musaf the SHEMA YISROEL is mentioned as one of the ten passages that speaks of Hashem's Kingdom.

For this special relationship there was an absolute requisite that all the twelve tribes are included. Thus Yaakov's response followed the reassurance of all the tribes.

Yaakov's most serious concern and worry was Joseph's purity as a sanctified tribe, having been for so many years in Egypt, in danger of its negative impact. "Blow the Shofar on the new moon ... a judgment for the G-d of Jacob ... as a testimony for (Joseph)... Jehoseph... (Tehilim 81:4,5,6). The Shofar is blown on Rosh Hashanah, when Israel is asked to proclaim G-d as their King. That coincides with the day of judgment, hopefully favorable. As for the totality of the twelve tribes in their purity and royalty, to gain the privilege of inaugurating Hashem as their King, "Hashem Himself bears testimony to the chastity of the tribes" (Rashi on the passage "For there the tribes ascended, the tribes of Yud-Hai" - Tehilim 122:4). As for Joseph, however, there was need for specialized testimony of his purity of body and soul. This testimony was bestowed upon him by calling him "Jehoseph". The letter "Hay" from Hashem's name is added to Joseph's name, as testimony to his purity (Sotah 10b).

When Yaakov saw Joseph, recognizing that he was a Tzadik, thus completing the totality of the twelve tribes and the worthiness, the requisite for that special relationship, King and His subjects, at that moment he recited the SHEMA and the Boruch Shaim - blessed is the Name of His glorious KINGDOM for all eternity.

Tosfos (Brochos 49a) wonders: The Talmud rules that each BRACHA" must mention the Kingdom of Hashem. "Without such mention it is not considered a Bracha" (Brochos 40b). Accordingly, the very first BRACHA of Shemona Esrai should mention "Melech Haolom". How come it does not?

Tosfos answers: There is mention of Hashem's kingdom in the BRACHA before Shemona Esrai, Ezras Avoisainu, that fulfills the requirement. This, however, presents a difficulty. Why is the mention in this case different from all other BRACHOS where MELECH is mentioned in the very BRACHA?

One conjectures it is to emphasize the concept of Kingdom in the SHEMA; the BRACHA of Ezras Avoisainu constitutes the final Bracha of SHEMA.

The Shulchan Aruch (code on the Shema, chapter 65:2) states: when an individual enters a synagogue when the Tzibur (communal worshippers) are up to reading the SHEMA, the individual should join them, reading the first passage, "and the Boruch Shaim" (Mishna Brura). This law well coincides with the above, Yaakov's insistence that all his children, all twelve tribes are in harmony in accepting the yoke of Kingdom of Hashem.

