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1. If ever there was drama in a Biblical tale, it can be found in the life of Joseph and his brothers; and if one wants to look for the high point, the point of climax and tension and grandeur and the quintessence of the drama of the human situation, in this absorbing story of Joseph and his brothers, it is to be found in this morning's Scriptural reading.
2. BACKGROUND MATERIAL. Joseph, son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, died young. BEN ZEKUNIM. Dreamer, naive, and uninhibited. Jealousy of brothers. Decide sell into slavery Egypt...coat (Jacob's gift) in g at blood, tell Father killed by wild beast...Fate: Joseph, after series adventures, becomes second to Pharo alone, given absolute powers over this greatest of ancient kingdoms...Hunger Canaan, brothers come Egypt, do not recognize him; he recognizes them. Taunts them.

At opening this Sidra, terrific tension. Judah addresses Joseph, tells him Father still alive and still grieving for lost son (Jos). One feels Judah's anger welling up and showing through his words of deference and pleas to Joseph. Feel will soon attack him. Just then, Joseph reveals self. They can hardly believe him. Soon, he hurries them off to Canaan, and the brothers, humble yet happy, penitent but somewhat frightened, go forth and fetch their father and tell him that Joseph lives and is the second most powerful person in the world. Jacob's heart skips a beat. Can't be true. Yet it is. With tears in his eyes he offers sacrifices to G-d, and in complete bewilderment and incredulity asks the Divine guidance. And G-d tells him go down to Egypt, for He will accompany him there, and meet his beloved son, his son of his beloved Rachel, and find happiness again ere he dies.

3. THE MEETING. Jacob goes down to Egypt. Joseph comes to see his aged father, whom he had thought he would never see again. They espy each other. Joseph runs towards the aged patriarch, VAYIPOL AL TZAVARAV, VAYEIVK AL TZAVARAV OD. Joseph embraces his father, kisses him, and cries and sobs uncontrollably.

A scene packed full of drama, most certainly. But, our Rabbis noticed something was missing in this scene. Joseph embraced, kissed his father, and shed tears of joy. Well, what about Jacob? Wasn't he glad to see his son? No kissing Joseph? No embracing? Not even a tear? No, our Rabbis say, not even that. What then? Listen closely: YAAKOV LO NAFAL AL TZAVAREI YOSEF VE'LO NOSHKO, VE'AMRU RABOSEINU SHE'HAYAH KOREI ES HA'SHEMA. Jacob neither embraced nor kissed Joseph, for he was preoccupied with the reciting of the Shma Yisroel.

What an eerie thing! How terribly strange! Here is Jacob who had so adored and fondled and loved Joseph from the moment he was born to his beautiful and tender mother...this Joseph whom he so loved that he committed his every word to memory, he memorized every childish dream the boy had, he personally with his own hands weaved and dyed and sewed a coat for the young child, the delight of his old age. Here is the boy whom he would not allow to wander off watching sheep because he longed for him and wanted his presence in the house, the boy whose very face and voice sang a song of eternal youth and loveliness. Here was the boy who so resembled his mother that every time he saw the boy he thought he saw Rachel again, the Rachel who had died a young woman. Here is the child, the favorite child of Jacob, who disappeared suddenly and whose coat of many colors that Jacob made for him with his own hands was brought back torn to shreds and soaked in blood.

The Joseph whom, he was told, was devoured and torn to pieces by a wild beast. And here he was in front of him! Here was this Joseph of his, the Joseph for whom he had torn KRIAH and sat SHIVAH, the son who he thought had died, and for whom, in unlimited grief, he had said that life was no longer worth living, and that he, the father, would now die in sorrow and everlasting mourning. Here was the son he had seen every night in his troubled sleep and whose murder he had relived a thousand times. Here was his beloved son whose passing he reexperienced every morning when he woke up in an empty house, and whose existence he began to doubt in moments he thought he was losing his mind. Gone. Dead. Torn apart. Plucked off in his prime. The naive, honest, uninhibited, darling son of his old age devoured by a beast. AND HERE HE WAS, RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF HIM, IN THE FLESH, UNDEVOURED, UNTOUCHED, UNHURT, AND WITH THE CROWN OF EGYPT ON HIS HEAD. AND HERE THIS SAME JOSEPH, THE SAME AIR OF YOUTHFUL INNOCENCE ABOUT HIM, EMBRACES HIM, CALLS HIM 'FATHER', KISSES HIM AND SOBS LIKE THE CHILD JOSEPH ONCE SOBBED WHEN HE WAS TAUNTED BY HIS BROTHERS, ONLY NOW IT'S A SOBBING OF JOY. And Jacob raises his arms...and 'leins krias shma'!!!!!!

4. Can anything be stranger? Can anything be, one is almost tempted to say, more inhuman? Did our Rabbis mean to say that a human being is not allowed to express his joy and Simcha?
5. That is hardly the case. In fact, what they want to point out is just the opposite. What they teach us is a saintly, profound and psychologically tenable way not of abstaining from joy, but of expressing it.

You see, they want to say, there comes a time when just kissing or embracing or praising or even crying hysterically is simply insufficient to express the heights and depths and intensity and loftiness of one's feelings. There comes a time when you want to give expression to a feeling which simply cannot be expressed in any known language. Well, how do you give expression to this limitless thrill, how do you articulate this indescribable happiness?

Some people just faint. If your conscience cannot contain your emotional grandeur, just pass out. Others take to drink. Others to narcotics. Others to other and more unspeakable kinds of revelry and orgy. But that is not the way a Jew expresses his Simcha.

The way a Jew does express this inexpressable sensation of joy, is through Torah. It is precisely because Jacob is so overcome with emotion, because he has experienced the untold heights of ecstasy, because his heart is at the bursting point, because he is even more charged with this limitless thrill than is Joseph, that he cannot express himself in the conventional means as does his son. The embrace and kiss, the warm handshake and tear of joy, all these are certainly acceptable. But, a Jacob is deeper. His soul is too vast for such superficial expression. When a Jacob lives to see a Joseph resurrected, when a Jacob sees such a Joseph - he leins krias shma. Words, gestures and tears will not do. They simply do not rise to the occasion. Only in Torah can he articulate the ineffable and express the indescribable. When great love threatens to burst through the meagre heart that holds it, it can be expressed only by inclusion in that greater and even more enduring love known as AHAVAS HA'SHEM, the love of G-d, VE'AHAVTA ES HA'SHEM ELOKECHA...Only by expressing his love for G-d who has returned this loved son to him, could Jacob find a responsive chord which would vibrate in harmony with his great experience. True, the greatest, most expressive, most delightful, fullest and most Jewish way of expressing Simcha is through Torah.

I remember what happened once in my last years in high school in the Mesifita in Brooklyn. A great and beloved teacher was critically ill. All students in the school, even those not in his class, kept the vigil. We all said Tehillim. We all wept. But we gave up. We knew all was gone. And then the impossible happened. He recovered. He was going to be well again. The news travelled like electricity through the Beis Hamidrash. We were excited and elated. And then it started. One voice rang out: LE'KAVOD, in honor of his recovery, I promise to stay up two nights this week in study of Torah. Another gave one night; the highest was four nights that week and four the next. Here were Jews expressing Simcha-through Torah. And it is a worthwhile way. I remember deriving as much Sincha from the Torah as from the News.

6. I wonder if those Jews who last night frequented various kinds of clubs, and there were not many such, I believe no more than one, I wonder if they really experienced and expressed true Simcha. Humans are humans, and there are times when, for no soecial reason, you just feel like being happy and espressing it fully. But I wonder this morning if those who celebrated last night really derived satisfaction from their mode of expression. I refer to the alcohol and the trumpeting and the nonsense and the aspects which one cannot discuss from the pulpit. They never gave themselves the opportunity to express Simcha through Torah. They don't know what a genuinely good time they're missing.
7. The Rabbi of Kotzk once said that he didn't understand Simchas Torah. The Bible mentions nothing about a Torah celebration at that time. And he answered, it just seems that at that time, after heavy and solemn holidays, people just want to be happy. And when a Jew wants to be happy he opens a Gemarrah or dances with the Torah.
8. Let us take that to heart. When we have great Simchos, let us express them, as Jacob did, through Sama Misroel. Let us not turn to the Synagogue and Siddur only to express grief and mourning. Let us use it for happiness and joy and thrills of all kinds. Let us sublimate our happiness in and through Torah.
9. May G-d Almighty give each and every one of us many causes for great happiness. May He give us the wisdom to celebrate and express them in Jewish, not un-Jewish, ways: by the study of the Torah. And may the study of the Torah in which we indulge as a result give us the uncounted blessings that all generations of our people have found in it.

*Submitted to  
 Meft Manned  
 1957.  
 Title: The  
 Joy of a Jew*