

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah in this week's portion Vayigash tells us about the emotional reunion between Yosef and his brothers. During his opening remarks to his brothers, Yosef refers to the divine intervention which brought about the unusual set of circumstances of the reunion, namely, that Yakov's sons had come to Egypt to ask for food from their long-last brother whom they had sold into slavery many years earlier.

The verse quotes Yosef as saying, "Thus Hashem has sent me ahead of you to insure your survival in the land and to sustain you for a momentous deliverance." (Bereishis 45:7) We see from here Yosef's recognition of the concept of Hashgacha Pratis – divine intervention, which is one of the foundations of Jewish belief. As the Rambam teaches us in the first of his 13 Principles of Faith: "I believe in perfect faith that the Creator blessed is His Name, is the Creator and the *Guider* of all creations..."

Believing in Hashgacha Pratis – divine intervention means believing that Hashem guides even the minutest details of the universe. From this belief stems the belief that life is not random. We Jews do not believe that Hashem created the world like a clock and then let it run. Rather, everything that happens in life is for a purpose. The following inspirational stories illustrates these concepts.

The gabbai's eyes moved rapidly across the familiar faces of the men packed into shul on this sunny Shabbos morning. Shloime Kaufman, the gabbai, had been going through this routine for the past twenty years, looking out over the congregation and glancing, face by face, at his many friends and neighbors — a world of warm-hearted people with whom he shared his life.

Choosing a few each week for aliyos was a job that came with its difficulties, but it also gave him the weekly opportunity to count these blessings. This secure, contented world in which he found himself was all the more precious because, by any law of logic or probability, it should never have come into existence.

The world Mr. Kaufman had known as a child and young man in Poland had been erased. It had collapsed all around him, snuffing out the lives of his loved ones. At the time, he had thought that surely the few survivors who managed to emerge from the rubble alive would be left with nothing — no yeshivos, no shuls, no gedolim to guide them.

And yet, here he was, the grandfather of a beautiful, Torah-observant family, the gabbai of a thriving shul, surrounded by friends and family. Better to relish the miracle of the present than think too much about the searing pain of the past.

Mr. Kaufman scanned the rows of men as the Torah was removed from the ark. His eyes rested upon an unfamiliar face, a man about his own age with a short grey beard. He hadn't seen him in shul before. He surmised that he must be a guest. But there was something very familiar about this face. Suddenly, the man's features and expression jarred loose a powerful flash of recognition in Mr. Kaufman's mind.

It was Menachem Reiner, his closest childhood friend. It was Menachem, the boy with whom he had grown up in their small Polish shtetl, with whom he had attended yeshivah in Bialystock. It was Menachem, the young man to whom he had clung, and who had clung to him, as they began their cattle-car journey into the fearsome blackness of Auschwitz. They had promised each other to stick together, they had given each other courage and hope. Bearing the numbers the Nazis had tattooed on their arms, they had found in each other the strength to hold onto their humanity and resist becoming only numbers. They had vowed to help each other survive, both in body and soul. And they did survive, Boruch Hashem.

But when the war ended, each went his own way, eager to begin anew. For sanity's sake, they each tucked the past away into a deep, locked box that would be opened only on rare occasions. Menachem had settled in Israel, and Shloime Kaufman had obtained a visa for America.

Consumed with creating a future and healing the wounds of the past, they had lost touch with each other. That was forty-two years ago. Now, with unbelieving eyes and trembling hands, Mr. Kaufman beheld the unmistakable face of his friend once again.

Shlomie decided in his mind: Menachem Reiner would get the sixth aliyah. As the Torah reading began, the gabbai felt as if his heart could not be contained in his chest. He wanted to leap across the rows of men and fall upon his friend in a mighty embrace. "This must be how Yosef felt when he finally saw his brother Binyamin," he thought to himself. "All these years!"

Nevertheless, he clamped a tight lid on his emotions and performed his duty, calling up each aliyah with the traditional chant of "Ya'amod" followed by the honoree's Hebrew name. By the fifth aliyah, however, beads of sweat were sparkling on his forehead and tears were welling up in his eyes. He prayed that when the time came to call up number six, his voice would be able to break free of his tight throat.

There was no need to ask Menachem his name because he could never forget Menachem ben Yehoshua. For the first time, he began to wonder — how would Menachem react when they came face to face?

It was time to call him up, but Mr. Kaufman could not open his mouth. There were no words fit for this moment. All the suffering locked away in that figurative box was now out in the open, laid out before his eyes, and it was too much to bear.

The congregation began murmuring and looking toward Mr. Kaufman, fearing that the pale, trembling man was becoming ill. A deep cry rose up inside the gabbai — a cry to Hashem that contained in its broken sound all of His children's cries of anguish. Mr. Kaufman turned in the direction of his friend and at last found his voice.

"Ya'amod, 57200148!" he called. The baffled men in the shul did not understand what had happened. What was this number? What had become of Mr. Kaufman? But in the back of the room, one man understood completely. The number was Menachem's number, tattooed on his arm as a lifetime reminder of the darkest period of Jewish history, the epic tragedy of his people which he had witnessed with his own eyes.

The entire shul sat in stony silence as Menachem moved slowly toward the bimah. Finally, as they saw him approaching his long-lost friend, they understood the scene that was unfolding in front of them. Menachem needed no introduction. With tears coursing down his face, he cried out, "Shloimele! Shloimele! Is it really you?"

"Yes, Menachem, it's really me!" Mr. Kaufman answered, embracing his friend. They wept into each other's shoulders, rocking gently. "Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay," Mr. Kaufman breathed. Words were powerless to carry his chaotic emotions.

The entire shul sat spellbound, witnessing a moment that could have melted a heart made of iron. As these two men stood together, living witnesses to the Jewish people's miraculous survival, it seemed that the Heavens had opened up to declare, through them, that Hashem would never forsake His people. Am Yisrael Chai! The Jewish nation is alive, and Torah has been rebuilt in America. The Holocaust survivors who came to America planted the seeds, and it is up to us to reap the fruits of their labor and continue their legacy. (From, Stories for the Jewish Heart - Book 2 R. Binyomin Pruzansky) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**