

And Reuven heard, and he rescued him from their hand; he said, “We will not strike him mortally.” (37:21)

What is the meaning of “Reuven heard”? Was he not present together with his brothers? He did not “hear” from afar; he was there! The *Midrash* explains that, indeed, Reuven was there; it is just that he viewed the situation from a different vantage point than his brothers did. It was as if he had heard differently than they did. When Reuven heard Yosef relate his dream, he heard something which the other brothers either did not hear, or to which they did not bother listening: Yosef mentioned that there were eleven stars. This indicates that he still included Reuven as one of the *Shivtei Kah*, twelve tribes, from which *Klal Yisrael* would be built. Up until now, Reuven had thought that, due to his impetuosity concerning Leah *Imeinu*’s bed, he had crossed the “line” and was no longer included in the group. Apparently, Yosef did not think so.

Chazal understood that *Vayishma Reuven*, “And Reuven heard”, has a much deeper meaning than simply perceiving sound. Reuven did more than hear – he understood; he cogitated; he derived a lesson. True, the brothers thought that Yosef meant to take over the future reign of the brothers – to usurp Reuven’s position as *b’chor*, firstborn, and assume the rulership himself. Reuven understood differently. He understood that Yosef was not seeking monarchy; he saw it as coming to him. In between the lines, however, he also heard that Yosef had included him as one of the brothers. He had retained his position as one of Yaakov *Avinu*’s tribes. Reuven felt a sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, to Yosef. Thus, he came forward, demanding that Yosef be allowed to live.

Horav Chaim Shmuelewitz, zl, posits that the *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras hatov* is *mechayev*, is what compelled, Reuven’s view of Yosef’s intentions to be different than the view held by his brothers. This is why Reuven understood that Yosef was harmless; his intentions were not threatening. When one views a situation through the lens of *hakoras hatov*, what he sees is illuminating.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* supplements this with another insight. Actually, when we think about it, what did Reuven owe Yosef? It was but a dream which Yosef had experienced. Indeed, this dream primarily concerned Yosef, and it was to his benefit. Incidentally, he mentioned that there had been eleven stars, which represented eleven brothers – granting the fact that Reuven had been included in this sum total. Such a message – although related innocuously without intention to make Reuven feel good – still demands *hakoras hatov*.