

Yosef hitched his chariot and went up to meet his father... He appeared before him, fell on his neck, and he wept on his neck. (46:29)

Yosef made a point to harness the horses personally in preparation for his long anticipated meeting with his father. It would be no ordinary meeting. It was Yosef and Yaakov *Avinu*, two individuals whose relationship with one another was unusual, in the sense that Yosef was a spiritual replica of his father. Separated for over two decades, one can only begin to imagine the pent-up emotion that was welling up within each one – father and son. Yet, we see a number of anomalies concerning this meeting. Yosef hitched the chariot himself, probably out of excitement and growing anticipation. “Yosef came within view of his father.” This is obvious; why state it? Clearly, if his father fell on his neck, he came into his father’s view.

This question is addressed by a classic answer of **Horav Leib Chasman, zl**. Yosef had his own personal reason for seeing his father. Twenty-two years is a long time. He had left as a teenager and was now presenting himself as an adult, a world leader. How his heart must have pounded as he came closer and closer to that moment. A righteous person such as Yosef, however, does not think only of himself. What about his aged father’s feelings? As much as a son yearns to see his father, it is only a minute emotion compared to the father’s feeling toward his son. Yosef empathized with his father’s feelings.

Yosef had two feelings coursing through him that day. On the one hand was his personal longing for his father; on the other hand, he recognized his father’s yearning to see his long lost son. How does one process these two emotions? Which one dominated Yosef’s heart? The Torah gives us the answer with the words, “Yosef hitched his chariot.” What was his rush? Why did he not wait for one of his servants to do it for him? *Rashi* explains, “So as to stir himself to honor his father.” It was all about his father. Everything that he did – in thought and deed – was directed towards his father. His *Kibbud av* consumed him, so that nothing else mattered – not even his own feelings. With great effort, Yosef suppressed his emotions and directed all of himself, every aspect of his being, to focus totally on the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av*. This is underscored by the Torah when it says, “He appeared before him.” It was all about him: Yaakov. It was as if “Yosef” played no role in the historic meeting, for all of his thoughts were focused on his father.

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, applies the *Mashgiach’s* explanation to elucidate why Yaakov chose that moment to recite the *Shema*. In *Meseches Kallah Rabbasi 3*, *Chazal* teach us the magnitude of the *mitzvah* of deferring one’s personal wishes to perform the will of Hashem. They derive this from Yaakov, who refused to kiss Yosef, because the Patriarch was unsure if, during Yosef’s exile in the morally bankrupt Egypt, he might have fallen under the allure of a pagan woman.

Can one begin to imagine Yaakov’s devotion to Hashem? He was a loving father who was about to meet his son for whom he had mourned for twenty-two years. Surely, he was filled with longing,

anticipation, incredible pride at his son's success – and yet, despite all of this, the Patriarch did not for one moment disregard the minutiae of *halachah* and the demands of *kedushah*, holiness. He refused to kiss his son, because, maybe, on the outside chance, his son's spiritual character had been tainted during his long exile. That day, the spirit of prophecy – which had left Yaakov when he commenced his mourning for Yosef – had returned. What more did Yaakov need? What greater proof of Yosef's fidelity to maintaining his spiritual integrity did Yaakov require before he kissed Yosef? Until he was absolutely certain that Yosef was still “with the program,” Yaakov would not indulge his deepest fatherly emotions. He would not yet kiss his son. How did he achieve such an unprecedented level of devotion?

Rav Bergman explains that this is Yaakov *Avinu*. He was an individual who accepted the the yoke of Heaven Above to the fullest extent, who lived by the axiom, *V'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha*, “You shall love Hashem, Your G-d,” *b'chol levavcha, u'b'chol nafshecha, u'b'chol meodecha*, “With all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” To Yaakov, these were not mere words to be repeated by rote. There was no lip-service in his service to Hashem. It was tangible; it was real. He carried these words engraved on his heart and imbedded within his soul. At the moment that he served Hashem, every fiber of his being was engaged. There was no compromise. At that moment, every human emotion paled in comparison. Even the joy of reunion, following twenty-two years of inconsolable mourning, was nothing compared to the minutest doubt concerning spiritual integrity. This was Yaakov *Avinu's Shema*.

Yosef also “said” *Shema*. After all, if Yaakov was reciting *Shema*, should Yosef not also have been reciting it? *Rav Bergman* explains that, indeed, Yosef was expressing the *Shema* differently. What better way could there be for him to proclaim his acceptance of the yoke of Heaven than by doing exactly what he was doing – in the manner that he executed his *Kibbud av*? Harnessing the chariot with his own two hands, racing off to Goshen as fast as he could go, with the single-mindedness of subduing his own emotions and thinking of nothing else other than honoring his father – this was Yosef's *Shema*! Is this not a compelling expression of acceptance of Heaven's yoke? How did Yosef conclude his *Shema*? He kissed his father. This was surely his father's greatest conceivable pleasure. They both “said” *Shema* that day – just with different expression.