

And someone said to Yosef, “Behold!” – your father is ill. (48:1)

If someone had not informed Yosef that his father was ill, he would not have known. During the entire seventeen years that Yaakov *Avinu* resided in Egypt he was never alone with his long lost son, Yosef. They had been separated for twenty-two years, their hearts yearning for one another; yet, they were never alone together, never saw one another, until the end, when Yaakov lay on his deathbed. *Pesikta Rabbasi* explains that Yosef was afraid to be alone with his father, lest he ask him the big question: “What happened?” Yosef was acutely aware of his father’s supernatural powers. A single word with a negative connotation that left his mouth would have disastrous ramifications. When Lavan was searching for his idols, and Yaakov claimed that they were not in his possession, the Patriarch had added, “Whoever has them will not live,” and Rachel, Yosef’s mother, had died. If Yosef were to relate the story of the sale which led to his captivity to his father, it might catalyze a negative reaction; an impugning word might cause his brothers to be cursed. The world was created for the *Shevatim* who would produce *Klal Yisrael*. Without them – there would be no world. Yosef was not prepared to assume such an onerous responsibility. So he stayed away, his heart yearning for his father.

The **Tzidkas HaTzaddik** writes that this is a remarkable tribute to Yosef. Father and son had been separated for twenty-two years; the love burned so passionately between father and son that nary a minute went by during those twenty-two years that they did not think of one another. Yet, when the opportunity to meet, to talk, to be with one another, became available, they did not take advantage of it. Why? Because Yosef knew he would be asked the “question,” and his response would include *lashon hora* against his brothers; therefore, rather than submit to *lashon hora*, he suffered.

Horav Shlomo Harkavi, zl, views the lesson of the *Pesikta* from a different vantage point. For twenty-two years, Yaakov yearned for his son. Finally, he heard that he was alive and well, living in Egypt, and acting as its viceroy. He had a multitude of questions to present to his son: “What? Why? How?” Human nature dictates that he would demand to hear and absorb each and every detail concerning his son’s disappearance, but Yaakov did not question. He looked toward the future. Whatever happened – had happened. The past was final. The less he knew – the better. It was now time to forget the past, to look forward.

The *Tzidkas HaTzaddik* describes Yosef’s extreme sacrifice in not going to visit his father. *Chazal* (*Kallah Rabbasi* 3) teach that Yaakov did not kiss Yosef, because he feared that, after all of those years exposed to the hedonistic Egyptian culture -- and given his extraordinary handsome countenance -- Yosef might have fallen prey to the allure of its women. Yosef, on the other hand, was certainly aware of his father’s reluctance – and the reason for it. Yet, despite his ability to remove the cloud hanging over his head with one visit, he chose not to do so. Yosef withstood temptation; he overcame every challenge. Yet, he did not vindicate himself to his father, because it

meant answering questions which would result in needing to offer difficult answers that were likely to incur devastating ramifications. He stayed away. He discounted his own feelings in deference to those of his brothers.

The *Belzer Rebbe*, **Horav Yissachar Dov, zl**, would gather his sons together once a week and listen to the *chiddushei Torah*, novel ideas in Torah, which each had innovated that week. His son and successor, *Horav Aharon, zl*, was also present, but he refused to speak. He neither added his novellae nor offered an opinion concerning the novellae of the others. It was truly an anomaly, because he certainly was not lacking in the ability to communicate. A number of years went by, and, one time, he spoke up, articulating a brilliant *dvar Torah*, for once entering into the conversation with the others. Afterwards, his father questioned him concerning his sudden involvement in the family Torah discussion. He explained that, in the past, he had kept silent because his stepmother, who was the mother of his step-brothers, was always in the house during the discussion period. He felt that it was appropriate that she should hear the novellae of her sons without his “contributions” to the conversation. Her sons were her pride and joy; how could he diminish her satisfaction? The day that he joined in the conversation was a day when the *Rebbetzin* was visiting out of town.

This is an example of the extent to which the saintly *Belzer Rebbe* went in order not to deprive another person of her fullest degree of satisfaction.