HEAR O ISRAEL

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

After 22 years of separation, Yakov and Yoseph were reunited. Twenty-two years of loneliness, suffering, mourning, and loss were wiped away in a single glorious moment of reunion and rejoicing. The Medresh explains that as Yoseph embraced his father and dissolved into uncontrolled tears, Yakov recited Kriyas Shema. Why did Yakov feel it necessary to recite the Shema at the moment of his greatest joy, rather than embrace his long lost son?

This week's Parsha begins with two instances of Yoseph meeting with Yakov. In the first instance Yakov summoned Yoseph and asked him to promise that he would be buried in Eretz Yisroel. In the second instance, Yoseph was told that his father was ill and he rushed to his father's bedside. In both instances Yoseph wasn't at the side of Yakov, but had to be summoned. Why did he have to be summoned? I would have thought that considering their long separation, Yoseph would have spent as much time as possible with Yakov?

After Yakov was told that Yoseph was alive, Yakov must have had numerous unanswered questions: What happened after Yoseph was attacked by the wild animal? How did Yoseph end up in Egypt? How did he rise to the exalted position of the most powerful man in Egypt? Why didn't Yoseph contact Yakov as soon as he was in a position to do so? Why did Yoseph first give his brothers such a difficult time? Why did Yoseph act out a charade that only added to Yakov's suffering by imprisoning Shimon and insisting that Binyamin be brought to Mitzrayim?

The simplest answer would have been the truth. Tell Yakov that Yoseph had been sold by his brothers into slavery, and that the entire scene had been orchestrated by Hashem in order to fulfill the prophecy of "and they will be enslaved." Yakov would have then understood that Yoseph had manipulated his brothers in order to fulfill his dreams and give them the opportunity to do Teshuva. Yakov would have himself understood and been able to forgive his sons for their part in selling Yoseph and causing the family so much pain. Instead, all the brothers were enjoined in an oath of silence, including Yoseph, Binyamin, Yitzchak, and G-d Himself. No one was allowed to tell Yakov the truth! So what did Yakov do with all his questions?

At the end of Parshas Vayigash the Torah used an entire Aliyah describing Yoseph's masterful manipulation and reorganization of Egyptian society for the sake of bringing the Bnai Yisroel into exile and slavery. Most of Parshas Meeketz was devoted to Yoseph's masterful manipulation of his brothers in order to effect forgiveness. The commentaries explain that Yoseph was the visionary and

administrator par-excellence! As Pharaoh proclaimed, "no one is as discerning and wise as you!" His ability to recognize possibilities and seize opportunities was seemingly second to none.

However, as great as Yoseph was in planning and strategizing, Yakov was even greater. Yakov had been Yoseph's teacher. At the age of 15, Yakov already perceived Eisav for who he was and wrestled away from him his claim on the Jewish people. Yakov was able to survive the constancy of Lavan's 20 years of evil conspiracies and bring forth a family of unparalleled potential and greatness. Yakov, as a Navi, was able to perceive the patterns of time, the expectations of G-d, and the consequent obligations of man. We must therefore assume that Yakov suspected the truth of the events surrounding Yoseph's disappearances. In fact, in his final Bracha to Shimon and Levi Yakov said, "and at their whim they maimed an ox." Rashi explains this as referring to their attempt at "disabling Yoseph" by plotting to kill him! Why then didn't Yakov ever ask Yoseph what had happened?

The reason why Yoseph had to be summoned was because Yoseph and Yakov had an unspoken understanding that they would stay away from each other. Both understood that the more time they spent with each other the greater the possibility of Yakov asking the unasked and Yoseph confirming the unspoken. Therefore, Yoseph busied himself in the affairs of government while Yakov directed his attention to setting the foundation for his children's survival and eventual redemption from Mitzrayim.

At the time of Yakov and Yoseph's reunion, Yoseph reacted emotionally while Yakov deliberately said Krias Shema. Yoseph's reaction was expected and understandable. Twenty two years of loneliness and determination had ended! Finally, Yoseph was able to let down his guard and permit himself to feel the enormity of the events that had swept him away from the loving embrace of his beloved father. Therefore, Yoseph fell upon his father and wept.

On the other hand, Yakov was equally confronted by the enormity of the reunion. Finally, he could once again gaze upon the face of his beloved Yoseph and believe in the resurrected destiny of his collective children. Once again could he feel the pride and joy in having all of his extraordinary sons gathered around him. It was a moment deserving of emotional expression, both tears and laughter. However, it was also a time of unanswered questions. How? When? Why? What happened?

Considering Yakov's unequaled ability at seeing patterns and possibilities, we can assume that Yakov had already guessed the basic truth of Yoseph's disappearance. As the quintessential father and teacher, Yakov was more concerned for the emotional impact that his unasked questions would have on Yoseph and his other sons, rather than his own curiosity. The very last thing that Yakov wanted to have happen was for the brothers to retreat into the distrust and fears that had originally motivated Yoseph's disappearance.

Instead of asking the questions and forcing a confrontation, Yakov saw his beloved Yoseph and was filled with the joy and exaltation of once again being whole. At that moment he realized that the past didn't make a difference. He realized that his questions didn't need answers. Instead, Yakov

accepted upon himself the obligations associated with a recognition of Hashem's absolute dominion. To accept Hashem's dominion means to acknowledge G-d's control over everything that happens. Upon seeing the face of Yoseph, Yakov was able to accept that all that had transpired was as G-d intended. Therefore, he set aside his questions and recited Krias Shema.

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The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
