

Love of G*d and Love of Others

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Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

Parshat Vayigash

Joseph . . . went up to call upon his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell upon his neck, weeping at length upon his shoulders. (Genesis 46:29)

Israel, however, did not weep in response, but said merely (46:31), **Now that I have seen thy face, now that I know thou art still alive, I can die.**

Rashi explains that Israel was reciting the *Sh'ma* and therefore could not respond until he had finished. Leaving aside the apparent anachronism that the *Sh'ma* had not yet been given – for such anachronism does not disturb the tradition – Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk finds that Rashi's interpretation raises two other questions entirely.

First, if Israel was indeed engaged in reciting the *Sh'ma* (or, for that matter, any other prayer), then why did Joseph fall upon his neck? Was he wholly unconcerned with the possibility that he was disturbing his father's devotions?

Second, on what basis do we assert that Israel was concentrating on a prayer at this – understandably emotional – moment of reunion rather than on finally encountering his long-lost favorite son?

The Kotzker finds in the story and in Rashi's interpretation a great tribute to the spiritual potential of the human being. Israel, he says, was at a level high enough to warrant his seeing Joseph not only alive but living in the most regal splendor. His emotions welled up within him, and his desire was to reach out and kiss and embrace Joseph.

At that very moment, Israel realized that such a powerful level of love should most properly be directed and consecrated to G*d alone, and he immediately began to recite the *Sh'ma*.

There could be no greater tribute to the power of Israel's love for his son! Paraphrasing the poet, "I could not love thee half so well, loved I not G*d still more!"

Shabbat Shalom.