



PARSHAS MIKEITZ – DAVID FREEDMAN

Vayaker Yoseph es echav vehaim lo hikiruhu

Yoseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him (Bereishis 42:8)

How was it possible for the brothers not to recognise him? Yes, it was 22 years since they last met and Yoseph's situation and position was completely different, but how could the brothers not recognise their own?

Rashi explains that when they last saw Yoseph when he was 17, he did not have the full beard that he had now (Kesuvos 27b)

But Yoseph recognised Isaachar and Zevulun who were only a little older than him!

Ibn Ezra suggests that Yoseph only recognised his brothers collectively as a group (42:7) and only afterwards individually.

Admittedly, Yoseph's superior position and Egyptian clothing was out of context for the brothers. Also, once the brothers admitted they were from Canaan, Yoseph had extra clues to help him with their identification.

Chizkuni comments that the brothers referred to each other by name, thus providing further help for Yoseph to confirm who they were.

But how was it possible for the brothers not to recognise Yoseph?

Even if the brothers could not fast forward Yoseph's appearance from a young 17 year old to now, Yoseph's amazing similarity in appearance to their father Yaacov must have alerted them.

The Gemara (Gittin 23a), when discussing whether a blind agent can deliver a Get, even if he cannot see the lady concerned, states that a blind man can cohabit with his wife through voice recognition.

If so, why could the brothers not identify Yoseph through speech?

This can be possibly answered by noting that Yoseph did not speak directly to the brothers, but through an interpreter (42:23). Voice recognition can only succeed if speaking in the usual language. As Yoseph was speaking Egyptian, the brothers could not recognise him.

This is further borne out by the fact that when Yoseph eventually reveals himself, in next week's Sedra (45:12) "...my mouth is speaking..." Rashi explains this means in Loshon Hakodesh.

In his sefer, R Dovid Goldwasser suggests that the Posuk is talking about a different type of recognition that the brothers could not understand.

It was not recognition of voice, face or anything physical that the brothers did not recognise. It was how come a political leader of such standing as the viceroy of Egypt, could attain Yoseph's spiritually exalted standing. The brothers could not reconcile the physical resemblance to the spiritually elevated level of Yoseph.

They convinced themselves it was not possible, so did not recognise their brother.

However, Yoseph proved that with effort, human resources are capable of rising above the physical environment and reach higher than would otherwise be thought possible.

With the miracle of Chanukah, we can all strive to lift ourselves and rise like the flame.

In memory of my Mother, Braina bat Tzvi, whose Yahrtzeit is 30 Kislev