



When Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, they initially could not respond due to a combination of fear, guilt, and shock. “Then Yosef said to his brothers, ‘Please come closer to me’, and the brothers came closer. And he (Yosef) said, “I am Yosef your brother, it is me whom you sold (as a slave) to Mitzrayim” (Beraishis 45:4). Rashi comments on this Pasuk that Yosef drew them close to show him his Bris Milah.

It was difficult for me to understand why Yosef would show his brothers his Bris Milah to prove that he was Yosef. His intimate knowledge of their history together that no one else could possibly know, his genuine appearance when removing his ‘viceroy’ disguise and his speaking to them in Lashon HaKodesh should be enough to convince them he is Yosef without needing to reveal his Bris Milah.

When Yosef accused the brother of being spies ‘to see the land’s nakedness’ (see Beraishis 42:9), the Midrash (Beraishis Raba 91:6) explains that the brothers did not all come as a group, the way it might appear from the literal reading of the Pesukim, “Bnei Yisroel came to buy provisions among the arrivals...Yosef’s brothers came and bowed to him with their faces to the ground” (Beraishis 42:5-6). Rather, they entered the city where the grain was being distributed through ten different gates.

Yosef knew that members of his family would have to come down eventually to Mitzrayim due to the famine. Therefore, he placed guards by all of the gates and instructed these guards to require all people entering to identify themselves by their name and their father’s name. These guards were put on alert for anyone entering named ‘Ben Yaakov’ or ‘Ben Yisroel’ and were to report immediately to Yosef when this occurred.

This is how Yosef knew how they arrived through different gates and could accuse them of being spies. The brothers defended themselves by explaining they were twelve brothers in all. The youngest remained with the father and ‘one is unaccounted for’ (Beraishis 42:13). Rashi cites the continuation of the Midrash that they split up to search throughout the major city to try to find their missing brother.

Another Midrash describes how they searched the marketplaces and interrogated slave traders, inquiring about a good-looking circumcised slave. To their amazement, they learned that all citizens of Mitzrayim were circumcised, and their slaves were uncircumcised.

This is because when the famine started Yosef required all citizens asking for grain to circumcise themselves and Paro upheld Yosef’s decree (see Rashi to Beraishis 41:55). This seemingly would strengthen our question, as revealing his Bris Milah would not show that Yosef was their brother, since all citizens of Mitzrayim had a Bris Milah.

I would suggest that Yosef showed his brothers his Bris Milah for the following reasons. The first is that Yosef was showing the brothers that they had finally found the circumcised slave that they were looking for. This would retroactively make his earlier accusation – that they were spies ‘to see the land’s nakedness’ – true. He also reminded the brothers of the intimate detail that they had promised the citizens of Shechem that if they would perform Bris Milah they would live together in peace. So too, Yosef was demonstrating that he was coming to his brother in peace.

The Mitzvah of Bris Milah, which is found in the words of Chazal in Parshas Miketz and Parshas Vayigash, ties these Parshiyos to the festival of Chanukah that just concluded, as Bris Milah was one of the Mitzvos that the Yavanim prohibited Klal Yisroel to perform (See Megillas Antiochus 7). Now that the festival of Chanukah has passed, it is now our mission to take the spiritual illumination we received on Chanukah and shine it on all of our Avodas Hashem throughout the rest of the year.

In addition, from the Torah reading (see Bamidbar 8:2 and Rashi there citing Tanchuma 5) of Zos Chanukah, the final day of Chanukah, Aharon HaKohen was consoled that although the Korbanos – which the tribe of Levi did not take part in during the inauguration of the Mishkan – will cease, the lighting of the Menorah – which he was commanded – will continue throughout the generations. May it be His will that our lighting of the Menorah this Chanukah will be the start of the rebuilding of the Third Beis HaMikdash, speedily in our days, just as it was ‘in those days at this time’.

