

The Torah tells us that the children of Jacob returned from Egypt and informed him that Joseph was alive and that he was the viceroy of Egypt. Upon hearing the news, Jacob's heart would not accept their words as he did not believe them. They showed him the chariots, עגלות, that Joseph sent to carry him to Egypt and Jacob's spirit was revived. Jacob fainted out of shock and surprise precipitated by the story that Joseph was still alive and his initial skepticism about the veracity of the report. Why did Jacob initially reject the testimony of 11 eye witnesses? What was the significance of the chariots Joseph sent and how were they connected to the revival of Jacob's divine inspiration (רוח הקודש)?

The brothers reported to Jacob that Joseph was still alive in Egypt. In spite of spite of all his trials and successes and being the viceroy of Egypt, he remained the same Joseph. As the commentaries point out on the verse "And Joseph was in Egypt", he retained the same sense of righteousness that he had in Canaan years before and was untainted by the trappings of his position and Egyptian culture. Jacob could not understand how Joseph could be the ruler of Egypt and maintain his nature of kindness and compassion. That is why he initially refused to accept their report of his discovery in Egypt.

When the brothers related to Jacob the words of Joseph, how he had cautioned them not to quarrel among themselves over how they treated him in the past, that he had been sent by Gd to provide for them and their families during the years of famine, Jacob realized that these were the words of one who grew up with the concept of kindness as taught in the house of Abraham. Finally they showed him the chariots Joseph sent. This was a sign to Jacob that Joseph remembered the פרשת עגלה ערופה, the last topic they studied together before their relationship was interrupted abruptly 22 years before. The fundamental principle of פרשת עגלה ערופה is the responsibility of the elders for their generation and how they are accountable for the death of a stranger found murdered outside the borders of the city. The chariots Joseph sent hinted to Jacob that he still remembered the lessons of responsibility and compassion he learned years before as represented by the פרשת עגלה ערופה. The Torah says that Jacob saw the chariots that Joseph sent to carry him, לשאת אותו. לשאת also means to elevate. Joseph indicated that he was sending the chariots to lift the spirit of Jacob, רוח יעקב, which he succeeded in doing.

The Torah tells us that Jacob stopped in B'er Sheva on his way to Egypt. Gd appeared to him and told him not to fear descending to Egypt for Gd will accompany him on both his journey down to Egypt and his return from Egypt. Jacob was apparently seeking this spiritual guarantee, as immediately after

receiving it he travels directly to Egypt with his entire family. Why was Jacob reticent to go to Egypt and what did Gd promise him that eased his mind for his immediate departure?

The Ramban says that the Patriarchs were considered Jews while they lived in the land of Canaan. However, when they left Canaan, their status was reduced to that of בן נח, bound only by Noahite laws. This explains how Jacob was permitted to marry two sisters while he was in Charan. However, when he returned to the land of Canaan, he was once again bound by the Torah and the additional prohibitions of עריות that apply to a בן ישראל but not a בן נח. Rachel, the second of the sisters Jacob married and was therefore the prohibited one as an איסור ערוה, died just prior to Jacob's return to Canaan. This was a result of the קדושת ישראל that Jacob surrendered when he went to Charan that he now regained upon his return to Canaan.

[Gd promised Abraham (בראשית 17:7-8) that He will maintain His covenant with Abraham and his children, to be their Gd, to grant them the land that they dwelled in and He will be unto them אלקים. However at the time of מתן תורה (שמות 19:5-6) Gd enters into a covenant with בני ישראל to keep His Torah because all belongs to Gd, כי לי כל הארץ. Prior to receiving the Torah, the patriarchs had קדושת ישראל while they dwelt in the land of Canaan, ארץ מגוריהם. However with מתן תורה, קדושת ישראל was no longer restricted geographically. The Jewish People were imbued with קדושת ישראל no matter where they may be.]

Jacob was afraid that as a result of his leaving the land of Canaan to see Joseph in Egypt, he would once again lose the קדושת ישראל that comes with dwelling in the land of Canaan. He also knew that this קדושת ישראל would be lost for a long time, as his children would be enslaved for an extended period in Egypt. He was afraid that the nascent Jewish People might become assimilated in Egypt and disappear as a separate and chosen nation. Gd appeared to him and reassured him that he should have no fear to descend to Egypt. Isaac was not permitted to detach even momentarily from the קדושת ישראל. However, Jacob and his children were not subject to this restriction. Their descending to Egypt is in compliance with the will of Gd. Gd promised Jacob that they will not lose קדושת ישראל even though they are departing the land of Canaan. Indeed, they will receive an additional measure of sanctity because Gd will make them into a great nation while they are in Egypt. Gd promised to accompany him down to Egypt and, at the appropriate time, bring him and the Jewish People back from Egypt as well. Reassured by Gd, Jacob is now ready to depart Canaan to see his beloved son.

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