

YOSEF'S ENCOUNTERS WITH HIS OBLIVIOUS BROTHERS

In the *Haftorah* of *Vayeishev* it states in the very beginning that the brothers sold Yosef the *tzaddik* for a pairs of shoes. Why does the Torah go out of its way to let us know what they received for their sale of Yosef? Secondly, does one think that they were lacking shoes that they bartered Yosef for nothing other but sandals?

Furthermore, when they discovered that their money which was given to Yosef for the food was returned unknowingly to them in their sacks, the brothers' hearts went into shock mode **מה זאת עשה אלקים לנו** what sin did we do that Hashem brought this frame up upon us. The brothers understood clearly that the viceroy of *Mitzrayim* was not acting on his own but rather being a mere puppet in the hands of Hashem. They were asking each other what could we have done wrong to deserve such punishment from Hashem. Similarly, when the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack they said **האלקים מצא את עון עבדיך**. Once again they realized that they must have sinned against Hashem and they accepted their fate from Him.

Which transgression were they exactly referring to? Sadly, it wasn't a confession to the selling or attempted killing of Yosef but something else, **ראינו צרת נפשו בהתחננו** **אלינו ולא שמענו** (Bereishis 42 21). When we threw Yosef into the pit he pleaded with us from agony asking how one can act this cruel way with your brother without having any *rachmanus* at all. However, as for the essential sale of Yosef there was no admission of fault. The reason the brothers were absent from compassion was because they were total confident that concerning the sale of Yosef they were 1000% correct, righteous, and were saving Klal Yisrael.

The *meforshim* question that if this confession from the brothers is true then why didn't the Torah describe explicitly this scenario. The Rabbeinu Bachya answers that the reason is because it is self understood that naturally Yosef in this situation pleaded with his brother to refrain such an evil behavior towards him.

Another perplexing theme that is woven throughout the encounters of Yosef with his brothers is that the *Shevatim* seemed to miss so many obvious cues from Yosef that all together indicated almost as a certainty that this viceroy was certainly no other than their missing brother. Here are just a few examples that the The Medrash 91,6 addresses: Yosef made believe that his goblet was revealing all the facts such as two brothers killed all the males in Shechem, afterwards you sold your brother to Arabs, he took Shimon who was the instigator in the plot against Yosef and put him in jail as the collateral to bring Binyamin to Mitzrayim, they come down to Mitzrayim to buy wheat and they bowed to the viceroy just like Yosef saw in his dream of wheat sheaves

bowing down to him, Yosef even revealed to them what kind of crib they slept in as babies (43,6 Rashi), when Binyamin was brought to Mitzrayim they ate by Yosef a meal and Yosef set the seat arrangements according to their ages, he positioned Binyamin to sit at a separate table with him exclusively since they were both orphans and gave him five times as much as he gave to the other brothers, and the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack.

What is going on over here? Are the brothers so blind that they couldn't process all these clues and cues which would lead them straight to the treasure that they were searching for – Yosef the viceroy who was bringing them all their problems and accusations of spies etc. To answer this question we have to understand human nature. A person can size up another individual with a character judgement. It doesn't have to be signed and sealed forever as the saying goes one's first impression is his last impression. It can be changed after much thought, or seeing the person in experiences that demonstrate that one's evaluation of him is not completely true, or he hears from that person an explanation for his behavior which caused you to judge him so.

Yet there can also exist an assessment of another individual that is irrevocable. No matter how many excuses all the psychologists in the world can make on behalf of Hitler's genocide of the Jewish Nation, one's perspective can never and will never change. It's as if your opinion is locked in and the only key was thrown away because there is nothing further to discuss. It could be compared to a mass murderer whose verdict by the judge was to receive six million life sentences. Even if there arises new compelling evidence that could lighten his sentence somewhat, there is still nothing to talk about. The brothers held that Yosef *lehavdil* was a tremendous peril to lead the future *Am Yisrael* into history and the Jewish destiny. Yosef must go if *Klal Yisrael* is to stay and bring Hashem's glory into the world.

This would now explain their being oblivious to all the clues of Yosef's identity that he presented placed before them along the way. When there is absolutely zero flexibility and wiggle room in an upshot, then you are locked in so tight that there is absolutely no interest whatsoever in that person's existence for he doesn't exist in your mind or heart. My Rebbi Rav Freifeld ztl explained that this is the reason why the Torah did not describe Yosef's pleading to the brothers because they actually did not hear him plead and cry to them for *rachmanus* because he didn't exist in their eyes at all. To the brothers there was zero reception for a Yosef informational broadcast.

Even though the brothers had a *Beis Din* which found Yosef guilty for his actions and even Hashem sat on that *Beis Din*, the brothers were punished for their selling of Yosef as we see from the **עשרה הרוגי מלכות**. We could understand this with the same explanation that the Alter from Slabodka ztl said to interpret why Yaakov was punished for not allowing Dinah to marry Aisav considering the chance that she might

mekaraiv him. The reason is because "he banged the nails used to close the lid of the box in which Dina was hidden, too tightly. What the Alter meant in this analogy is that Yaakov in his decision not to entertain Dina's marriage to Aisav, didn't even have a 1% chance in his heart that "maybe" Aisav marrying Dina could work out to save his brother. Yaakov in his assessment of this opportunity left absolutely no wiggle room for a fleeting moment of *rachmanus* for his brother. The case was already closed before it even started! Hashem expected more from him.

So too we can say, that the decision might have been correct to sell Yosef to Mitzrayim but they should have at least for a fleeting moment entertained the idea that by doing so he will die spiritually. Chazal say causing one to sin is worse than killing him (Bamidbar Rabba 21,4). This factor was not reckoned with even for a second. They did not even leave in their decision process the possibility that maybe this is worse for Yosef than dying. The brothers were so locked into their mind set that they did not hear Yosef's crying at all. Like Yaakov this was their transgression.

Now we can understand what the shoes that they received as payment for their selling Yosef have to do with the transgression. A shoe is called **נעל** from the word **מנעול** a lock for it locks in your feet. They made all the participants of Yosef being sold to swear never to reveal what happened to Yosef. They wanted shoes from the sale to serve as a constant reminder not to weaken even .0000001% in their correct judgment of selling their brother.

Chanukah is the story of willingness to think outside of the box and not be locked in to "tunnel vision" the name my Rebbi ztl gave to a very narrow and paralyzed perspective. To think that 13 people can defeat an entire Greek army with hundreds of thousands soldiers and elephants is preposterous. There is nothing to talk about. Yet Chanukah is the Yom Tov that says that with Hashem one can make that happen supernaturally. When connected to Hashem one can never say he is locked into habit, *middos, taavos* to the point where it is inconceivable to change. Even if the odds are over 22 million against you for succeeding in your endeavor you still don't give up and say it cannot happen. After all when was the last time you bought a ticket for a Mega Jackpot that has the same odds against you winning? Yet you still think you have a chance to be the winner. Without the thought of Hashem helping you to get your ticket numbers drawn, you would be considered a total insane idiot for wasting \$2. This means that you inwardly believe that only Hashem could pull this off for you. So for buying tickets to make a "killing" you are willing to leave the box of sanity and go out to insanity. However, when it comes to personal *tikkun* and change one says "I cannot "kill" myself to get out of this rut. Just look of how many failures I had until now". OK. But I am definitely sure they were not even close to 22 million.

I always marveled why the first word of every *Mesechta* is printed in a box. Nothing of the Shas is happenstance even its printing. It teaches us that the more one learns

Torah the closer he gets to Hashem and sees the light. He leaves the tunnel vision mode, the darkness of despair and hopelessness and finds the key of success which is always available for one who truly seeks to unlock his potential in ruchniyus. Hashem is just waiting for the asking.

Rav Brazil

Gut Shabbos Lichteigin Chanukah