

“He (Yosef) comforted them and spoke to their heart.” (50:21)

Yosef comforted his brothers. It seems that he had forgiven them for selling him as a slave. In a similar statement, Yosef said to his brothers, “Do not be distressed and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was as a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you” (Bereishis 45:5). Once again, it seems apparent that Yosef was not angry with his brothers. Indeed, he asserted that the sale was a G-d-send. Hashem placed him in Egypt, so that he would be in a position to help his family. Both of these pesukim apparently imply Yosef’s forgiveness. He did not, however, forgive them. The Torah does not relate explicit forgiveness from Yosef. Was explicit forgiveness necessary? One would think that Yosef’s remarks concerning the mechirah, sale, would be sufficient proof that he had forgiven his brothers.

The Midrash, as cited by Rabbeinu Bachya, teaches us that Klal Yisrael suffered the terrible tragedy of the Asarah Harugei Malchus, Ten Martyrs, who were murdered by the Roman emperor as a result of the sin of mechiras Yosef, the sale of Yosef. Is this possible? Did not Yosef forgive his brothers for their part in the sale? Why should ten great Torah leaders, the greatest of the generation, die as penance for that sin?

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that while it seems that Yosef forgave them – and he probably did forgive them – he never explicitly and openly articulated this forgiveness. It is only implied by his statements. That is not sufficient. The forgiveness must be explicit! This is why the tragedy of the Ten Martyrs occurred many centuries later.

What a powerful lesson for us! How often do we apologize to someone we hurt? We even ask for forgiveness, only to receive the following response, “It’s okay;” “It’s no problem,” “Don’t worry about it,” which we accept as sufficient. We see here that unless the person we hurt explicitly says, “I forgive you,” we are still held liable. To forgive a hurt is not a simple thing to do; to articulate this forgiveness is more difficult, but without this explicit forgiveness, the absolution is not genuine.