

“And so it was, when Yosef came to his brothers they stripped Yosef of his tunic, the fine woolen tunic that was on him.” (37:23)

Was it really necessary to remove Yosef’s unique tunic? Was their hatred toward him that implacable? *Horav Sholom Shwadron, z.l.*, explains that, indeed, it had nothing to do with animosity. On the contrary, everything which they did was to ensure a “fair trial” for Yosef. The eye can be deceiving. Since the genesis of their animus toward Yosef was the multicolored tunic that was a special gift from their father, it was only right that it not “stare” at them while they judged Yosef. Seeing it might arouse their anger and cause them to adjudicate an incorrect verdict. This exposition is rendered for the specific purpose of demonstrating how far-removed the *Shivtei Kah*, holy Tribes, were from any vestige of hatred or jealousy in the sense that we understand these emotions. They were *kedoshim u’tehorim*, holy and pure, and their intention regarding Yosef was noble and virtuous, as was to be expected of Yaakov’s sons.

With this in mind, we must understand that the Torah’s terminology-its use of the words *kinah* and *sinah*, envy and hatred – is purely relative. In no way are they the same terms with the same criteria as applied to us. Our perception of envy which is driven by one’s passion, his negative character traits, is unlike the terms applied to the *Shevatim*. When we see one of our friends excelling in an area in which we would have liked to excel, we become filled with envy – an envy which can, at times, lead to tragic consequences. Then we have the insolence to justify our behavior by citing the actions of the *Shevatim*! If they could act in this manner, why should we be different? Heaven forbid, that anyone should err and compare contemporary human deficiency to the actions of the *Shivtei*

Rav Shwadron cites the *Ramban* who states that everything that occurred in regard to Yosef – from the “envy” of his brothers to his eventual sale to the *Yishmaelim* – was all part of a Divine Plan to bring *Klal Yisrael* down to Egypt. Hashem orchestrated everything. To believe differently is to challenge the words of *Chazal*, an action that is tantamount to heresy. To paraphrase the words of the *Midrash Rabba* 84, “When You (Hashem) desired, You placed in their hearts love; when You so desired, You placed hatred in their hearts.”

If so, why were they blamed for selling Yosef? It was not their choice. They were pawns in the Divine Plan. Why does the Torah in *Sefer Amos* 2:6 detail the three sins for which Hashem held *Klal Yisrael* in contempt, which includes “their sale of the *tzaddik* (Yosef) for silver”? Furthermore, other *Midrashim* imply that the sale of Yosef is considered a *zechus*, merit for them, since it catalyzed an opportunity for Yosef to sustain his family during the Egyptian famine. Were they sinners or righteous men?

Rav Shwadron explains that their “sin” lies in the last words of the *pasuk* – “for silver.” He brings the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon Ha’ben*, redemption of the first born, to support this idea. The connection

drawn by *Chazal* is that we give five silver *shekels* to redeem the firstborn, an amount equivalent to Yosef's sale.

When we analyze the words of the *Midrash*, we realize that the money used for *Pidyon Ha'ben* serves as an atonement for the sale of Yosef. Evidently, this must be the sin – taking money for the sale of Yosef. So what is the sin? Should they have given Yosef away to the Arabs? Moreover, perhaps they took money to diminish the shame. Why should an Arab be able to come along and just take a Jew? He should pay dearly!

Rav Shwadron cites the *Daas Zekeinim*, who say that originally the brothers were willing to sell Yosef for the equivalent of five *shekalim*, because when they lowered him into the pit, his face changed color out of fear of the snakes and scorpions that were in the pit. His value depreciated with his appearance. As they removed him from the pit, his color began to return, so that they decided to increase his "price." They compromised by accepting shoes, the value of five *shekalim*, from the Arabs.

Had they been willing to accept the original price, we could have accepted that every aspect of the sale was Divinely ordained. When they attempted to raise the price, settling in the end for pairs of shoes instead, it became apparent that they did not object to receiving money for their role in the Divine Plan. This is precisely what the *pasuk* means when it says, "For selling a *tzaddik* for money, and a poor man for a pair of shoes." The fact that they sought shoes is an indication that even the money which they were going to originally accept was for their personal benefit.

Last, this elucidates for us why there were ten *Harugei Malchus*, martyred rabbis, who were killed as "penance" for the ten brothers that had a hand in selling Yosef to the Arabs. Why ten? Reuven was not there, so there should have been only nine martyrs. *Rav Shwadron* explains that while Reuven did not take part in selling Yosef, he did take a pair of shoes for himself. That action resulted in an additional martyr being put to death. Tragically, the shoes were the determining factor in their sin.