

Yosef saw his brothers and he recognized them, but he acted like a stranger towards them. (42:7)

Yosef apparently wanted to conceal his identity from his brothers. He wanted them to think that he was the Egyptian viceroy, a pagan, not a Jew, and certainly not their long-lost brother, Yosef. Why? A practical, insightful explanation for Yosef's behavior is rendered by **Horav Moshe Yaakov Ribicov, zl**, the holy man known as the *Der Shuster, HaSandlor*, the Shoemaker. Let me first digress from the subject and introduce the reading audience to this holy man. The *Sandlor* lived in Tel Aviv, and the *Chazon Ish* considered him to be *rosh ha'lamed vov tzaddikim*, the head/leader of the thirty-six righteous Jews, in whose merit the world is sustained. These men are, for all public purposes, simple Jews, not on rabbinical boards, honorees at dinners, *Roshei Yeshivah*. They keep to themselves and conceal their righteous activity. It takes another holy Jew, of the caliber of the *Chazon Ish*, to recognize the greatness of such an individual. The *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponevez, *Horav Yaakov Edelstein, Shlita*, was very close with him.

I present one short vignette (among many) to demonstrate his saintliness: The *Sandlor* was once invited to attend a *Bris Milah*, circumcision. Upon entering the room, he raised up his head, looked around and yelled out, *Ich zeh em nisht! Ich zeh em nisht!* "I do not see him! I do not see him!" He immediately left the room. He was referring to Eliyahu *HaNavi* who attends every *Bris*.

The *Sandlor's* reference to not seeing Eliyahu *HaNavi* made everyone anxious – enough to delay the *Bris*, while they investigated why Eliyahu *HaNavi* would not attend this *Bris*. A number of hours went by, and the matter was resolved. The original child who was supposed to have been circumcised had been somehow switched at the hospital and exchanged for a gentile child. The parents had been clueless, and the error might have gone undetected for some time. Once they brought the true Jewish-born child to the home, they called the holy *Sandlor* to attend the *Bris*. When he entered the home, his face lit up as he announced, *Ah, yetzt zeh ich im*, "Ah, now I see him." The *Bris* took place in the presence of Eliyahu *HaNavi*.

Having said this, we return to our original question: What lesson is the Torah teaching by informing us that Yosef made a point not to identify himself to his brothers? The *Sandlor* explains that Yosef did this due to his righteous nature. He originally had dreamt that he would achieve a position of distinction, as a result of which his brothers would bow down to him. They, of course, did not acquiesce to Yosef's dream and, indeed, were quite adamantly against any thought of their bowing down to Yosef.

Under normal circumstances, when one wins a debate, a dispute with someone, the victor might act presumptuous, often displaying a sense of pomposity in the presence of the loser. The individual who had not emerged successful is, likewise, ill at ease when he confronts the person who defeated him. This is only if he is aware of the victor's identity. If, however, the victor's identity is concealed, then the individual who lost has no undue feelings of shame, since no one is

aware of his defeat.

When the brothers bowed down to Yosef, it was his moment of triumph. The dreams that they attempted to squash were, in effect, a prophecy that came true! Imagine if Yosef had revealed himself to them; it would have been devastating. In order that his brothers not feel bad that all this time they had been wrong and Yosef had actually been destined to become royalty, a person to whom they had to bow down to, he covered up the truth; so that they would not recognize him.

The desire to vindicate oneself before those who had suspected him of impropriety is all-consuming. Imagine, all of those years Yosef was reviled as the usurper of the Patriarchal legacy, a man who sought to undermine his own brothers and lord over them. His brothers had reached a *halachic* conclusion that Yosef was a *rodef*, pursuer, who sought to destroy them. For this, he warranted death. In the end, they compromised by selling him instead. When they sold him, it was good riddance; they were finally free of his maligning mouth and arrogant dreams. For years, this had been their impression of Yosef. Now, at this moment of vindication, Yosef could have easily (and many of us would have gloated to put our detractors in their proper place) revealed the truth. He did not, because it would mean hurting his brothers' feelings.

What about Yosef's feelings? What about all of those years of separation from his father, from his home? Rejected and left to die, then sold to the Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt, one would think that Yosef had every reason to gloat, but he did not, because to hurt another person, especially his brothers, despite their animus toward him, was the farthest thing from his mind.

A great person does not minimize himself over petty and sometimes not so petty occurrences, which have offended or hurt him. He rises above the pain and reimburses good for the bad that was done to him. A great person empathizes with the pain of others, even if it is self-inflicted, or if they are personally responsible for their own downfall. Furthermore, a great person does not gloat when Hashem pays back the individual who hurt him. He understands that it is all part of a Divine plan. He was destined to suffer, and the other person was the tool Hashem used to inflict him with that suffering.

Caring for the feelings of a fellow Jew is the hallmark of greatness. Stories abound about the lives of our Torah leaders and the love they manifested for each individual Jew. They felt the pain of every Jew and, likewise, shared their joy. This is because a Torah leader does not live for himself. He lives for *Klal Yisrael*. **Horav Avraham Pam, zl**, was once asked by a man for the *Rosh Yeshivah's* assistance in helping him resolve a serious financial crisis. *Rav Pam* listened intently and then wrote the man a check. The *Rosh Yeshivah's* financial portfolio was far from great, yet he did his utmost to help the man. The man began to weep profusely. Apparently, he wanted more than the *Rosh Yeshivah's* check. He was seeking his help in soliciting his *talmidim*, students, who were financially successful and who could spare some money to help him. *Rav Pam* apologized and said that he could not possibly call upon his students to give money generously – again. He had just turned to them concerning another matter. There is a certain point at which the well goes

dry.

The man understood – accepting the *Rosh Yeshivah*'s explanation. Later that day a *talmid* visited the *Rosh Yeshivah* and noticed him going through a box of index cards – and crying. “*Rebbe*, what is it about the index cards that provokes such weeping?” the *talmid* asked.

“I just turned a man away empty handed because I could not help him,” the *Rosh Yeshivah* said. “He asked me to call my well-to-do *talmidim* and ask them to help. I told him that I could not do it. He understood but, nonetheless, left my house crying. I just went through my index cards to see if there might be someone whom I missed, someone who could help this man. Alas, I could not find anyone.”

“I understand,” the *talmid* said, “but why is the *Rebbe* crying?”

“I am crying because he is crying. How could I not cry, if another Jew is in pain?”

In order to achieve the Torah-mandated level of love for a fellow Jew, one must acquire the *middah*, character trait, of humility. Without humility, one neither can achieve *achdus*, unity, nor can he truly empathize with his fellow. In his *Sefer Yismach Yisrael*, **Horav Yisrael Chortkover, zl**, writes: “One of the most important aims of the *derech ha'chassidus*, the *Chassidic* approach toward serving Hashem, is achieving the goal of true harmony and love among *Yidden*. The *Baal Shem Tov* and the *Mezritcher Maggid* constantly stressed the need for their *talmidim*, disciples, to live together in *achdus*.

In order to achieve a supreme level of *achdus* one must, however, first acquire the trait of humility. As long as a person maintains pride and arrogates himself over others (because he considers himself better/higher than they), he will remain unable to live together with them in harmony.”

In a second *dvar Torah*, the *Rebbe* makes the following observation: “The *mitzvah* of *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*, to ‘Love your fellow Jew as (you love) yourself’ is comprised of two parts. The first half is to ‘love one’s fellow Jew,’ and the second half is to love him ‘as oneself.’ It follows that someone who has an inflated opinion of himself will find it difficult to honor his friends properly. He will never be able to love them (properly), ‘as himself,’ for he is (has) convinced (himself) that he is far superior to them all.”

This is a basic insight whose veracity and simplicity penetrates the core principles of Judaism.