

## **And Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef." But his brothers could not answer him because they were left disconcerted before him. (45:3)**

When Yosef finally revealed himself to his brothers, they were so overwhelmed with shock that they did not respond. We find two statements in the *Midrash* regarding the lack of "dialogue" between Yosef and his brothers. First, Abba Kohen Bardela declares, "Woe is to us from the Day of Rebuke: Woe is to us from the Day of Judgement. Bilaam was the wisest of the pagans, yet he could not withstand the rebuke of his donkey; Yosef was the youngest of the tribes, yet his brothers could not withstand his rebuke. When Hashem comes and rebukes each one (of us) according to what he is, how much moreso (will it be unbearable). Second, Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaryah says, "Woe is to us from the Day of Rebuke. Yosef was of flesh and blood, yet his brothers could not bear his rebuke. Hashem, Who is the Judge and Plaintiff Who sits in judgement on everyone and judges each one, how much moreso will a human of flesh and blood not withstand His rebuke!" What does Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaryah add to Abba Kohen Bardela's statement? Also, why does Abba Kohen Bardela use Bilaam's donkey as an example of unbearable rebuke, while Raabi Eliezer ben Azaryah does not?

*Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita*, explains that the *Midrash* is focusing on two different aspects of *tochachah*, rebuke. Abba Kohen Bardela opines that the goal of rebuke is to bring a person to the point of *bushah*, embarrassment. He achieves this goal through the comparison to Bilaam's donkey. Imagine, that as we are walking down the road we meet an incredible talking animal! We would undoubtedly be surprised. Bilaam did not seem taken aback. He had no problem conversing with the donkey. In fact, he had the audacity to respond to it with *chutzpah*. However, when the donkey, said, "I am the donkey that you have ridden on all this time. You put me in grave danger," Bilaam was silent. Nobody, regardless of his position or his station in life, can face the truth.

The same idea applies to Yosef during his confrontation with his brothers. As long as they did not come face to face with the truth, they were fine. Once the truth was revealed, they could no longer hide; they had to own up to their responsibilities. Before they had been challenged by the truth, they had been able to rationalize their actions. They failed to have *rachmanus* on Yosef when he begged them for mercy. When Yosef exclaimed, "*Ani Yosef*," "I am Yosef", however, the entire situation changed. Yosef's dreams were realized! The same Yosef whom they had determined to be a *rodef*, hunter, who was out to destroy them, stood before them. They had adjudicated that "this" evil person should be put to death. The truth was now clear for all to see: Yosef was really a righteous, virtuous person who had no intention of hurting them in any way. The truth overwhelmed them.

Abba Kohen Bardela contends that revealing the truth is the essence of rebuke. For instance, consider the individual who claims he does not have sufficient funds to give to charity. Yet, he

seems to have money for every materialistic notion in order to gratify himself. Consider, also, the individual who never has time to study *Torah*, but wastes his time on every *narishkeit*, foolish activity, in his path. Rebuke demonstrates the truth and brings about shame, which will hopefully -- in turn -- effect *teshuvah*.

The other aspect of rebuke, noted by Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah, does not focus upon emphasizing the truth. He feels that in order to demonstrate the truth one must himself be an *ish emes*, a man who exemplifies the truth. Unfortunately, this virtue is not as commonplace as it should be. Consequently, he holds the opinion that *tochachah* has one goal: to portray the *halachic* implications of what the person is doing. A man should know that he is judged in accordance with the law by a judge who adjudicates the law - and that there is a law and a judge who will respond to his transgression. No sin will go unnoticed or unpunished.

Yosef told his brothers, "I am Yosef. You seem to be concerned about your father's pain should Binyamin fail to return home. Why were you not concerned about your father's anguish when you sold me? I will not accept any rationale regarding Binyamin's return, as long as I am aware that you did not have this same concern for our father's feelings when you sold me." They could not respond. They were overwhelmed by the logic. If Yosef's brothers were left speechless before their brother, the judge, how much more so will we be stunned when we ultimately face the Supreme Judge - Hashem. The *halachah* will confront us - our guilt will be apparent, and the Judge will mete out the punishment. Do we need more to serve as an effective rebuke?