

But his brothers could not answer him, because they were left disconcerted before him. (45:3)

The *Midrash* quotes Abba Kohen Bardela in what has become one of the standard catchphrases concerning the process of rebuke, remorse and repentance: *Oi la'nu mi'yom ha'din; Oi la'nu mi'yom ha'tochachah*, "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment; woe to us from the Day of Rebuke." While a number of issues regarding this statement beg elucidation, we will focus on a question raised by *Horav Avraham Yoffen, zl*, concerning the sequence of this statement. "Day of Rebuke" follows "Day of Judgment." However, first one rebukes – then one issues judgment. The *Tanna* apparently had a reason for altering the sequence. Why?

Horav David Budnick, zl, explains that we must first place the entire sale of Yosef into perspective. Were the brothers really that jealous of him? Would the fact that Yosef received a multi-colored coat from their father provoke such animosity between them? Was Yosef's talking about them, albeit harmful, a sufficient reason that would stimulate hatred? Obviously, there is much more to it. They felt the slander would distance their father from them, thereby cutting off their link to the Torah of Shem and Eiver. Yosef was studying Torah with his father. Thus, by speaking ill of them, Yosef was, in fact, depriving them of spiritual development. *Klal Yisrael* needed the input of twelve *Shevatim*, Tribes. Yosef was assaulting the basic fabric of *Klal Yisrael*. In other words, it was not about them – personally. It was about the future collective Jewish nation.

On the other hand, Yosef certainly did not want to undermine the future Jewish nation. The last thing he wanted was to distance his brothers from their father. His intentions were pure: to correct what he felt were his brothers' spiritual failings. The future Jewish nation had to be established upon the impeccable *middos*, character traits, of their forebears. Consequently, Yosef felt compelled to act accordingly. Much more was at stake than his public relationship with his brothers.

The brothers took the matter into their own hands, without consulting with anyone other than one another. Their punishment was *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, with their own actions returning to haunt them. For instance, it was Yehudah who asked his father if he "recognized" Yosef's garment covered with blood. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to "recognize" the *chosomes*, seal/signet, wrap and staff that he had left with Tamar after their liaison (Ibid. 38:18,25). Since the brothers relied on their own decisions, they were punished with the subsequent consequences.

This is why Yosef demonstrated to them the error of their ways. After all, it was the brothers who rendered their own *psak din*, legal decision, when they said that **all** of them – along with the individual in whose possession the silver goblet is found – will be slaves (Ibid. 44:16). Yet, when push came to shove, they asked for leniency – *lifnim meshuras ha'din*, to go beyond what was the law – in order to show their compassion for the sake of their aged father.

Let us place this “request” in perspective. The brothers were concerned about their father’s health. The shock of losing Binyamin after the earlier loss of Yosef might be too much for his health. For this, they asked the viceroy’s compassion, and to go beyond the letter of the law. Indeed, when they made their request, they intimated that they were prepared to destroy the land of Egypt if Binyamin was not safely returned. They were prepared to take on the entire world if necessary – anything for their father.

Yosef gave them every opportunity to express their request for compassion. He did this, so that when he revealed himself with the words, “*ani Yosef!*” they would immediately see the hypocrisy of their demand. Until now, they had presented themselves as willing to do anything – even take on the world – and this included their request to the viceroy that he act *lifnim meshuras ha’din*. Yet, when it came to their brother Yosef, they had refused to go beyond the letter of the law. They considered him a *rodef*, pursuer, a crime punishable by death – if necessary. Why did they not show the same compassion for Yosef? Why was leniency of the law not an option for Yosef, as it was for Yaakov?

This is what is meant by, “Woe to us from the Day of Judgment.” Yosef showed them that they had erred in *din*. Their judgment call was wrong, because they did not realize that a taint of hatred towards Yosef played a subtle role in their decision process. Likewise, when each and every one of us stands before the Heavenly Tribunal, we will see that we had been wrong in interpreting the law. Not only will we be rebuked but we will be shown that our concept of the *din* was wrong. This is why *din* precedes *tochachah*, why we need rebuke. The mere fact that we thought we had been acting appropriately – when, in fact, we were totally wrong – is justifiable reason for *tochachah*.