

## **And Yosef said to his brothers, “I am Yosef, is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, because they were left disconcerted before him. (45:3)**

Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, and, in the space of a few moments, G-d's master plan became evident to all. All of the questions, pain and challenges that had transpired and that they had experienced became clear to them. Twenty-two years of ambiguity had been lifted from their eyes. Yosef asked, “Is my father still alive?” This question begs elucidation. How many times must they repeat to him that their elderly father was still alive and living at home? The *Kli Yakar* explains that Yosef thought that they might have mentioned an elderly father who was inexorably attached to Binyamin, in order to garner Yosef's compassion. Perhaps he might show that he had a heart and not compel them to bring Binyamin, out of respect and compassion for their elderly father. Thus, he repeated his question in order to confirm his father's living status.

In an alternative exposition, *Kli Yakar* goes to the crux of their lapse in judgment in committing the deed of selling Yosef. Yosef asked, “Is my father still alive?” He is my father – not yours, because you did not seem to take into consideration your father's feelings when you decided to sell me! You acted as if he were not your father – but mine!” We now understand, says the *Kli Yakar*, why they cringed in his presence. His rebuke was quite powerful and provides a lesson for us all. How often do we act in a manner that shows sensitivity to our personal needs without thinking twice about its effect on others? To show consideration for others is the true barometer of one's sensitivity. One demonstrates his true inner strength of character during moments of stress or challenge. On the one hand, despite all that had transpired, in the moment of great emotional stress, Yosef was considerate of his brothers' feelings. To be alone with no one else present as he revealed his true identity to them took great courage. He did not want them to be shamed in public. Nonetheless, he rebuked them when he asked, “Is my father alive?” thus implying that he is mine – not yours. Children do not act in such a manner to parents.

*Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, relates a story which demonstrates human consideration at its zenith. The story also teaches us that greatness in Torah is accompanied by exemplary *middos tovos*, character refinement. A Jew knocked on the apartment door of *Horav David Povarsky, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Ponevezh*, with an important *shailah*, *halachic* query. The *Rosh Yeshivah* looked up from his *Gemorah* and listened to the man. Apparently, in an hour he was about to celebrate the *Bris Milah* and naming of his son. He and his wife were in disagreement concerning what name to give the child. Until that very day they had been in agreement that their little boy would be named Yehonasan. That morning, his wife changed her mind, because they had a neighbor who had lost a young boy whose name was Yehonasan. As a result, she absolutely refused to give her son that name.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* replied, “Do not give the name Yehonasan.” He proceeded to return to his learning as if the man were not there.

The father/husband was not easily deterred. Not wanting to disturb the *Rosh Yeshivah* again, he waited patiently until the *Rosh Yeshivah* concluded learning. Then, he asked, “*Rebbe*, what is the reason that we cannot use the name Yehonasan? We do not believe in superstition. My son having a similar name to the deceased child is not a bad omen.”

*Rav Povarsky* looked up at the man and said, “My decision had nothing to do with fear for the health of your son. What concerned me is that in a few years, when your son grows up and runs around playing in the neighborhood, the mother of the deceased child will hear you calling, ‘Yehonasan, Yehonasan,’ and this will cause her grief. It will bring back painful memories. This is why I am against giving this name to your son.”

This is empathy. Understanding someone else’s pain and thinking about how something that you do in some way infringes on another person, causing them to grieve. It may have nothing to do with you – and you may be well within your rights – but if you care enough to feel someone else’s grief, you will refrain from executing your carefully laid plans.

We can derive a powerful lesson from this concept. Imagine that a young father or mother have planned to name their child after a family member or friend with whom they had been close. Now it comes to their attention that this name, albeit in perfect innocence with absolutely no harm intended, might one day cause pain to another person. Suddenly, all the plans must change. Why? Because, as Jews, we not only think – but we also are mandated to see – outside of the box, with the “box” being ourselves. Any action on my part that might infringe upon another person’s emotions should be reconsidered and examined from all aspects. We should ask ourselves, “What if the shoe were on the other foot?” It is not just about being “nice,” “decent,” “humane” – it is about being Jewish. We are not like others. We have – and live by – the Torah.

asdfghjkl