

He took Shimon from them and imprisoned him before their eyes. (42:24)

Chazal (Midrash Tanchuma, 4) teach that after Yosef said that one of the group would be held hostage until Binyamin was brought to Egypt, he selected Shimon to be that family “representative.” The reason for this choice was twofold. First, it was Shimon who had initiated the process of the sale of Yosef, when he called out, “Look, that dreamer is coming!” Later, it was Shimon who threw Yosef into the pit. An alternative explanation is that Yosef was acutely aware that Shimon and Levi did not comprise a good *shidduch*, match. He feared that the two would conspire to kill him. Their companionship had led to the attack on Shechem, which had decimated an entire city. Yosef was not taking any chances. It was best that they be separated from one another.

The *Midrash* continues that Shimon reacted bitterly to his selection. Shimon turned to his brothers, who apparently agreed to “allow” him to remain in Egypt until they returned. He addressed them, “You are doing to me what you did to Yosef.” They replied, “What should we do – allow our families to starve?” In other words, they knew someone had to remain hostage while they returned with the provisions they had purchased. Shimon suspected them of turning on him as they had (all) turned on Yosef. (When the tables are turned, people view things from a different perspective.) Shimon apparently had some difficulty with this arrangement. They described their predicament as being between a “rock and a hard place.” Someone had to remain, or all of their families would suffer. Unfortunately, it had to be Shimon.

How did their response allay Shimon? He was about to be incarcerated in an Egyptian prison, while his brothers left to go home to their families. What made Shimon acquiesce? *Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl*, explains that it was not what the brothers replied, but how they replied, that calmed Shimon. He could sense their sincerity. They spoke from their hearts with great empathy for his dismal situation, but what were they to do? They could not neglect their wives and children, allowing them to starve to death. Their families were innocent of any wrongdoing. They meant him no harm. Shimon believed his brothers because they were sincere, and it came through. When words emanate from the heart, they will enter into the hearts of the people to whom one is speaking.

Likewise, *Chazal (Midrash Rabbah 93:9)* teach that when Yehudah came forward to plead the brothers’ case before Yosef, his words were accepted in the manner in which they were rendered – with sincerity. “Yehudah appeased Yosef, he appeased his brothers, and he appeased Binyamin.” Yosef saw that Yehudah was risking his life for Binyamin, the other son of Rachel *Imeinu* (Yosef’s mother). His brothers saw that he was standing up for them. Binyamin saw that just as Yehudah was willing to fight for him, he must have done the same earlier for Yosef, his brother. The question is obvious: How did the brothers know that Yehudah was doing all of this for them? Perhaps he just did not want to be excommunicated from “both worlds”: this World; and the

World-to-Come? He promised Yaakov Avinu, “I guarantee Binyamin’s safe return, or else I will be a sinner to you all my days,” which is interpreted to mean in “both worlds.”

Ostensibly, the brothers had the opportunity to recognize that Yehudah was “for real,” that he spoke sincerely from his heart. Everything that he was doing was purely for the sake of Binyamin. He was Leah *Imeinu*’s son; yet, he fought for Rachel’s son. This left a concrete, moving impression.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that sincerity is the key to successful communication. We have a great and dire need for knowledgeable, G-d-fearing, unpretentious educators to reach out to the multitudes of Jews who – due to gross ignorance and apathy – have assimilated into the world society, which is tainted with moral profligacy and ethical perversion. We have a moral and religious imperative to reach out and bring them back to a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. If the teacher/rebbe/outreach professional lacks sincerity – ie, has chosen this vocation because it gives him a feeling of superiority, benevolence, righteousness, etc. which are all due to a personal lack of security – whatever success he achieves will be short-lived. People respond to ingenuousness. They are able to distinguish one who is sincere from one who is pretentious. One should feel that he is on a mission for Hashem, sent to bring his children home.

Regardless of one’s personal spiritual eminence, if there is an ethical, moral deficiency in his attitude – even if it is only subconscious – it will affect his ability to communicate effectively and to successfully inspire his subjects. The *Rosh Yeshivah* substantiates this observation from what happened to Zechariah ben Yehoyadah, who was a *Navi*, prophet, *Kohen*, son-in-law of the king. When he gave *mussar*, was compelled to rebuke the people for their clinging to idols, however, he was killed. What did he do wrong? Where did he go wrong? The *Navi* (*Divrei Hayamim II*, 24:20) writes, *Vayaamod meial l'am*, “And he stood above the nation.” The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Koheles* 10:4) explains that he felt superior to the people, due to his lineage and spiritual stature. So? How did they know? Is this a reason to murder him? It is one thing not to accept rebuke, it is totally another to kill the messenger who is conveying Hashem’s word.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the people sensed a minute tinge of personal arrogance. In their eyes, his rebuke lacked full sincerity. As a result, they viewed his rebuke as being superciliously indulgent, condescending to the people in a manner that came across to them as if it were inappropriate for someone as dignified as he was to speak to them. While this was categorically false, it was a perception that festered in the guilty minds of the people. Hence, their brutal reaction. People can feel when one speaks from the heart. They can sense the truth, and they respond in turn.