

“I am Yosef, your brother, it is me, whom you sold into Egypt.” (45:4)

Abba Kohen Bardela says, “Woe is to us from the *Yom HaDin*, Day of Judgment; woe is to us from the *Yom HaTochacha*, Day of Rebuke. Yosef, who was the smallest (youngest) of the tribes, and (when he rebuked his brothers) they were unable to withstand his rebuke. Similarly, what will we say/do when Hashem rebukes each and every one of us in accordance with what he is (or could have been)?” Many commentators have commented on this well-known *Midrash* throughout the millennia as the paradigm of *tochachah*, rebuke. After all, what did Yosef actually say to them? Two words: *Ani Yosef!* “I am Yosef!” This was sufficient rebuke for the brothers, enough for them to realize that they had committed a grave error. Yosef was not the man they had made him out to be. Standing before them was the *baal ha’chalomos*, the ne’er-do-well dreamer, whom they had ruled deserved to die for his evil machinations against them. Now they saw and, with two words, it all became crystal clear: they had made a terrible mistake. They just realized that they had been living a lie, believing that they had been justified in their actions against their younger brother, only to be rudely awakened from their false reverie to the stark reality that they had been wrong.

One day, the unavoidable meeting with Hashem will occur. He will utter two words: *Ani Hashem*, “I am G-d.” How did you live an entire life of falsehood? How did you frivolously waste away your time and strengths, the numerous gifts that I gave you? We will stand there dumbstruck, mute, with nothing to say. We will have no excuses, because the time for prevarication will be over. We are before Hashem, Who is the essence of truth. All our excuses, rationales and lies – gone.

Yosef added, “that you sold me.” I am the Yosef whom you sold. He could have simply said, “I am Yosef.” Why did he add whom you sold? Even if they had not sold him, nonetheless, what happened to him was an unpardonable injustice, a tragedy of epic proportion. What difference does it make whether they sold him or gave him away? *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, explains that this was part of Yosef’s rebuke. “For what did you sell me? For a pair of shoes? Is that all a human being is worth? How could you sell me for such a paltry reimbursement?” Likewise, when the day of reckoning arrives, Hashem will ask us: “For what did you exchange the life of the spirit? What was so valuable that you felt it prudent to renege the Torah for it? What did you do with the time allotted for *davening*; with the time that should have been spent learning Torah? How did you spend it? For what did you exchange the spiritual opportunities that I gave you?” Imagine, if Yosef’s holy brothers were left speechless, what will we “say” when Hashem asks us these questions?

We make the mistake of exchanging spirituality for the material and physical, thinking that it is an equal trade, ignoring the simple fact that nothing physical endures. Only the spiritual prevails over time. A father who had a good life lay on his deathbed. Shortly before he took his last breath, he handed his eldest son an envelope: “This is my will, my last testament to you, which I would like you to open prior to my funeral.” He passed away a few hours later. Word spread throughout the community. The deceased was known as a benevolent, generous man who viewed his fortune as

nothing more than a Heavenly deposit to be used to help others. Material assets are not here for one to be wed to them. They are here to serve a Divine purpose.

The family convened in the side room off the main chapel to open and read the contents of the envelope, their father's last epistle to his family. They anxiously wanted to hear his message. The son opened up the large envelope only to discover within it two smaller envelopes. One envelope was marked: "to be opened after the *shivah*," seven-day period of bereavement. The other envelope had a note in it: "I ask that you bury me in my socks. Totty." A strange request which actually was not consistent with *halachah*. Thus, the son decided that he must first confer with the *rabbanim*. A Jew is buried in *tachrichim*, shrouds. He does not pick out his burial clothes.

The *rabbanim* apologized, but they could not permit the family to follow the wishes of the deceased. The *halachah* was straightforward concerning the garments in which a deceased is to be buried. Socks are definitely not among the permitted items. Indeed, at the funeral, each *rav*, after singing the praises of the deceased, apologized for not fulfilling his last wish. Following the funeral and burial, the family observed the seven bereavement days. On the last day, following the Morning Prayer service, they ended the *shivah* and then proceeded to their late father's study for the reading of the second envelope. After what was contained in the first letter, they truly wondered what the second letter would say. In the back of their minds was their father's division of assets. Who was receiving what held a captivating position in everyone's mind. While they were all equal as siblings, people often have novel interpretations concerning the term equal – especially when it applies to one's inheritance. In addition, everyone knew that the deceased was a charitable man. As such, everyone who had even an "imagined" organization had his call in for a contribution. Sad, but this is reality.

The eldest son opened the envelope and removed a note: "My dear children. By now, you have confronted the grim reality that nothing material in this world endures. When they say, 'You cannot take it with you,' they are correct. When a person leaves this world, he cannot even take his socks along with him! With this in mind, I hope that you will continue to focus your life on matters of the spirit, and, thus, use the material assets that I bequeath to you for the performance of *mitzvos* and good deeds. Nothing in this world leaves with you, only *mitzvos* and good deeds. This is how I encourage you to spend your newly acquired wealth."