

“Fear not, for am I instead of G-d? Although you intended the harm, G-d intended it for good. (50:19,20)

In the last few *parshiyos*, we have been reading about Yaakov *Avinu's* sons, the *Shivtei Kah*, Twelve Tribes of *Klal Yisrael*, the closest link to our Patriarchs from whom our Nation descends. We refer to them by name and relate their activities; their sale of Yosef, followed by their encounter with the viceroy of Egypt, aka, Yosef; their ensuing remorse over their lack of empathy with his pain; their being supported by Yosef in Egypt; and, finally, their apology and request for absolution for their misdeed. Reading all this, we might lose sight of the greatness of these individuals. They were no simple human beings; they were refined to the level of Heavenly Angels in the guise of men. Their “failings” were relative to their extreme level of spirituality. Their successes were indicative of their spiritual edification. Clearly, they were not typical human beings.

When Yaakov *Avinu* was *niftar*, passed away, the brothers noted that Yosef's relationship with them had been altered. The camaraderie that seemed to prevail during Yaakov's life suddenly came to an end. The brothers worried that the time of reckoning had arrived, since their father was no longer alive to protect them. The brothers attempted to assuage the feelings they perceived Yosef was holding against them. *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* teaches that the brothers sent the sons of Bilhah to speak with Yosef. During the debacle that preceded the controversy and eventual sale of Yosef, he had been closest with them. Since they were the sons of a co-wife who had originally been a maidservant, Yosef was able to identify with them. They were all more or less in the same boat. *Bnei Bilhah* presented to Yosef, on behalf of all the brothers, their sincere apologies for what had occurred years earlier. They even claimed that their saintly father had instructed them to speak with Yosef and that Yosef should acquiesce and absolve them.

Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah* 100:8), quoted by *Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*, identify Yosef's specific behavior that indicated a change in attitude towards them: When their father was alive, Yosef ate his meals with his brothers. Following Yaakov's passing, Yosef no longer invited them for dinner. Apparently, out of respect for Yaakov, he had eaten with them. That reason no longer applied. This concerned them.

Yosef replied to their unasked query: “You thought that I was angry and preparing to take revenge. It could not be further from the truth. When Father was alive, he had me sit at the head of the table, superseding Reuven, the first born, and Yehudah, the monarch. I acquiesced out of profound respect to our father. Now, I just cannot do it. I will not sit at the head of the table when Reuven and Yehudah sit at regular places. It is not my place to lord over my brothers. On the other hand, as viceroy of Egypt, it would be disgraceful for me not to sit at the head of the table. To circumvent the problem, I do not eat together with you. If I cannot do it respectfully, I will not do it.”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* views this *Chazal* as a characterization of the incredible spiritual/moral character of Yosef *HaTzaddik*. For seventeen years, at the behest of his father, Yosef sat at the

head of the table. We become complacent creatures of habit after a few weeks. Yosef did this for seventeen years! Yet, the moment his father passed, he refused to return to the head of the table. It belonged to Reuven or Yehudah. No one but Yosef would question his place at the head of the table. It was not right. His brothers superseded him. Reuven was the firstborn, a position which elicited respect. Yehudah was royalty, and, as a monarch, he was obligated to sit at the head of the table. Only one solution could resolve this problem. He would not join them for the meal.

As the *Rosh Yeshivah* asks: Can we imagine what it means to sit in an exalted place/position for seventeen years and immediately rescind it? Just like that? These, the *Rosh Yeshivah* posits, are not the actions of a human being. These are the actions, the sensitivity, of a *malach*, angel. We now have a glimpse into the world of the *Shivtei Kah*.