

“His brothers saw that it was he whom their father loved most of all his brothers, and so they hated him; and they could not speak to him peaceably.” (37:4)

How often do we clash with someone and matters get out of hand to the point that it blossoms into a full-blown dispute? Suddenly, friends are not speaking to one another, and enmity creeps in. The first step towards any form of resolution is a meeting: sit down at the table, face each other and talk it out. Air out your differences and, before long, it becomes apparent that it really is not an important conflict. As long as people are willing to meet and talk it out, to attempt to solve their problems, to seek a reconciliation – there is hope. When the two sides refuse to speak to each other; or when a meeting is convened and the irrational reigns, ending the meeting before any conversation has commenced, then there is no hope for a resolution to their differences. When people refuse to listen, rationality cannot prevail.

Perhaps a solution could have been reached concerning the brothers' "hatred" toward Yosef, but if they "could not speak to him peaceably," how could this conciliation ever be achieved? They harbored their enmity because they could not sit down to talk it out; they would not listen to Yosef's explanation of the way he acted. It is then no wonder that their enmity led to such tragic consequences.

We must understand that the genesis of the brothers' dispute with Yosef was not petty jealousy. It was a question in *Halachah*: Was Yosef a *rodef*, pursuer, bent on destroying their lives – or not? If this was the case, then they had justifiable cause to defend themselves from his treachery. Apparently, the brothers felt that Yosef was a pursuer with whom they had to cope, but what was Yosef thinking? What motivated his actions? Did he not understand the implications of his dreams? Was he not concerned with the pain and anguish he was causing his brothers?

The *Gaon m'Vilna* explains that Yosef was well aware of the message he was transmitting. Yet, he knew that his dreams were prophecies, and as a *Navi*, prophet, it behooved him to reveal his message to those for whom it was intended.

Horav Avrohom Pam, z.l., cited in “*The Pleasant Way*,” focuses on an important aspect of the *rodef/nirdaf* (pursuer/pursued) issue. Shlomo *HaMelech* says in *Kohes* 3:15, *V’HaElokim yevakesh es nirdaf*, “God always seeks the pursued.” Why does Shlomo *HaMelech* use the word *yevakesh*, seek, as opposed to, *matzil*, save? Hashem saves the pursued from his pursuer. *Rav Pam* explains that at times it is difficult to distinguish between the *rodef* and the *nirdaf*. The one who appears to us to be a *nirdaf* might actually be the pursuer. He just knows how to conceal it better. Only Hashem *Yisborach*, Who looks into the deep recesses of the hearts and minds of men, can seek out and discern who really is the *nirdaf* in order to protect him from the hands of his pursuer.

In some situations in life people become involved in bitter disputes over questions that could, and should, easily be resolved in *Halachah*. In many of these cases, the dispute is the product of an overactive ego, reflecting an individual who is deeply insecure and filled with misgivings. Without an objective examination of the *Halachah*, one cannot possibly render a decision that coincides with *Daas Torah*, the wisdom that is derived from the Torah, which forms the basis for the only possible valid decision.

Rav Pam cites the *Chazon Ish* who demonstrates for us how easy it is to err and confuse the *rodef* with the *nirdaf*. He cites the following responsa quoted in the *Pischei Teshuvah*. A certain school had a group of *melamdim*, Torah teachers, who – more or less – had the “franchise” for teaching the children in town. When a new group of *melamdim* moved to town and opened up a school, they succeeded in attracting many students to their school. One can imagine the dispute that ensued as a result of the competition. One would think the first group of teachers would be happy that more Torah was being taught. Only the small-minded and diffident would prevent the establishment of another avenue for Torah dissemination. These people wanted to make sure that only they had license to teach Torah in this community.

The first group of *melamdim* would not budge, while the new group of *melamdim* claimed that they were elevating the standard of *Torah chinuch*, education, in their town. The old *melamdim* claimed that the new *melamdim* were guilty of *redifah*, pursuing, and thus had no right to infringe on the turf of the original school. “Presumably” everyone was arguing *I’shem Shomayim*, “for the sake of Heaven.” The *p’sak*, *halachic* rendering, supported the new group. They were raising the level of *Torah chinuch* in their community. Therefore, they had every reason to exist. They were not the *rodfim*. In fact, it was the original *melamdim* who should be condemned for their selfishness and shortsightedness. They were stunting the growth of Torah education in their community.

This confusion between *rodef* and *nirdaf*, attacker and victim, occurred between Yosef and his brothers. While the brothers were certain that they were the victims, it was only twenty-two years later, when Yosef’s dreams were fulfilled, that the brothers finally confronted the truth: they were the *rodfim*.