

"And Yosef said unto his brothers, 'I am Yosef'.... and his brothers could not answer him for they were frightened before him." (45:3)

Rashi says that the fear experienced by the brothers was precipitated by the intense shame that they felt. The *Yalkut Shimoni* cites *R' Shimon ben Elazar* who says, "Woe is to us from the *Yom Ha'Din*, Day of Judgment. Woe is to us from the *Yom Ha'Tochachah*, Day of Rebuke. Yosef was the youngest of the tribes. Yet, the brothers could not face up to his rebuke. How much more so when Hashem will come and rebuke each and every one according to his deeds."

This *Chazal* has long been applied in many instances as the standard for *Tochachah*, rebuke, and *teshuvah*, repentance. There seems, however, to be an inconsistency in the sequence of the text. Why is *din*, judgment, mentioned prior to *tochachah*, rebuke? One would think that rebuke precedes judgment, for one can be punished only after he has been informed of his wrongdoing.

Horav Rafael Boruch Toledano, z.l., offers the following interpretation of this *Chazal*. The classic case of rebuke in *Tanach* is when *Nasan Ha'Navi* reproved *Dovid Ha'Melech* concerning his relationship with *Bas Sheva*. According to the narrative, *Nasan* came before *David* with what was really a hypothetical problem. There were two brothers, one who was wealthy and the other who was poor. The poor brother had only one lamb, which was taken by the wealthy brother. The *navi* elaborated on the wealthy brother's selfishness to the point that *David* became very angry and passed judgment against him. It was only after *David Ha'Melech* had issued his verdict against the wealthy brother that *Nasan* told *David*, "You are that man!" The rebuke followed the judgment.

This is the way of Providence. As every human being is brought before the Creator every incident, every deed and action, and every thought, is presented to the person. He is asked for a verdict concerning this iniquity -- his verdict for his own error. It is only after he has expressed his opinion that the name of the offender is revealed -- himself! He is not reproved after the deed; he is reproved after he has delivered the verdict. This is the meaning of rebuke following judgment. When one issues his own opinion regarding an incident, he can no longer justify his behavior. All his excuses lose validity.

This is what took place during *Yosef's* encounter with his brothers. For years, they had justified every one of their actions concerning the sale of *Yosef*. He was the *rodef*, hunter, in pursuit of their lives and spiritual position as the *shevatim*, tribes. They had made a decision, in which they wholeheartedly believed, and carried out the sentence with certitude. In no way could *Yosef* be the individual to whom they were talking right now, the viceroy of Egypt. They were prepared to destroy the entire land of Egypt. The only sin for which they felt remorse was the removal of the silver goblet. For this "crime" they were prepared to issue the verdict of "*with whomsoever it be found of your servant, let him die, and we will also be slaves.*" They felt there was no other deed for which they could be held liable. They perceived themselves to be blameless.

Suddenly, Yosef issued forth three words, *ofhjt ;xuh hbt*, "I am Yosef your brother." (45:4) Immediately, their whole world disintegrated. These few words corresponded with Nasan *Ha'Navi's* incrimination of Dovid *Ha'Melech*, when he said, "You are the man." The brothers had already issued the verdict. Now they must be ready to accept the reproof by reexamining all of their actions regarding Yosef. There was no longer room for rationalization; no arguments could be presented on their behalf. They were wrong, and they must face the reality of their errors.

The realization that those we have found guilty, the one whose actions we have castigated, are none other than ourselves is a most humbling experience. It literally paralyzes one to the point that he loses his ability to express himself. "And his brothers could not answer him, for they were frightened of his presence." Yosef's presence itself was the rebuke. They were left speechless, for they had already issued the verdict against themselves.