

But his brothers could not answer him, because they were left disconcerted before him. (45:3)

It had become clear to the brothers. The ambiguities with which they had lived for the last twenty-two years were all resolved, as everything that had transpired fell into place.

Likewise, explains the *Chafetz Chaim*, when our exile is finally concluded and Hashem lifts the veil from our eyes, we will see clearly how the events of history all fit together. What up until now seemed to be an inexplicable puzzle will be revealed as a Divine master plan.

In the *Midrash Rabbah*, a quotation from Abba Kohen Bardela has set the standard for understanding the concept of *mussar/tochachah*, ethical guidance and rebuke, throughout the generations: "Woe is to us from the Day of Judgment; woe is to us from the Day of Rebuke. Yosef was the youngest of the brothers, yet the other brothers could not respond to his rebuke. If so, what will we say when Hashem will rebuke each and every one of us according to what he is?" This statement begs elucidation. First, where do we find Yosef offering rebuke to his brothers? He said: "I am Yosef!" and that is it. He issued no rebuke. Second, what kind of rebuke can one expect in the World to Come? By the time we get there, rebuke is a foregone conclusion. It is all over. We no longer have the possibility for *teshuvah*, repentance and remorse, to correct our iniquity. *Olam Habba* is a place for *s'char v'onesh*, reward and punishment. A person receives either one or the other. It is too late for *teshuvah*.

Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, posits that, actually, one question answers the other. We wondered, when did Yosef rebuke them? The answer is that the mere fact that he did **not** articulate his reproof is in itself the greatest and most compelling rebuke. His brothers had built a solid foundation of complaint against Yosef: He was a slanderer who was out to destroy them. They painted a picture of Yosef that was contemptible. This is not unusual. When we have issues with someone, we justify our actions towards him by presenting him in the most iniquitous manner. Yosef, however, said nothing. He did not rebuke; he did not even censure. He treated his brothers royally, respectfully, decently. Something was wrong. This was not the "Yosef" that they had previously conjured up in their minds. Can there be a greater rebuke than discovering that the premises upon which they had built their entire perspective of, and relationship with Yosef were wrong? The brothers expected castigation, rebuke. Instead, they received love and friendship. This was the noblest form of rebuke.

Rashi (Ibid.) alludes to this idea when he explains the reason for the brothers' disconcertion: *mipnei ha'bushah*, "because of the shame." Their fear of Yosef was not a physical thing – they did not fear for their lives. Rather, it was the humiliation of what they did to Yosef that disconcerted them. Why does the Torah use the word *nivhalu* which implies fear, if, in fact, it was embarrassment? Veritably, it was fear. It was the fear of having to confront face-to-face the Yosef they thought they knew in light of the real Yosef who was presently standing before them. When

one realizes the error of his ways, when he sees the depth of a life's mistakes, he becomes fearful.

The brothers were older than Yosef. He was the *ben zekunim*, the child born late in Yaakov *Avinu's* life. Yet, when they saw his profound piety, his all-encompassing virtue, his *mentchlichkeit* – they were speechless with shame and with fear. What will **we** say when we come “face-to-face” with the Heavenly Tribunal? Imagine our shame and fear at that moment of truth.