

Indeed, we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us, and we paid no heed. (42:21)

Twenty-two years had passed from that fateful day on which the brothers had sold Yosef as a slave. During this period, they no doubt saw their father constantly in a state of mourning over the loss of his son, lamenting over what had probably happened to him. What was worse, he did not know whether/how he had died. Yaakov *Avinu* could not get closure to the tragedy of his son's disappearance. The brothers saw this daily – for twenty-one years, but they were not moved. Never once did they even question the veracity of their deed. Had they done the right thing? Had they acted appropriately? Nothing. Never once did they question themselves. Yosef was a *rodef*, pursuer, who sought to deprive them of their rightful share in *Olam Habba*, World-to-Come.

Furthermore, from the time of the *mechiras Yosef*, sale of Yosef, twenty-two *Yom Kippurs* had passed. Clearly, the brothers had confessed whatever wrongdoing for which they felt guilt. The sale of Yosef was not one of the subjects of their confession. At no time during the past twenty-two years, had the brothers experienced pangs of guilt. Yet now, standing in front of the Egyptian viceroy, they manifested a complete transformation. After being suspected of spying and being publicly ridiculed and maligned, their attitude began to change. Now, they faced the *tzaros*, troubles, which they understood to be punishment for their behavior twenty-two years earlier. What happened? Why did they make an about face?

Now, they were suffering. Now, they were the ones who were feeling the pain. The tables had turned, and they began to ask themselves – “Why is this happening?” The brothers were holy men who followed a strict *halachic* script. They had decided, based upon *halachic* dialectic and analysis, that Yosef was a *rodef*; as such, his punishment should be final. They believed in what they were doing. It was not petty jealousy, as one who is uninitiated might contend. Absolutely not. They were certain in their application of *Halachah* – until they began to feel the pain. Knowing that nothing happens in a vacuum, they questioned themselves, “Could we have been wrong – in some minute way?” Why, all of a sudden, now, after twenty-two years? Now it hurt them. They were feeling pain. It must be a Divine message that in some way they were off the mark.