

Thoughts of Judgement & Repentance; Madoff's Apology **"Oy Lanu Miyom Hatochacha" Woe To Us on the Day of Rebuke!** by Baruch C. Cohen, Esq.

As I was reading the words of Mr. Madoff's apology, reflecting on every aspect of this tragedy, I wondered what was going on behind the scenes, beneath the surface, beyond the words, through his mind during this horrifying moment of truth? I began to think, what if, it was me standing there before the victims, before the court, before the media. I would be horrified, mortified and humiliated beyond words.

At first, I dismissed the notion (of what if that was me) because thank God, I'm not in his shoes accused of such a heinous crime. But I still felt that there was a personal lesson for me to be learned from this tragic scene. Then it occurred to me, that one day, after I die, my soul will ascend to the Heavenly Tribunal where I will be judged - before the souls of everyone I know and care about. The accusing angels will prosecute me for sinning and place my sins on one side of the Heavenly Scale and the defending angels will then speak of my good deeds and place them on the other side of the Scale. Where the scale weighs determines my fate: in Hell or in Paradise. As Mr. Madoff apologized, I asked myself: What will I say in response to my accusing angels when I will be judged in the Heavenly Court for my sins after I die? What will I say before God? Will the words "I'm sorry" cut it? I would be horrified, mortified and humiliated beyond words.

I could not help but relate to a fascinating Midrash on a passage of the Torah, when our forefather Joseph revealed to his brothers who sold him to slavery, that he is their long-lost brother Joseph. The Torah in Bereishis / Genesis 45:3: records that Joseph told his brothers: "I am Joseph" ... And his brothers could not answer him for they were in shock and overwhelmed by him.

The Midrash Yalkut Shmoni states that Rabbi Shimon Son of Elazar said: "Woe to Us on the Day of Judgement, Woe to Us on the Day of Rebuke (Oy Lanu Miyom Hatochacha) for Joseph, though he was the youngest of the brothers, rebuked them, and they could not answer him. Certainly this will be the case on the day that the Holy One will rebuke each person in accordance with his deeds."

The reference in the Midrash to Joseph's 'rebuke' is puzzling. While the verse tells of the shock of the brothers at the revelation that this was Joseph, it does not, however, mention any rebuke at all. Joseph merely said the three words: "I am Joseph." Where is the rebuke that the Midrash refers to?

This Midrash therefore implies that rebuke in essence is not the verbal castigation that we have come to see. Rather, it is making a person aware of the fact that he erred. When a person realizes that he has lived his life with a totally mistaken perspective, then rebuke has accomplished its purpose.

According to Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the former Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah, no greater rebuke than Joseph's can be imagined. The very act of selling Joseph into slavery became the stepping stone to Joseph's ascension to royalty. The very actions perpetrated in order to prevent the fulfillment of his dreams became the means of their realization. Joseph's simple declaration: "I am Joseph" was absolute proof that he was not a dreamer, as they had accused him of being, but rather a prophet of God conveying the divine word. It was the shock of this rebuke in the face of their strong convictions that so overwhelmed the brothers and left them speechless.

Joseph's brothers justified their cruelty to him by the belief that he was a dreamer. When the presumption was refuted, the act of selling Joseph became a wrong and sinful act. Thus the feelings of shame and contrition that Joseph's brothers experienced when he uttered the few words: "I am Joseph your brother."

When Rabbi Shimon son of Elazar pondered this he exclaimed: “Woe to Us on the Day of Rebuke.” If the youngest of the brothers can cause such shame and agony to his brothers by simply revealing the truth, how great will our agony when we will be shown by the Holy One how our lives were so filled with mistakes.

It is not only because we have a distorted perspective per se that we will be so severely embarrassed in the World-to-Come. It is also the fact that we behaved and acted based on our erroneous beliefs and viewpoints. When we realize that our perspectives were wrong, it automatically means that the entire chain of our deeds and actions was one continuous error.

Respectfully,

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