

NOT JUST A NUTSHELL

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"And Yehudah approached him..." The Torah narrates the dramatic climax of the episode with Yosef and his brothers. Yosef deliberately frames his youngest brother Binyomin, "catching him" with his "stolen" silver goblet. "The one who was found with the cup will be my slave, and the rest of you will go up to your father in peace."

We know from the previous parsha that Yehudah took full responsibility to bring Binyomin back from Egypt alive and well. It was up to Yehudah to appeal for his release from Yosef, who was disguised. "Please, my master, we only came down here to begin with to buy food...and my master asked us if we had a father or a brother...and you said to your servants 'bring him (your brother) down to me so that I may see him. And we said to my master 'the young man is not able to leave his father...' And you told us 'if you don't bring your brother you may not see me again.' And now how can I go back up to my father without the young man (Binyomin) with us? Their souls are very closely bound to one another." Yehudah then suggested that he remain as a slave in Binyomin's place, "lest I see the evil that will befall my father." At that point Yosef was no longer able to contain his emotions, so he sent everyone out besides his brothers, and he began to cry, and he said "I am Yosef " and he revealed himself to his brothers.

The S'fas Emes, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, explains that this episode between Yehudah and Yosef is an analogy to a deeper thought, and its message is applicable to us at all times as well.

The S'fas Emes explains that the name Yehudah comes from the Hebrew root word which means to thank or acknowledge. When Yehudah was born, the fourth child to Leah, she acknowledged G-d's kindness to her in giving her this child, and she memorialized her feelings in his name. The name of a person is his essence. Yehudah's essence is acknowledgement to G-d for everything - great or small, and the recognition of G-d's involvement in all things. Yosef - because his identity was hidden from his brothers - represents the hidden quality - the G-dliness within everything.

The deeper meaning of the analogy: "And Yehudah approached him." That means to say "Yehudah" employing his trait of acknowledgement and recognition that G-d was behind this event which was unfolding - "approached him." When one views life with the uncompromising perspective that G-d is involved in everything (Yehudah), the end result is that the hidden hand of G-d will ultimately reveal itself (Yosef revealing himself).

We see that there is a way to break down barriers and to see a deeper truth contained within

everything. Yehudah accomplished this with his attitude and approach to Yosef. I dare say that in our daily interaction with people the same is true.

A teacher I know once had a student whose family circumstances were somewhat complicated. She did not live with her biological parents. She was an intelligent girl, but she was not confident about her own abilities. Socially, things were not going very smoothly for her either. Her teacher was able to turn her around and make her a happier, more confident student in the following way. She would genuinely praise her saying that she was a source of pleasure for her. "You give me so much nachas (pleasure)." From the moment she began doing that, the child began putting in effort to maintain the perception which the teacher had created, and the relationship between student and teacher was very warm. The girl's feeling that her teacher valued her so much even positively affected the way she carried herself and conducted her everyday affairs. I believe that this teacher succeeded in breaking down the barriers in this child, and tapped the potential greatness latent in her. She contributed to the good of this child in a very profound way, and I know that it lasted for many subsequent years.

When we unconditionally convey to a person that they are someone very special, we can break down the barriers and what will be revealed to us will exceed our expectations. This attitude never fails on some level -- but only on the condition that it be genuine.

From the wise words of the Sfas Emes, we understand that there is always more to life than meets the eye. What we see at first glance is like a shell, and we can never benefit from what is contained under the shell if we think it is empty. Just as Yehudah was able to uncover the depth of his situation, so too should we endeavor to see beyond that which meets the eye.

Good Shabbos!

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