

WE CANNOT HIDE

by Rabbi Label Lam

We Can Compartmentalize but We Cannot Hide

And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" And his brothers could not answer him because they were embarrassed before him. (Breishis 45:3)

Woe to us on the Day of Judgment! Woe to us on the day of rebuke! (Midrash Tanchuma)

The Mikvah (purification) of Israel is Hashem! (Jeremiah 17:13)

Why does Joseph ask, "Is my father still alive?" Judah had based his entire appeal to save Benjamin on the claim that it would cause great harm and may even kill Jacob, their father, if he would remain in captivity. Joseph understood from this that his father Jacob was still alive. Where do we see that Joseph rebuked his brothers?

The following story I heard from the son of a prominent Rebbe a number of years ago. The names have been changed to protect the guilty:

Reb Yudel wearily steps off the bus after a long journey. It is Erev Shabbos, the eve of the Sabbath. He stares at street signs with a look that betrays his lack of orientation. His quizzical appearance invites a kindly gentleman to volunteer some help, and secure an invitation to a Friday night Shabbos meal. Kindly Mr. Yozzel Schwartz gives him directions to his home, points him to the stores, the synagogue, and other essentials.

Reb Yudel buys some little snacks and goodies to be enjoyed on Shabbos and parks his bags at his place of lodging. With The Holy Shabbos rapidly approaching Reb Yudel hurries to the local Mikvah, the ritual bath. As he removes his shoes and his glasses he is finally beginning to relax, in hopeful anticipation of the goodness ahead.

He descends into the hot pool where heads are bobbing like beach balls. The steam is rising all around. "Ahhh!" he says, and turning casually to the fellow soaking next to him asks, "Do you happen to know a fellow named Yozzel Schwartz?"

After a moment of hesitation, the fellow asks, "Why?" Yudel explains, "I want to know if his wife is a good cook. I'm going there to eat tonight. I just want to know if I'm in for a big treat or a disappointment."

The other man now tells Yudel, "It's a good thing you asked me. I know Mr. Schwarz very well. He

used to be a rich man. Times have been hard for him lately. His house, it's large and lovely. Don't be deceived. Inside the table is long and elaborately set but there is no real food. I suggest you fill up as much as you can on the Challah because soon after the meal has begun it will end. I'm afraid you'll leave hungry."

Arriving at Yozzel Schwartz's home it was just as described by the man in the Mikvah. After Kiddush and a sip of wine came the giant Challahs. Reb Yudel just kept eating that bread with passion till his stomach was entirely full. Mrs. Schwartz then brought out three types of fish, and multiple salads and then soup. Yudel had no room left to think about other dishes. They insisted he eat. He could hardly swallow. Then the main dish arrived with every species of kugel and meats. Reb Yudel was ready to explode and kindly Mr. Shwartz was urging him to enjoy his wife's delicious cooking.

Yudel backed off from the table and confessed, "I adopted the wrong strategy. I filled up on the Challah. I have no more room left for the fine foods. I'm sure it's delicious." At that moment Yozzel turns to Yudel and says ever so gently, "I look different in the Mikvah, don't I?" Reb Yudel was aghast!

When Joseph asked his brothers if his father was still alive, he was not just seeking information. After having revealed his true identity, Joseph gently pointed out the fault in their appeal. "You express concern about our father's well being. I'm Joseph! I was at the bottom of the pit twenty-two years ago. Is my father still alive after that?" The power of a rebuke is that excuses and alibis are proven feeble and shrink before the pure gaze of truth. Woe to us! Woe to us! Joseph teaches us, we can compartmentalize but we cannot hide.

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