

# THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"Then Yehudah approached him..." [44:18]*

The Alshich asks, why is Yehudah arguing with Yosef all of a sudden, at the beginning of our parsha? Just moments earlier, Yehudah had said, "we will be servants to my master, all of us, including he in whose hand the goblet was found." [44:16] To which Pharaoh's viceroy, Yosef, responded: "the man in whose hand the goblet was found, he will be my servant, and you will go up in peace to your father."

It should be obvious that Yehudah has nothing to say. He offered to have all the brothers become slaves, to which Yosef responded that he only wanted the guilty party! How can Yehudah suddenly jump up now, and oppose this arrangement?

The Alshich answers that we have this question because we look at matters only in physical terms. Yehudah, however, lived his life on a more spiritual plane. The brothers had come to the realization that they had wronged Yosef, and that they deserved a punishment. They had examined their actions, and concluded that the bizarre treatment that they were receiving from the viceroy could only be for this reason. "Then they said to one another, 'it is because we are guilty for our brother, because we saw his heartfelt pain when he begged us, and we did not listen -- this is why this pain has come upon us.'" [42:21] And thus they were prepared to accept their punishment for the sale of Yosef, and become slaves.

This is why Yehudah said, "what can we say, and how can we justify ourselves -- G-d has found the sin of your servants." [44:16] He was not talking about the stolen goblet, because he knew that they were "framed," and of course G-d had found no such crime. It was because of their brother, whom they sold.

If Benjamin were included when they were all made slaves to Pharaoh, they understood that it might be punishment for something else, or afford him some benefit. All of this, however, would not explain Benjamin -- the one brother who was in no way involved with the sale of Yosef -- going into slavery, alone. That made no sense. Yehudah immediately realized that this was not a punishment for the sale of Yosef, after all. It was just a run-of-the-mill false accusation! And this is why he reversed himself and argued with Yosef in strong language.

Yehudah realized that no one can have any power against us unless G-d makes it so. And therefore he knew to look for the spiritual roots of problems first, and face the real problem, not the "cover" which faced him

*Dedicated in memory of Tzipa Rochel bas Chaikel and Chaya*