

POTENTIALLY

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

They were unable to answer him because they were frightened of him (Beresheet 45:3)

The climactic revelation of Yosef to his brothers shocked them into a speechless stupor. They feared repercussions for the heartlessness they showed on the day they sold him to a caravan headed for Egypt. "What would the Viceroy of Egypt do to them now?" was the question that filled their hearts with fear. That is the surface explanation of their concern. However, the Midrash reveals to us a more perceptive perspective on the moment that highlights the multi-week Torah portion tale of Yosef and his brothers.

Abba Cohen Bardela said: "Woe is to us from the day of judgment! Woe is to us from the day of reproof! Yosef was the youngest of the tribes and they were not able to withstand his reproof. When The Holy One Blessed Be He will reprove each and every one according to who he is- how much more frightening it will be!" (Beresheet Rabbah 33:17)

What does the Midrash mean to convey by the superfluous phrase "According to who he is?" Would we expect the perfect judgment of Hashem to be based on something other than who the person is? Of course Hashem judges an individual according to his actions and not the behavior of his friend.

Many people fail in life because they see the talents and the success of others around them and lose their self-esteem. Sometimes they will justify a lack of achievement by stating, "I don't have the quick mind of Jack or the organizational skills of Sarah." The flaw with this excuse is that they began by measuring their own ability to succeed against someone else's G-d-given talents. The correct road to success is to measure against oneself - "according to who he is" not someone else.

There was a great Rabbi named Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Berlin zt'l, better know as the Netziv. When he published his first work Ha-amek She-elah he made a big celebration. His face was beaming and his ecstasy apparent to all attendees. Someone inquired, "Why are you so happy?"

"When I was 11 years old", he replied "I was a failing student. My father told my mother that he thought it would be best if he took me to learn a trade as an apprentice for a shoemaker or a tailor. Fortunately I lay awake I in my bed that night and I overheard their conversation. I jumped out of bed and pleaded for a chance to prove that I could succeed in Torah studies. My father agreed and from that night forward I worked hard, applied myself and have been blessed with great success.

"Imagine", he continued, "if I had not overheard my father's plan. I would have been an upstanding

observant tradesman. I would pray with a minyan, attend certain classes and do my share of hesed and mitzvot. After 120 years I would go before the Heavenly court and proudly defend my simple performance of Torah law. Then they would ask, 'and where is the Ha-amek She-elah?'

'What is that?', I would reply.

'The book you were sent to Earth to write'.

'Write? I am a simple shoemaker. I can't write a sefer on Torah.'

'Who says so? What did you do with your potential? What did you do with your life?'

'Now that I have written the book I know I will be able to answer that all- important question. That is why I am so happy today'

Every person will be judged based on his or her individual mission. Each is given the tools and equipment to successfully do their custom made job in life. Those that maximize their potential are considered successes and those who fall short will be held accountable. You will be called a success if you do more than your friend. You will not fail the test if you do not accomplish quantitatively as much as your neighbor. You will be judged according to who you are. At the end of the day everyone is judged by their score in maximizing their potential. YOUR success will be measured against how well you fulfilled YOUR potential.

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