

## WHY DID THEY BECOME MUTE?

### SHABBOS VAYIGASH

I must share this fascinating story with you.

*Rebbi Shmuel Zvi Horowitz (1921-1997) became the Rebbe of Spinka in the United States. He was known as Rav Hershele. He had a devoted student in London who was exceedingly wealthy. When Reb Hershele first became the Rebbe, this student visited him and said that he would pay for all the Rebbe's happy occasions for his children and grandchildren. This wealthy student would cover the cost of every bar mitzvah and every wedding. True to his word, the wealthy student sent a large check to the Rebbe to pay for the upcoming bar mitzvah of his son. The check was enough to cover the cost of the entire bar mitzvah celebration, the clothes for the bar mitzvah boy, a pair of tefillin and even the tefillin bag, The Rebbe was overjoyed.*

*A few months passed and the wealthy student was waiting to receive a thank you letter from the Rebbe. None came. A year later, he still did not receive a thank you. The wealthy student became very upset. He complained bitterly to his family about the lack of appreciation shown by his Rebbe. He*

*told his family that he did not want anything to do with the rebbe anymore. He was not going to send him any more checks. All he wanted was a simple thank you which he had never received. He remained an embittered man. Seventy years later, in 2023, Moshe Hirshkowitz, a dealer in antique sefarim, bought a sefer called Imray Yosef which was written by the first Spinka Rebbe. When Moshe got home, he leafed through the sefer and an old envelope fell out. The letter was written by Rav Hershele and was addressed to his wealthy student from London. Rav Hershele wrote, "You can't imagine the burden you have lifted from me by covering the expenses of the bar mitzvah. Thank you from the depths of my heart. May you and your family be blessed with health and wealth and much much nachas." The letter had been sealed and stamped but for some unknown reason was never mailed. After much research, Moshe Hirshowitz discovered that the wealthy man had passed away but his son was still alive. He brought the letter to the son*

"I am Yosef... His brothers could not answer him because they were overwhelmed."  
(Bereishis 45:3)

*who burst into tears upon reading it. He said that throughout his father's life, his father kept saying that the Rebbe was an ingrate for never expressing appreciation for the bar mitzvah check. Had he known about the letter, he would have continued sending checks to his Rebbe and his*

*life would have been less embittered. (Rabbi Yehuda Zev Klein on Torah Anytime- Netzoir)*

**The wealthy student was embittered his entire life because he lived his life with a mistaken perspective.**

Yosef revealed himself to his brothers. He said, "I am Yosef... His brothers could not answer him because they were overwhelmed." (Bereishis 45:3) **Rashi** says that they were overwhelmed from shame. Thus, they became speechless. The **Midrash Rabbah** (Bereishis 93:10) quotes Abba Kohen Bardela who says, "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment! Woe to us from the Day of Rebuke." The **Midrash** comments that this is the way it will be in the future when a person leaves this world and stands in front of the Throne of Glory. We will have the same experience that the brothers of Yosef had on that day. Hashem will rebuke every individual for their misdeeds while on Earth. We certainly won't be able to open our mouths to respond.

Yosef's brothers were overwhelmed by the shocking news that this ruler in front of them was their brother Yosef. Many commentaries ask that all Yosef said was, "I am Yosef". Yosef did not rebuke them. Where does the Midrash get the idea that the brothers were rebuked?

**Rav Chaim Shmulevitz** zt"l (Sichos Mussar), **Rav Yeruchom Levovitz** zt"l (Da'as Torah) and others, explain that when Yosef revealed himself, his brothers suddenly realized that they had lived their lives with a totally mistaken perspective. They had been convinced that Yosef had grandiose dreams to rule over them. They were concerned lest Yosef cause their father Yaakov to curse them. Now, the brothers realized that Yosef's dreams were more than dreams. They were prophetic visions. Initially, they had convened a court of law to try Yosef for attempting to cause Yaakov to curse them. Now they understood

that they were totally wrong! Yosef was not trying to harm them! They were wrong to condemn Yosef to death! They were wrong to sell him as a slave! Now that they realized their error, they were confounded and could not speak.

**Rav Chaim Shmulevitz** zt"l (Sichos Mussar) adds that the same thing happened to our forefather Yitzchok. Yitzchok lived his life assuming that Esav was the more righteous son and deserved the brachos. In one moment, Yitzchok realized that he had been mistaken for his entire life. When Esav entered to get the brachos, "Yitzchok trembled mightily" (27:33). **Rashi** explains that Yitzchok saw the entrance of Gehinnom open under Esav's feet. The **Yalkut Shimoni** says something astounding! Yitzchok trembled in greater fear now, even more than he had trembled on the altar when Avraham prepared him to be sacrificed! The moment when he realized that he had been mistaken all his life about the righteousness of Esav was a moment of great trembling!

**On the day of reckoning, Hashem will show us our erroneous perspectives in how we may have lived our lives.** Did we waste our lives on meaningless things? Were our goals in life consistent with the reason that we were created? Did we live our lives according to the ideals of Torah? Were our efforts to make more and more money at the expense of our emphasis on performing mitzvos and coming closer to Hashem? **When we realize the error of our ways, and see the truth revealed to us, we will understand that our actions were based on rationalizations.**

**We will become speechless at hearing this rebuke!**

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*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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