

Judah said: What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. --- Gen. 44:16

The brothers assumed that Benjamin had actually stolen the cup. They began beating him, saying: "You're a thief just like your mother. Rachel humiliated our father Jacob by stealing Laban's idols (see Gen. 31:19). Now you have embarrassed us." --- **Midrash Tanchuma** 13

As the brothers took silver when they sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt, so now they are unable to return the silver and get out of the plight in which they find themselves. --- Prof. Robert Alter

If a righteous man abandons his righteousness and does wrong, I put a stumbling block before him. --- Ezekiel 3:20; noted in this context by David Kimchi, 12th-13th c., Provence

Judah speaks in the plural because he is not admitting that Benjamin did what he is accused of, only that all of them did wrong. He is saying: We know that we did not act improperly in this matter, but God who is omnipresent ("**Ha-Makom**", the One who is every place and was there when we sinned against Joseph) brought it about. The Divine Creditor has found an opportunity to collect on his promissory note. --- Rashi

What can we say to my lord? — this refers to the first money in Benjamin's sack. *How can we plead?* — this refers to the second money in Benjamin's sack. *How can we prove our innocence?* — this is the cup.

What can we say to my lord? — this refers to the incident of Tamar. *How can we plead?* — this refers to the action of Reuben (taking his father's concubine; see 35:22.) *How can we prove our innocence?* — this is what they did to Shechem (see chapter 34).

What can we say to my lord? — what shall we say to our father (Jacob) in Canaan, about Joseph? *How can we plead?* — about Shimon. *How can we prove our innocence?* — about Benjamin. --- **Midrash Bereshit Rabbah** 92:9

The midrash sees a triple implication in the verse, explaining the word **adonee** (“my lord”) in three different ways: (1) as the Egyptian governor standing in front of them, (2) as the Lord of the Universe Who knows their guilt, (3) as their aged father in Canaan against whom they had sinned. The midrash unearths for us the nine different sins recalled by the text, showing us how the brothers repented not merely of one wrongdoing, but emulated the true penitent who sees his guilt and sin in every step and turn, a thought which is expressed instructively in the phrase in Psalm 51: *And my sin is ever before me*. After his brothers had reached this level of penitence, remorse, and sense of sin, Joseph can then make himself known to them. --- Nechama Leibowitz, 20th c.

They might have asked several things. Is it conclusive evidence of someone’s theft, if the object is found with him? Can it not have been placed there maliciously? Are there witnesses to the theft? What of their words to the steward? When and how could the theft by Benjamin have been possible? Yet they forgo any argument. Not only because it would have been futile before the powerful man, but they immediately understand this misfortune, even if the present charge is false, as punishment for another deed. --- Benno Jacob, 20th c.

We are not guilty of this crime; we have committed no wrong against you at all. But God has arranged for you to punish us for a crime we committed long ago. --- Sforzo