



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

INTENTIONS ARE EVERYTHING

RABBI BEN SUGERMAN

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YONI MAYER ('18)

SHMUEL BELIZON ('20)

YITZY LANNER ('19)

SARA MERKIN ('17)

R' Yaakov Kamminetsky in his sefer on Chumash, אמת ליעקב, asks the following question. The two oldest sons of Yehuda acted inappropriately with Tamar and as a result the two of

them die. Rashi states that they both committed the same crime as is derived from the term, וַיָּמָת גַּם אֹתוֹ, "And he also died." (38:10) If so, asks R' Yaakov, why would the Torah detail what the second son, Onan, did while leaving the details of the first son in obscurity, where the Torah simply states,

"וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי ה' וַיִּמָּתוּ ה'."

"And it was Er the oldest son of Yehudah was bad in the eyes of Hashem and Hashem killed him." (38:7)

If as Rashi states they did the same sin, either detail both of their sins or neither. Why would the Torah reveal one's action and not the other?

R' Yaakov has an approach and I encourage the reader to see his approach. I'd like to suggest another answer to his question. The Rambam in the second chapter (halacha 5) of הלכות תשובה writes as follows:

ושבח גדול לשב שיתודה ברבים ויודיע פשעיו להם ומגלה עבירות שבינו לבין חבריו לאחרים ואומר להם אמנם חטאתי לפלוני ועשיתי לו כך וכך והריני היום שב ומתנחם, וכל המתגאה ואינו מודיע אלא מכסה פשעיו אין תשובתו גמורה שנאמר מכסה פשעיו לא יצליח, במה דברים אמורים בעבירות שבין אדם לחבירו אבל בעבירות שבין אדם למקום אינו צריך לפרסם עצמו ד ועזות פנים היא לו אם גילם, אלא שב לפני האל ברוך הוא ופורט חטאיו לפניו ומתודה עליהם לפני רבים סתם וטובה היא לו שלא נתגלה עונו שנאמר אשרי נשוי פשע

כסוי חטאה

"It is very praiseworthy for a person who repents to confess in public and to make his sins known to others,

revealing the transgressions he committed against his colleagues.

He should tell them: ‘Though I sinned against so and so, committing the following misdeeds.... Behold, I repent and express my regret.’ Anyone who, out of pride, conceals his sins and does not reveal them will not achieve complete repentance as [Mishlei 28:13] states: ‘He who conceals his sins will not succeed.’”

When does the above apply? In regard to sins between man and man. However, in regard to sins between man and God, it is not necessary to publicize one’s [transgressions]. Indeed, revealing them is arrogant. Rather, a person should repent before God, blessed be He, and specifically mention his sins before Him. In public, he should make a general confession. It is to his benefit not to reveal his sins as [Te-hillim 32:1] states: “Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” (Translation taken from chabad.org)

The source of this Rambam is the gemara in Yoma 86. To paraphrase what the Rambam is saying: when a person violates an interpersonal aveira he needs to publicize his sin and share with others how he wronged somebody, while if he were to sin between him and Hashem, he need only share and confess his sin with his Creator. The distinction is based on conflicting pesukim where one pasuk indicates that one should broadcast his sin while the other pasuk indicates that one should cover it up.

Coming back to our question, we can make the following observation. Although the two brothers committed the same act, their intentions were totally different. Rashi (38:8) writes that the older brother, Er, did not want to impregnate Tamar as it would detract from her beauty and therefore was *ערוה*, an aveira that falls under the category of *בין אדם למקום*, immoral behavior which is between man and Hashem, and consequently the Torah did not publicize it. His brother Onan on the other hand, was given the instruction from his father to marry Tamar specifically for the purpose of perpetuating his brother’s legacy, the concept of Yibum. The Torah then goes on to relate that Onan, knowing that the future child would not be his, decided not to impregnate Tamar. His action was an affront to his

deceased brother, an aveira falling under the category of *בין אדם לחבירו*, between man and man. Based on the Rambam, we can now suggest that this is the basis of the Torah publicizing the action of Onan and not Er, based on the intent behind their actions.

SAY WHAT’S ON YOUR MIND

YONI MAYER ('18)

IN THIS WEEK’S PARSHA, PARSHAT VAYEISHEV, ONE of the most unusual and significant families is introduced to us: Yaakov, Yosef and the 11 other sons. Perhaps one of the most significant events in this family’s life, and also an extremely important event in the course of this parsha, is the brothers’ plot to throw their younger brother Yosef in the pit.

The obvious question must be asked: how could these brothers, these leaders of family and community, ever plot, let alone carry out, an intended killing of one of their family members? The answer can be found in the dynamic of the family itself.

Perhaps Yaakov made some parenting mistakes. The brothers clearly reconized that their father was playing favorites to Yosef: he even gave Yosef a technicolored dreamcoat. For their whole family life growing up they were emotionally affected by their father’s favoritism, but they never acted on it. They never thought of going to their father Yaakov, a spiritual man with a close relationship to God, to deal with the issue of favoritism and so they did nothing to confront and perhaps change their reality.

Yosef reciting his dreams finally gave them the opportunity to act on the emotional anguish they had grown up with. Not only did Yosef’s dreams confirm that Yaakov truly did show favoritism to Yosef, Yosef also clearly felt entitled to Yaakov’s special attention. The brothers reacted in the worst way possible to Yosef’s dreams, and after all of the years of dealing with Yaakov’s favoritism and hearing Yosef acknowledge it, sort of as a last straw on the camel’s back, the brothers responded violently and decided to kill their younger brother.

This parsha tells us a seemingly simple but profound message. We shouldn't wait until the last minute to deal with our issues. If something is angering or bothering us, it should be dealt with right away. This can be applied in so many cases: receiving a bad test grade and finding a newfound dislike for a teacher, not liking a new dish that your mother just made, or even playing basketball with a dirty player and never having the courage to speak up about it. We should learn from the mistakes of the brothers and speak our minds, rather than keep our feelings inside until they explode, most likely violently.

GOD HAS OUR BACK

SHMUEL BELIZON ('20)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA WE READ ABOUT POTIPHAR'S wife having Yosef sent to prison. The pasuk says:

**וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנָי יוֹסֵף אֹתוֹ, וַיְתִנֶּהוּ אֶל-בַּיִת הַסֵּהר...
וַיְהִי-שָׁם, בְּבַיִת הַסֵּהר**

"Then Yosef's master took him and placed him in the prison...and he was there in prison"
(Bereishit 39:20)

The meforshim are bothered by the repetitive phrase at the end of the pasuk: "and he was there in prison." Where else would he have been after they put him in prison? Rabbeinu Bechaye answers that the spare words are really connected to the first words of the next pasuk: "וַיְהִי ה' אִתּוֹ יוֹסֵף"--*"And Hashem was with Yosef"* (Bereishit 39:21). Therefore, you read the pesukim as follows: "And he was there in prison and Hashem was with Yosef". We are being told that even when he was put in prison; the lowest point of his life, Yosef lived with the awareness that Hashem was down there with him.

There is a well-known parable known as "Footprints in the Sand": We see the paths of our lives as a set of footprints stretched out before us. At some points in our lives we see two sets of footprints, and at other times only one set is visible. Then we notice that we are seeing only one set of footprints at the hardest points of our lives. Seeing this, we might think that Hashem, who has been walking alongside us, tem-

porarily abandoned us, explaining the tremendous hardships. Why is there only one set of footprints? Why would Hashem leave us?. However, the opposite is true! At the very points when we think that Hashem has left us and we don't see His footprints next to us, that is when Hashem has picked us up onto his shoulders and carried us. The single set of footprints are His!

From this mashal and Yosef's predicament we can learn that no matter what happens or how it happens we always have to be aware of Hashem's presence in our lives. He is always here and we should never fear the lack of Hashem's presence!

IT'S ALL ABOUT YOSEF

YITZY LANNER ('19)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT VAYEISHEV, THERE is a strange series of events that occurs. First, the Torah tells us that Yaakov loved Yosef more than any of the other brothers, and for that reason Yaakov gave Yosef the ketonet pasim, the multicolored coat. Then the pesukim go on to say that the brothers could no longer tolerate Yosef, and they did not believe the dreams that Yosef was sharing with them. Question one: why did Yaakov love Yosef more than any of his other sons? Question two: what specifically about receiving the ketonet pasim made Yosef intolerable to his brothers?

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky elucidates that Yaakov taught Yosef all of what he learned while he studied in Yeshivat Shem V'Ever. This is the yeshiva that Avraham and Yitzchak attended as well. The main strength of this yeshiva was that it taught Torah that could survive in bad and unfortunate circumstances. For example, Yaakov used his Torah learning to deal with Lavan and Esav. Yaakov decided, therefore, to teach Torah to Yosef for practical reasons, for when Yosef was going to need to deal with the Egyptians later on in his life. It was essential for Yaakov to invest his time to learn this with Yosef. As a result of Yaakov learning so much with Yosef, he grew to love Yosef the most, and he gave Yosef the ketonet pasim. Yaakov was actually hoping that the other brothers would be jealous of Yosef and want to learn with Yaakov as well!

However, that was not the outcome. The brothers, instead, became jealous of the wrong things and thought that since Yaakov was teaching Torah to Yosef (and then gave him the ketonet pasim), they falsely assumed that Yosef was the good kid and that they were the “Lavans” and the “Esavs,” which scared them a lot. This fear of rejection explains why, after Yosef receives the gift of the ketonet pasim from his father, the brothers can no longer tolerate Yosef, to the point that they sell him into slavery in the hopes of getting rid of him.

PRISON “BREAK”

SARA MERKIN ('17)

IN THIS WEEK’S PARSHA, WE READ ALMOST THE ENTIRETY OF THE STORY OF YOSEF. We read that Yosef is thrown into jail, ultimately to be taken and promoted to Pharaoh’s right-hand man. So, why is it that God puts Yosef through this jail detour in the first place? The Baal HaTurim comments on this and claims that Yosef was in jail for ten years as a punishment for each brother that Yosef tattled on to Yaakov. Two more years were added on since Yosef asked the butler to “remember him” and request that he be released. The Kli Yakar explains that Yosef shouldn’t have placed his trust in the butler to remember him, but rather in God to get him out of jail. By asking the butler, Yosef was displaying a lack of faith in God.

Rashi and the Or HaChaim fit together to offer a different explanation. The Or HaChaim explains that the Torah is outlining the steps that Yosef took to achieve greatness. He started out working in the field as a slave, but God was with him so he got promoted to housework. He works to eventually rise to be Potiphar’s assistant and eventually the master of his house, which grants him control over all the servants and possessions. Finally Potiphar gives over everything but his wife into Yosef’s hands, to the point where Yosef is practically on the same level as Potiphar. Furthermore, Rashi writes that the more powerful Yosef became, the more relaxed and comfortable he became. This angered God since Yaakov was back in Canaan mourning the loss of his favorite son, while Yosef was having the time of his life in Egypt, focusing purely on himself. This is why he needs to be thrown in jail and kept in for longer after he relies on the butler for help. Yosef let his vanity take over, ignoring God’s hand in his entire story. The years in jail forced him to realize that God was the reason behind his success and power.

Similarly, in our lives, we need to make sure our egos don’t get in the way of realizing that God is with us, helping us succeed. As we approach Chanukah, a celebration of a time when God’s assistance to the Jewish people was so prominent and clear, take time to reflect and thank God for all the help He offers to each of us in our lives.

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