

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

DECEMBER 31, 2022 This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rav Shmuel Ben Rav Usher VOLUME 13, ISSUE 11
Zelig HaLevi z"l, father of Kalman Finkel. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

7 TEVES

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYIGASH

True or False?

Yosef could not endure the presence of all those that stood before him and he commanded; "Remove everyone from before me!" Therefore there was no one with him when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers (45:1).

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah describes the climactic confrontation between Yosef and his brother Yehuda. This dramatic scene is the conclusion of a three *parsha* story line; one that leads to the somewhat uneasy reunion of Yosef and his brothers, and later, an emotional reunion with his father who thought him dead for twenty-two years.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Yosef could not bear the thought of Egyptians present when he revealed himself to his brothers because they would be embarrassed by their shame.

Maharal, in the Gur Aryeh (ad loc), is bothered by Rashi's assumption that Yosef was concerned about their embarrassment once he revealed himself to them. The Torah never even introduced the concept of Yosef revealing himself! If Rashi is right, the Torah should first discuss that Yosef intended to reveal himself and was therefore concerned for their shame and embarrassment in front of the Egyptians.

Remarkably, Maharal seems to conclude that Rashi is wrong. Instead, Maharal suggests an alternative reason for their embarrassment, and why Yosef asked all the Egyptians to leave. Looking back on last week's *parsha*, we see that Binyomin was accused of stealing Yosef's "magic" goblet. Maharal therefore concludes that their embarrassment was rooted in the accusation that they were common thieves. It is for this reason, he explains,

they were embarrassed, and therefore Yosef ordered all the Egyptians out of the room.

Still, if possible, it is important to try to understand Rashi's perspective and why he didn't agree with Maharal's conclusion.

When it comes to gossip, stories generally fall into two categories: 1) Stories that are essentially true, if perhaps somewhat embellished and 2) stories that are patently false. In *halacha*, these two categories are known as 1) *loshon hora* and 2) *motzi shem ra*.

One would naturally assume that it is more wicked to spread stories that are patently false than to simply relay stories that are essentially true. In fact, this is exactly what the Chofetz Chaim says; *Motzi shem ra* is worse than *loshon hora* (*Chofetz Chaim, Hilchos Loshon Hora* 1:1).

Still, it is a little puzzling that in the Gemara, and countless Chazal, much more attention is given to the evils of *loshon hora*. The Gemara actually compares the sin of *loshon hora* to the three cardinal sins of murder, adultery, and idolatry. How are we to understand this dichotomy?

Perhaps the answer lies in looking at these sins from two different perspectives; that of the perpetrator and that of the victim. To completely make up a terrible story about someone (*motzi shem ra*) requires malevolence; one has to have a real character flaw to fabricate stories about



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someone in order to hurt them. From the perspective of the perpetrator, it is a critical failing of one's humanity and is positively evil; this requires a complete overhaul and rehabilitation of one's character.

On the other hand, when it comes to the emotional harm to the victim, *loshon hora* is a far greater sabotage. In other words, if one is accused of something false, one may feel outraged and wronged, but he can still hold his head up high because he knows the story isn't true. But if one's innermost vulnerabilities and failings are exposed to all, there is simply nowhere to hide; everyone knows exactly what you have done - there is no defense. This is quite devastating; in this sense, *loshon hora* is far more sinister and damaging.

Perhaps that is why Rashi didn't agree with Maharal's assessment of what happened with Yosef and his brothers. Being accused of stealing the goblet, while terribly unpleasant and outrageous, wouldn't lead to embarrassment. After all, they knew they didn't steal it. However, being faced with their treachery to Yosef when he revealed himself would lead to an incredible shame and they would be very embarrassed if anyone else were present. That's why Yosef asked the Egyptians to leave.

Daddy Duty

It wasn't you who sent me here, rather it was Hashem. He has made me as a father to Pharaoh [...] (45:8).

Yosef, upon revealing his identity to his brothers, seeks to lessen the burden of their betrayal to him. He explains that his coming down to Egypt was really all part of Hashem's plan; and that he had been uniquely placed in a high position in the Egyptian hierarchy.

Yosef asks that they convey his stature in Egypt to his father, along with his request that Yaakov and his entire family come down to Egypt to join him. The initial way that Yaakov describes his position within the hierarchy is that of a father to Pharaoh.

Rashi (ad loc) gives us a remarkable definition of what it means to be a father: "a friend and patron." As Yosef expects his brothers to convey

his position to Yaakov – without any elaboration on what he means by "as a father to Pharaoh" – Yosef is obviously using Yaakov's own definition of fatherhood.

Different cultures have very different definitions of what it means to be a proper father. As an example; the mid-20th century European definition of how fathers should relate to their children was very different than the American definition of fatherhood.

Rashi's description of what Yosef understands Yaakov's definition of fatherhood to be is very instructive. According to Rashi, the first role of a father is to treat his child as a colleague, not an indentured servant. Secondly, one has to recognize that a child cannot survive

on his own, therefore one has to be a patron to his child – that is, provide unwavering support.

Perhaps most remarkably is that, in the entire Torah, the only father who has absolute success with children is Yaakov. The Torah makes a special note of the fact that all of his sons were equal and righteous (see 35:22 and Rashi ad loc). There is no other model in the Torah for successful fatherhood; not in Adam Harishon, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Moshe, or Aharon. It is therefore crucial that we take special note of what Yaakov's definition of fatherhood was, and try to incorporate those principles into our own families.

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