

## Parshas Bechukosai

### RESPONSIBILITIES

The Torah details curses, of tragedy and atrocities, that occur when the Jewish nation strays from its course of bettering mankind. One of them stands out:

וְכָשְׁלוּ אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו – Each man will stumble over his brother (26: 37)

The literal translation is incorrect. Rashi explains that this curse is the inverse of the famous maxim of כל ישראל כולל זה לזה – all of Israel are accountable for one another. The curse is that Jews will stumble over other Jews sins.

The Maharal explains why the literal meaning is incorrect. Tripping over someone has nothing to do with brotherhood. When the Torah says וְכָשְׁלוּ אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו – the tripping is because of the brotherhood – the tripping is over the accountability that brotherhood engenders.

The root of the word ערבין is the word ערב – meaning mixture – it is the same root as the word for tasty, evening, guarantor, Arab and eruv. R' Ezra Hartman explains that these are all mixtures; An eruv mixes property rights; tasty is the cuisine that “mixes” when digested; evening is twilight, in contrast to בקר which means “differentiate”, in twilight things are hard to make out. The name for ערבי – Arab, is a mixture too. The pasuk in Bereishis says of Yishmael, their ancestor, that יָדוּ בְּכָל יָדוּ כָל בּוֹ – his hand will be upon all, and everyone’s hand upon him (16: 12). Today, we see this as terrorism. Terrorism has no borders – it is potentially everywhere, in a school, a mall, a bus, a train or a plane.

Rashi saw fit to quote that the solution is כל ישראל ערביין – the nation is a unit, a brotherhood, with components accountable for one another – the Torah assures us that we will stumble on our brother’s problems if we do not help them.

For that reason alone, we have to help them.

### FORGIVENESS – BIG DEAL?

After Yosef revealed his identity, and after so many years in exile, Yakov’s family was complete once more. His brothers apologise to him, and Yosef rebuffed them with a bizarre response:

אַל תִּירָאוּ כִּי הִתַּחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנִי – “Don’t be afraid, for am I in place of God?” (50: 19).

He clearly isn't angry, but how has he responded to their apology?

The Baal Haturim suggests that this is intended to be ironic, poetic justice. He was not the first to use this expression – it had been used years before; when his mother had begged Yakov to give her children, their father replied:

הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אֲנִכִּי אֲשֶׁר מָנַע מִמֶּנּוּ פְּרִי בֶטֶן – “Am I in place of God, Who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (30: 2)

Why isn't a simple answer enough – did he accept their apology or not?

The Maharil Diskin answers that it may have been out of his control to forgive them. In the laws of vows (30: 7-9) the Torah describes a woman who makes a vow, but her husband annuls it without telling her. If she intentionally violates the vow that is unknowingly not in effect; counter intuitively, the pasuk says וְה' יְסַלַח לָהּ – Hashem will forgive her. This woman technically done absolutely nothing wrong – she did not actually violate a vow at all! Yet there is a certain something that does not sit well. The fact that circumstances fell favourably does not detract from what was intended to be a wilful wrongdoing.

And perhaps the same was true of Yosef and his brothers. They conspired to commit, perhaps justifiably, a nonetheless horrendously evil act to him. In hindsight, it had turned out for the best in the end, and the family were reunited – just as in the case of a woman who circumstantially did nothing wrong. But they certainly weren't to know that at the time. He bore them no ill will, but it was not his place to forgive their evil intent – וְה' יְסַלַח לָהּ. Due to the turn of events they had done nothing wrong, but הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אֲנִכִּי – he was not in the place of God.

Simply put, the ends did not justify the means. Yosef told his brothers that they were only circumstantially sorry.

Rabbeinu Bachaye shares a frightening thought. Chazal understand that Yosef not forgiving his brothers resulted in the Asara Harugei Malchus – the Ten Martyrs – one of the greatest tragedies in Jewish history. Each took the place of a member of the group who had sold Yosef. Yakov was not told, as an oath was agreed between a group of 10; such an oath cannot be annulled.

Only there weren't 10 men present at the sale – there were nine! Binyamin was not there, Reuven had left, and Yosef not a party to his own sale and exile. So why are there ten martyrs if only 9 people sold Yosef?

There is a concept that a minyan can take place with 9, as Hashem joins in – Hashem was the 10th member of this group. It is implicit to be so, because Yakov could not use his prophecy to identify the truth about Yosef; Hashem was in on it.

R' Shamshon Ostropolier uses the first two words of a pasuk in Bechukosai as an acronym to explain- וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂר וְכָל בְּקָר וְצֹאן כָּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹר תַּחַת הַשֶּׁבֶט הָעֵשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה קֹדֶשׁ לַה' – Any tithe of cattle or flock of all that pass under the rod, the tenth shall be holy to the Lord” (27: 32)

In reference to Rabbi Akiva, arguably the greatest of the lot:

וְכִי לְמַא מֵת עֲקִיבָא, שֶׁהוּא רֹאֵה בְּקָר וְצֹאן וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂר בְּקָר וְצֹאן – Why did Akiva die? He was just a shepherd!  
שֶׁבֶט – Those (nine) who passed on were for a שבט.  
וְכִי לְמַא מֵת עֲקִיבָא – But the tenth, Akiva, was קֹדֶשׁ לַה'.

There is another allusion to this when Yosef meets Binyamin for the first time since childhood. The Torah says

how he cried on his necks – plural – (45: 15) וַיִּבֶךְ עַל־הֶם. This is odd as we have one neck – עַל־הֶם instead reads ‘י על י – for the ten Harugei Malchus.

The last sections are not literal explanations – pshat. But the flow of the story is that he did not forgive them, and it had serious ramifications.

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