

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the Torah illustrates here that if angry, avoid speaking until the anger settles. The reiteration indicates that there was a pause between his anger and his speech. They were two very separate acts.

The Peleh Yoietz compares keeping quiet when angry to spraying water at the base of a fire. It extinguishes the source. R Elya Lopian would never punish a student at the time of an incident. The Alter of Kelm had an “angry suit” that he would change into each time he was angry, delaying reaction and allowing himself to calm down.

Controlling emotions are hard – but it is required. It is a life-long struggle, but we can never let up. Each breakthrough makes it easier next time around, not to mention the mountain of reward for managing to do it.

Actions must be thought through – not based on impulse.

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:

אֲנִי – “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 אֲנִי – “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 וְהָיָה 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 – וְהָיָה לָהּ. Due to the turn of events they had done nothing wrong, but הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי – 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' Shmshon Ostropolier uses the first two words of a pasuk in Bechukosai as an acronym to explain- וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂר יְהוָה קָדָשׁ לַיהוָה – 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:

וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂר בְּקָר וְצֹאן becomes וְכִי לְמַא מֵת עֲקִיבָא, שהוא רואה בְּקָר וְצֹאן – Why did Akiva die? He was just a shepherd!
שְׁבֹט – Those (nine) who passed on were for a שְׁבֹט.
וְהַתְּעֵשִׂי יְהוָה קָדָשׁ לַיהוָה – But the tenth, Akiva, was קָדָשׁ לַיהוָה.

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) וַיִּבְדָּה עֲלֵיהֶם. This is odd as we have one neck – עַל יְהוָה instead reads ‘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.

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

Lavan caught up with Yakov after he and his family escaped Lavan's ranch, and they agreed a pact to not harm each other. The pact was to have a signature:

... עַד הַגִּל הַזֶּה – This pile of stones shall bear witness... (31: 52)

The Midrash adds that Yaakov also thrust a sword into the wall, as a second witness. The Da'as Zkeinim points out that Bilam ben Be'or's downfall was through these two, a wall and a sword. What does Bilam have to do with Yakov and Lavan's agreement?

There is a Gemara in Sanhedrin that the figure called Be'or is in fact the same person as Lavan, and Kushan Reshasaim (a wicked king in Judges). Simply put, Bilam was Lavan's son.

Bilam was injured by a wall, and died by the sword, as it says in Bamidbar:

וַתִּלְחַץ אֶת-רַגְלוֹ בַּלְעָם, אֶל-הַקִּיר (22: 25) – his foot was crushed against the wall.

וְאֵת בַּלְעָם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר, הָרְגוּ בַחֶרֶב (31: 8) – also Bilam son of Be'or was slain by the sword.

There is a story told by the Gemara in Taanis that a boy found a girl who'd tripped into a pit, and agreed to rescue her on the condition that they marry. She consented, and they made the pit and a nearby animal witnesses. They

went their separate ways, and years later he married another woman, who bore him two sons. But one died by falling into a pit, and another was killed by an animal. His wife asked lamented the bizarre misfortunes that had befallen them, and he recalled the vow and his witnesses. His wife told him to divorce her and find the girl, which he did.

This is similar to the case of Bilam in that the witnesses came back to “remind” them of their duties, a clear demonstration of measure for measure.

When Yakov entered Lavan’s house, Lavan clearly had no sons, as otherwise he would not send his daughters to tend the sheep, a man’s job. Yet by Yakov’s departure, he has since had sons: וַיִּשְׁמַע, אֶת-דְּבָרֵי בְנֵי-לָבָן לְאִמֹּר – he listened to Lavan’s sons... (31: 1). Lavan only had daughters until Yakov arrived. Years later, Bilam, his own son, broke the pact that nothing befall his daughters.

The witnesses to the pact upheld it, and he was crippled by a wall, and killed by the sword. These are a fulfillment of the law that when witnesses give key testimony that sentence someone to death that יָד הַעֲדִים תְּהִיָּה בּוֹ בְּרֵאשִׁיטָה – The hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death.

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