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Why INTERRUPT A Good Story?

by *Rabbi Steven Finkelstein*

Reading Parashat VaYeishev, we are completely engaged as the saga of Yosef and his brothers unfolds. We can sense the discomfort of the brothers as Yosef describes his dreams. We fear for Yosef as he says, "Hineini," and he bravely agrees to fulfill his father's request to check on his brothers. We are mortified as Yosef is thrown into the pit and quickly sold into slavery.

As we anticipate discovering Yosef's fate, the Torah interrupts the story. All of a sudden, we are forced to turn our attention to Yehudah.

We understand the need for the Torah to share with us the story of Yehudah. But why must it be placed at this point? Why not wait until later, before the brothers leave on their journey to acquire food in Egypt?

Clearly, the Torah is trying to tell us that it is precisely at this point, as the gravity of what has just happened to Yosef is settling in, that we need to stop and think about Yehudah and his role in the Yosef saga.

The Torah begins the story of Yehudah with seven words of introduction: "VaYhi BaEit HaHi VaYeired Yehudah MeiEit Echav," "And it happened at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers" (BeReishit 38:1). Rashi (ad. loc.) explains that the word "VaYeired," "went down," implies that the brothers demote Yehudah from his position of greatness. The brothers see the suffering of their father, Yaakov, and they turn to blame Yehudah. They explain, "Yehudah, we admired and respected you. We were willing to listen to you. When you suggested selling Yosef instead of leaving him to die, we followed your advice. Had you only encouraged us to bring Yosef home safely, we surely would have complied, and we would not have caused so much distress to our dear father."

Thus, Rashi captures for us the great sense of regret

that the brothers experience. "How did we get into this terrible situation? Where did things go wrong? What should have happened?" Their answer, according to this comment of Rashi, is that a terrible failure of leadership causes their downfall. Yehudah has their respect. He has the potential to influence them. It is within his ability to bring Yosef home, but Yehudah does not utilize that ability. His inaction as a leader allows Yosef to be sold and costs Yehudah, at least temporarily, the respect of his brothers.

While we are all aware of the dangers of an inflated sense of self, reading this Rashi reminds us that a lack of self-confidence and a deflated self-esteem can be equally detrimental. Had Yehudah acted as a leader, fully and honestly recognizing the power that he had to sway his brothers, this story could have ended differently.

Inserting the story of Yehudah at this point is the Torah's way of encouraging each and every one of us to look at all of the wonderful skills, talents, and abilities with which we have been blessed and to consider honestly and accurately all that we are capable of achieving. It is with this healthy self-esteem and self-confidence that we will be best able to deal with the difficult situations in our own lives. May we be Zocheh to recognize our Berachot and to use them to serve Hashem and our fellow men.

BITZUA: GOOD OR BAD?

by *Yonason Rutta* (20)

In this week's Parashah, Parashat VaYeishev, the Torah records the sale of Yosef: "VaYomer Yehudah El Echav Mah Betza Ki Naharog Et Achinu VeChisinu Et Damo", "And Yehudah said to his brothers, 'What is the gain if we slay our brother and cover up his blood?'" (BeReishit 37:26).

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 6b) attempts to connect the aforementioned Pasuk to another Pasuk in Tehillim, "Ki Hileil Rasha Al Ta'avat Nafsho U'Botzei'a Beireich Ni'eitz Hashem", "For the wicked man boasts about the desire of his soul, and the robber congratulates himself for having blasphemed the Lord" (Tehillim 10:3). Rabi Meir bases the connection on the fact that the language of "Bitzu'a" is only found throughout Tanach in these two Pesukim. "Ni'eitz Hashem", the thief's blasphemy of God (in Tehillim), refers

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to the act of selling initiated by Yehudah in this week's Parashah. The mere suggestion to sell Yosef is considered to be a negative action on Yehuda's account. However, others in the Gemara disagree with Rabi Meir's connection. They explain that the Pasuk in Tehillim refers to something else entirely, and thus do not consider Yehuda's actions to be a transgression.

What exactly lies at the heart of the Machloket within the Gemara? Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l (Sefer Kol Ram, VaYeishev) explains that the varied opinions disagreed about the nature of Yehuda's evaluation of his brothers. On the one hand, one could say that Yehudah didn't think that his brothers were merciful, and thought that if he suggested that they return Yosef to Ya'akov, they would surely refuse, making it a case of Safek Pikuach Nefesh (due to the fact that there were snakes and scorpions in the pit in which they were holding Yosef; see Rashi to 37:24). Therefore, the selling of Yosef would be justifiable, as it was an attempt to save his life. However, on the other hand, one could say that Yehudah did think his brothers were Ba'alei Rachamim (merciful), but thought that selling Yosef was a better idea. According to this latter evaluation, the sale of Yosef was an error on Yehuda's part. Therefore, we can now explain the Machloket in the Gemara: Rabi Meir thought that Yehudah evaluated his brothers in the latter way, thereby performing an act of "blasphemy", and the other opinions thought that Yehudah evaluated his brothers the first way (i.e. his actions were justified).

However, a question still remains. According to Rav Moshe Feinstein's interpretation of Rabi Meir's opinion, what exactly would be the thought process of Yehudah in selling Yosef? One could not say that Yehudah sold Yosef out of a sense of anger towards him, because the Pasuk afterwards records Yehudah as saying that, "*Lechu LeNimkirenu LeYishmi'eilim VeYadeinu Al Tehi Bo, Ki Achinu Vesarainu Huh, VaYishmi'u Echav*", "'Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but our hand shall not be upon him, for he is our brother, our flesh.' And his brothers hearkened." (BeReishit 37:27)

Perhaps a potential resolution can be found through an application of a general Tanach principle. The Pasuk in Mishlei states "*Palgei Mayim Lev Melech BeYad Hashem, Al Kal Asher Yachpotz Yatenu*", "A king's heart is like rivulets of water in Hashem's hand; wherever He wishes, He turns it." Throughout

Tanach, Hashem influences kings to set certain events into motion. For example, and most famously, Hashem hardened Paraoth's heart to ensure that the 10 Makkot would have maximum effect. Less famously, Rechavam Melech Yehudah acted rather foolishly at the beginning of his Malchut (he did not listen to the complaints of the people, and listened to inexperienced advisors, among other things). Melachim 12:15 records that Rechavam did not act of his own accord: "*VeLo Shama HaMelech El Ha'Am Ki Haitah Sibah Mei'im Hashem Le'Ma'an Hakim Et DeVaro Asher Diber Hashem BeYad Achiyah HaShiloni El Yeravam ben Nevat*", "The king did not listen to the people; for Hashem had brought it about in order to fulfill the promise that He had made through Achiyah HaShiloni to Yeravam ben Nevat." As the Nevuah of the splitting of the kingdom had to come true (see Malbim on Melachim I 11:30), Hashem influenced Rechavam's actions. Likewise, Yehuda, the genealogical origin of Malchut, was influenced by Hashem in his decision to sell Yosef. The Brit Bein HaBetarim included the Bnei Yisrael's enslavement in Mitzraim (BeReishit 15:13, "*Ki Geir Yihiyeh Zaracha Be'Eretz Lo Lahem Va'Avadum...*"), and Hashem initiated this process through the sale of Yosef.

DO DENTAL PRODUCTS REQUIRE A HECHSHER? PART I

by Dr. Ephraim Rudolph ('98)

The issue of whether dental products require a Hechsher (rabbinic kashrut certification) is hotly debated. Since they are not food items, and therefore not subject to the laws of Kashrut, many authorities ridicule or scoff at the idea that dental products would require a Hechsher. Yet there are still a significant number of Poskim who believe that dental products certainly would require a Hechsher, because toothpaste and mouthwash do contain ingredients that can be considered to be food. One of them, glycerin, is not kosher. Therefore, perhaps toothpaste and mouthwash would require a Hechsher to clarify that they do not contain any glycerin.

However, the question remains as to whether the glycerin is rendered *Nifsal*, inedible, due to being mixed with the other non-food ingredients. Non-kosher food that has become inedible, or "*Aino Raui Le'Achilat Adam*," "not fit for human consumption," is permitted to be consumed¹. Therefore, even though toothpaste and mouthwash

¹ Avodah Zarah 67b-68a

father. The Noda BeYehudah brings a proof from the Rama quoted earlier. The Noda BeYehudah notes that the Rama distinguishes only between a Biblical prohibition, Yayin Nesech and a rabbinic prohibition, Stam Yainam. But the Rama does not distinguish between forbidden wines and foods, because you may not even taste the foods.

The Rivash explained that tasting non-kosher food is prohibited because they may inadvertently swallow a little bit of the food “and violate a biblical prohibition.” Therefore, maybe we could postulate that the Rivash only prohibits tasting if it might cause a biblical violation but not a rabbinic prohibition.

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (Har Tzvi Responsum 95) is lenient and does not require a Hechsher on toothpaste. He notes that the Rivash prohibited tasting food because someone may come to consume some of the forbidden items. Therefore, one can suggest (despite the wording of the Rivash) that we should even be concerned about swallowing foods that are biblically prohibited. However, one is not allowed to eat *Nifsal* foods because of “*Achshavai*”. The person eating the inedible food subjectively considers this spoiled food to be consumable. Toothpaste, however, has an unpleasant taste, and therefore nobody considers it to be an edible food. Rav Herschel Schachter explains that *Achshavai* applies only when the individual has intent to eat it as food. With regards to toothpaste, the issue is accidentally swallowing something, so *Achshavai* does not apply (Mishna Berurah 442:45) Furthermore, the Mishna Berurah (442:43) and Chazon Ish Or Hachaim (116:8) write that *Achshavai* does not apply when the *Nifsal* item is mixed with other items. Therefore, if toothpaste and mouthwash are not considered food, they should not require a Hechsher.

However there are some who clearly disagree even with this distinction. The Peri Chadash (108:22) vehemently disagrees with the Tzemach Tzedek. He believes that when the Rabbis prohibited eating certain types of food, they forbade even tasting the food. For instance, the prohibition against eating *Nifsal* food also included tasting such items. Additionally the Peri Megadim (MZ 98:1) argues that tasting food is not rabbinically prohibited but Biblically prohibited.⁷ He quotes the Gemara (Chullin) which

⁷The Peri Megadim takes issue with many points of the Rivash's responsum. He notes the Gemara (Berachot 14a) which concludes that one is allowed to taste something on a fast day. But if there is a concern that one may swallow inadvertently, then it should be prohibited. The Peri Megadim attempts to answer that fast days are a Rabbinic prohibition, seemingly in agreement with the Tzemach Tzedek. But the

discusses where the prohibition of actualizes itself, in the stomach or the throat. Since we answer that it is the throat, if the throat receives any benefit, the prohibition has been violated. The Rambam (Machalot Asurut 14:6) writes that any food stuck in the gums constitutes the volume necessary to violate the prohibition. The Peri Megadim states that therefore any non-kosher food in the mouth is considered as if it is providing Hana'ah, benefit, to the throat and is considered a biblical violation. If the Peri Megadim is correct that one of the prohibitions is biblical in nature, then the entire leniency of the Tzemach Tzedek vanishes (since it was predicated upon having two rabbinic prohibitions). Also, the rabbinic prohibition would be patterned after the biblical ones, so food automatically providing benefit to the throat also applies to the rabbinic prohibitions.⁸

There may be another reason to argue that the Kashrut of toothpaste involves a biblical prohibition. This whole discussion is presupposing that the proper way to brush teeth is to brush and spit out the toothpaste. But there have been relatively new instructions for brushing teeth, especially for those who experience many cavities. One should brush their teeth, but leave the toothpaste to allow the fluoride to absorb into the teeth. If this is the case then the concern is no longer just in the realm of tasting, but it is very likely that minute amounts of toothpaste will be swallowed. Therefore, according to those who say these items are food, brushing with toothpaste would no longer be a rabbinical concern but maybe a Biblical concern. Also, the Tzemach Tzedek's leniency would not apply for those who are lenient and hold that these items are not food, then, and one would need to rely on Rav Frank and Rav Schachter to allow for leaving the toothpaste on one's teeth overnight.

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Peri Megadim continues that accepting fast days is like a vow and may have Biblical ramifications. If so then why is tasting allowed?

⁸ There would be no problem when it comes to the allowance of tasting on a fast day, because eating on a fast day is not based on benefit of the throat, but removing hunger in the stomach.