



Vayechi

GETTING THE JOB DONE: MARKS OF A TRUE LEADER

When It Comes to Leadership, Results Matter

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayechi

Jacob lives the final seventeen years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children but is prevented from doing so.

Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators, and kings; priests will come from Levi; scholars from Issachar;

seafarers from Zebulun; schoolteachers from Simeon; soldiers from Gad; judges from Dan; olive growers from Asher; and so on. Reuben is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage bed"; Simeon and Levi, for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Naftali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

A large funeral procession, consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt, and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the

Machpelah Cave in Hebron.

Joseph, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "G-d will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land which He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Question

Leadership is not just about what kind of speech someone gives. So what, really, is the defining element of leadership? What are we looking for?

TEXT 1A

Genesis 49:3–4

ג. ראובן בְּכֹרִי אַתָּה, כַּחַי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי, יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת
וְיִתֵּר עָז:

ד. פַּחַז כַּמַּיִם אֵל תֹּמֵר כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ, אֲזִ
חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֵה

3. Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first of my might. [You should have been] superior in rank and superior in power.

4. [You have] the restlessness of water; [therefore,] you shall not have superiority, for you ascended upon your father's couch; then you profaned [Him who] ascended upon my bed.

Rashi explains that Yaakov was telling Reuven that as the firstborn, his tribe was supposed to be the “superior one,” the one designated to fill the seat of Jewish monarchy. Alas, due to his “restlessness,” he sinned, and in so doing, he forfeited the privilege of the kingship forever:



TEXT 1B

Rashi, ad loc.

"פחזו כמים": הפחזו והבהלה אשר מהרת להראות
כעסך, כמים הללו הממהרים למרוצתם, לכך.

"אל תותר": אל תרבה ליטול כל היתרות הללו שהיו
ראויות לך. ומהו הפחז אשר פחזת?

"כי עלית משכבי אביך אז חללת": אותו שם שעלה על
יצועי, והיא השכינה שהיה דרכה להיות עולה על
יצועי.

"[You have] the restlessness of water." The restlessness and haste with which you hastened to display your anger, similar to water that hastens on its course. Therefore:

"You shall not have superiority." You shall no longer receive all these superior positions that were fit for you. Now what was the restlessness that you exhibited?

"For you ascended upon your father's couch; then you profaned." That Name that ascended my couch: this is the *Shechinah*, which was accustomed to going up on my bed.

TEXT 2

Talmud, Shabbat 55b

תנא, רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר: . . . מה אני מקיים
"וישכב את בלהה פילגש אביו" (בראשית לה, כב)?
עלבון אמו תבע. אומר: אם אחות אמי היתה צרה לאמי,
שפחת אחות אמי תהא צרה לאמי?
עמד ובלבל את מצעה.

It was taught in a Baraita that Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said, . . . “What is the meaning of the verse ‘And Reuben lay with Bilhah, his father’s concubine’ (Genesis 35:22)? [It does not mean that he lay with her literally. Rather,] it means Reuben protested the affront to his mother. He said, ‘If my mother’s sister Rachel was a rival to my mother, will my mother’s sister’s concubine be a rival to my mother?’”

He immediately stood and rearranged her bed so that Jacob would enter Leah’s tent.

TEXT 3A

Genesis 49:9–10

ט. גֹּר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה מִטֶּרֶף בְּנֵי עָלִיתָ, כָּרַע רִבֵּץ כְּאַרְיֵה
וּכְלָבִיא מִי יְקִימוֹנוּ:

י. לֹא יִסּוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה וּמַחֲקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו, עַד כִּי
יָבֹא שִׁילֹה וְלוֹ יִקְהַת עַמִּים:

9. A cub [and] a grown lion is Judah. From the prey, my son, you withdrew. He crouched, rested like a lion, and like a lion, who will rouse him?

10. The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the student of the law from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him will be a gathering of peoples.

TEXT 3B

Rashi, ad loc.

בני עלית: סלקת את עצמך, ואמרת: "מה בצע וגו'"
(בראשית לז, כו).

"My son, you withdrew." You withdrew yourself and said, "What is the gain [if we slay our brother and cover up his blood]?" (Genesis 37:26).

TEXT 4

Genesis 38:25–26

כה. היא מוצאת, והיא שְׁלָחָה אֶל חָמִיהָ לֵאמֹר, לְאִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר אֵלֶּה לוֹ אֲנֹכִי הָרָה. וּתְאֶמֶר, הֲכֵר נָא לְמִי הַחֲתָמֹת
וְהַפְּתִילִים וְהַמָּטָה הָאֵלֶּה:

כו. וַיִּכַּר יְהוּדָה, וַיֹּאמֶר צְדָקָה מִמְּנִי, כִּי עַל כֵּן לֹא
נִתְּתִיהָ לְשֵׁלָח בְּנִי. וְלֹא יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ:

25. She was taken out, and she sent to her father-in-law, saying, “From the man to whom these belong I am pregnant,” and she said, “Please recognize whose signet ring, cloak, and staff are these.”

26. Then Judah recognized [them], and he said, “She is right, [it is] from me because I did not give her to my son Shelah.” But he no longer continued to be intimate with her.

Judah's courage to publicly admit his sin and bear the humiliation rather than send someone to death earned him and his descendants the privilege of the Jewish monarchy.



TEXT 5A

Ibid. 37:19–22

יט. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו, הֲיֵנָה בֹּעֵל הַחֲלֹמוֹת הַלְּזָה בָּא:

כ. וַעֲתָה לְכוּ וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנִשְׁלַכְהוּ בְּאֶחָד הַבְּרוֹת וְאָמְרֵנוּ
חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָהוּ, וְנִרְאָה מָה יִהְיֶה חֲלֹמֹתָיו:

כא. וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיִּצְלָהוּ מִיָּדָם, וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִכְנֹו נַפְשׁ:

כב. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְהֵם רְאוּבֵן אֵל תִּשְׁפְּכוּ דָם, הַשְּׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ
אֶל הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבָּר וַיֵּד אֵל תִּשְׁלַחוּ בּוֹ, לְמַעַן
הִצִּיל אֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם לְהַשִּׁיבוֹ אֶל אָבִיו:

19. So [the brothers] said one to the other, “Behold, that dreamer is coming.

20. “So now, let us kill him, and we will cast him into one of the pits, and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him,’ and we will see what will become of his dreams.”

21. But Reuben heard, and he saved him from their hand[s], and he said, “Let us not deal him a deadly blow.”

22. And Reuben said to them, “Do not shed blood! Cast him into this pit, which is in the desert, but do not lay a hand upon him,” in order to save him from their hand[s], to return him to his father.

Judah's courage to publicly admit his sin and bear the humiliation rather than send someone to death earned him and his descendants the privilege of the Jewish monarchy.



TEXT 5B

Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah*
84:19

וְהֵיכֵן הָיָה? . . . רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר: בְּשִׁקּוֹ וּבְתַעֲנִיתוֹ.

Where was Reuben when Joseph was sold? . .
. Rabbi Eliezer said, “He was occupied with
his sackcloth and ashes.”

TEXT 5C

Genesis 37:29–30

וכט. וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר וְהִנֵּה אֵין יוֹסֵף בַּבּוֹר, וַיִּקְרַע
אֶת בְּגָדָיו:

ל. וַיָּשָׁב אֶל אָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר, הִיָּלֵד אֵינְנוּ, וְאֲנִי אָנֹכִי אָנִי בָּא:

29. And Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he rent his garments.

30. And he returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone! And I, where will I go?”

By definition, being a king means presiding over the people and leading them. “Royalty” is meaningless, and in fact cannot exist, unless there is a subordinate nation over whom someone is king.



TEXT 6

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneerson, *Sefer
Hamaamarim* 5700, pp.
22–25

הנה ספירת המלכות חלוקה משארי הספירות. ויובן זה
מכחות הנפש, דבמדת החסד הנה עצם המדה יכולה
שתהיה גם בלי זולת שמקבל את החסד, דמי שהוא
איש טוב בעצם הרי יש בו הטוב והחסד בליבו,
וכשיהיה מי שנצרך לו הנה ישפיע לו מחסדו וטובו.

וגם התעוררות מדת החסד יכולה להיות בלי זולת,
וכמו אברהם אבינו עליו השלום, הרי היה תמיד
בהתעוררות בחסד, וכשהרתיח הקדוש ברוך הוא את
העולם שלא להטריחו באורחים, היה בצער מזה, לפי
שתמיד עמד בהתעוררות דמת החסד . . . אבל במדת
המלכות שהיא כח ההתנשאות שבנפש . . . אי אפשר
להיות בלי זולת, וכמו שאנו רואים במוחש דמי שהוא
נמצא במדבר שמם שאין שם אנשים, לא יתעורר
במדת ההתנשאות. הרי דבזה חלוקה מדת ההתנשאות
משארי המדות.

The *sefirah* of royalty is different from the other *sefirot*. This can be explained in terms of the qualities of the human soul: In the case of the attribute of kindness, it can exist even if there is no beneficiary of that generosity. One who is inherently a good person has goodness and kindness in their heart, and if they happen to encounter someone who needs it, they will extend that kindness and goodness.

Moreover, this internal quality of kindness can manifest as a feeling, even if it isn't directed at anyone per se, as seen in the case of Patriarch Abraham, who always experienced the feeling of kindness. Therefore, after Abraham's circumcision, when G-d made it exceptionally hot outside to dissuade passersby from burdening Abraham, it bothered him because the kindness was manifest within him. . . . However, the attribute of royalty, which is the soul quality of preeminence . . . cannot exist without another person. As we see empirically, someone lost in a barren desert devoid of other people does not experience the attribute of preeminence.

TEXT 7

Midrash, *Pirkei Rabbi
Eliezer* 11

הָעָם מְמַלְכִין אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְאֵין הַמֶּלֶךְ מְמַלִּיךְ אֶת עַצְמוֹ
אִם אֵין הָעָם מְמַלְכִין אוֹתוֹ.

The nation appoints the king, and the king cannot
appoint himself if they do not appoint him.

TEXT 8

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Melachim 2:6

כְּדָרָךְ שֶׁחֶלַק לוֹ הַכְּתוּב הַכְּבוֹד הַגָּדוֹל, וְחַיֵּב הַפֶּלַח
בְּכַבּוּדוֹ - כִּי צְנִיחוּ לְהִיּוֹת לְפָנָיו בְּקִרְבּוֹ שֶׁפֶל וְחֶלְלָה,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְלִבִּי חֶלְלָה בְּקִרְבִּי" (תְּהִלִּים קט, כב). וְלֹא
יִנְהַג גְּסוּת לֵב בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יִתֵּר מִדָּאִי, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "לִבְלִתִּי
רוּם לִכְבוֹ מֵאֶחָיו" (דְּבָרִים יז, כ). וְיִהְיֶה חוֹנֵן וּמְרַחֵם
לְקִטְנִים וְגְדוֹלִים, וְיֵצֵא וְיִבֹּא בְּחֶפְצֵיהֶם וּבְטוֹבָתָם,
וְיַחֲוֶס עַל כְּבוֹד קָטָן שֶׁבְּקִטְנִים.

וְכִשְׁמַדְבֵּר אֶל כָּל הַקְּהָל בְּלִשׁוֹן רַבִּים - יְדַבֵּר רַפוּת,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "שָׁמְעוּנִי אַחֵי וְעַמִּי" (דְּבָרִי הַיְמִים א כח, ב),
וְאוֹמֵר: "אִם הַיּוֹם תִּהְיֶה עֶבֶד לְעַם הַזֶּה וְגו'" (מְלָכִים א
יב, ז). לְעוֹלָם יִתְנַהֵג בְּעֲנֻה וְיִתְרָה.

Just as the Torah has granted the king great honor and obligated everyone to revere him, so, too, has it commanded him to be lowly and empty at heart, as it is written [regarding King David], "My heart is a void within me" (Psalms 109:22). Nor should he treat Israel with overbearing haughtiness, as it is written, "He should not lift up his heart above his brothers" (Deuteronomy 17:20). He should be gracious and merciful to the small and the great, involving himself in their good and welfare. He should protect the honor of even the humblest of men.

When he speaks to the people as a community, he should speak gently, as it is written, "Listen, my brothers and my people . . ." (I Chronicles 28:2). Similarly, it is written, "If today, you will be a servant to these people . . ." (I Kings 12:7). He should always conduct himself with great humility.

Yaakov told Reuven that what cost him the monarchy was how he “hastened to display his anger” at his father for what he perceived to be an affront to his mother’s honor. Reuven crossed a line he should not have crossed and mixed into his father’s personal affairs.



TEXT 9

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot*
15, p. 444

דער ענין פון "פחז כמים . . . מהרת להראות כעסך"
[אז ווי נאר ס'איז ביי אים אויסגעקומען אז משכבי
אביו דארפן זיין באהל לאה, איז בא עם געווארן כעס
- אף א צווייטן - און ער האט דאס געטאן תיכף ומיד
("מהרת להראות כעסך") און מבלבל געווען יצועי
אביו (ביי א צווייטן)] איז א הנהגה וואס איז בניגוד
צום זארגן פאר טובת זולתו.

[Reuben] had the "the restlessness of water" and
"hastened to display his anger." After concluding that
his father's bed belonged in Leah's tent, he got upset
at someone else, and acted swiftly and immediately .
. . . to interfere with his father's bed (thus hurting
another person). This behavior is the opposite of
helping others.

TEXT 10

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Ibid.*, pp. 444–
445

דער חילוק צווישן "מטרף בני עלית" פון יהודה און
ראובן: דורך "מטרף בני עלית" פון יהודה איז לפועל
ארויסגעקומען א הצלה פאר א צווייטן:

יהודה'ס זאגן "מה בצע גוי" האט מציל געווען יוסף'ן
פון "נהרגנו", און ס'האט עם ארויסגענומען פון דעם
בור (וואס "נחשים ועקרבים יש בו") . . . בא ראובן,
הגם אז זיין . . . כוונה זיינען געווען גרעסערע ווי
יהודה'ס, איז דאס אבער א מעלה אין אים כשלעצמו,
ניט בשייכות צו טובת והצלת הזולת: דאס וואס ער
האט געזאגט "לא נכנו נפש . . . השליכו אותו אל
הבור הזה . . . למען הציל אותו מידם להשיבו אל
אביו", ווייזט אויף כוונתו — אבער לפועל איז יוסף
דורכדעם ניט ארויס פון סכנת מיתת רעב

The difference between Judah's "withdrawing from prey" and Reuben's is this: When Judah "withdrew from prey," he actually saved another person.

When Judah said, "What is the gain," he saved Joseph from the brothers' plan to kill him, and he took him out of the pit (which "contained snakes and scorpions"). . . . Although Reuben's intentions were nobler than Judah's, that has to do with his own personal qualities, and has nothing to do with his ability to benefit and save others: When he said "Let us not deal him a deadly blow. . . . Cast him into this pit. . . ." in order to save him from their hand[s], to return him to his father," it tells us about his intentions. But practically, that didn't extricate Joseph from the danger of starving to death.

TEXT 11A

Rashi, Genesis 37:22

למען הציל אותו: רוח הקודש מעידה על ראובן שלא
אמר זאת אלא להציל אותו, שיבא הוא ויעלנו משם.
אמר: אני בכור וגדול שבכולן, לא יתלה הסרחון אלא
בי.

“To save him.” *The ru’ach hakodesh* testifies for Reuben that he said this only to save him, so that he would [be able to] come and take him out of there. He said, “I am the firstborn and the eldest of them all. The sin will be attributed only to me.”

Question

Why was Reuven so worried about Yosef?

Answer

Because he realized that if anything happened to Yosef, “The sin would be attributed only to me.” It seems he was more worried about his own reputation than about Yosef’s well-being.

TEXT 11B

Genesis 37:29–30

כט. וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר וְהִנֵּה אֵין יוֹסֵף בַּבּוֹר, וַיִּקְרַע
אֶת בְּגָדָיו:

ל. וַיָּשָׁב אֶל אָחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר, הִילָד אֵינְנוּ, וְאֲנִי אָנֹכִי אֲנִי בָּא:

29. And Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he rent his garments.

30. And he returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is gone! And I, where will I go?”

TEXT 11C

Rashi, ad loc.

אנה אני בא": אנה אברח מצערו של אבא.

"Where will I go?" Where will I flee from father's pain?

TEXT 12

Genesis 42:21–22

כא. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו, אַכְּלֵ אֲשָׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ עַל
אָחִינוּ אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוּ אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא
שָׁמְעָנוּ, עַל כֵּן בָּאָה אֵלֵינוּ הַצָּרָה הַזֹּאת:

כב. וַיַּעַן רְאוּבֵן אֶתֶם לֵאמֹר, הֲלוֹא אָמַרְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם
לֵאמֹר אַל תִּחַטְּאוּ בְיָלֶד וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם, וְגַם דָּמוֹ הִגָּה
נִדְרָשׁ:

21. And they said to one another, “Indeed, we are guilty for our brother, that we witnessed the distress of his soul when he begged us, and we did not listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us.”

22. And Reuben answered them, saying, “Didn’t I tell you, saying, ‘Do not sin against the lad,’ but you did not listen? Behold, his blood, too, is being demanded!”

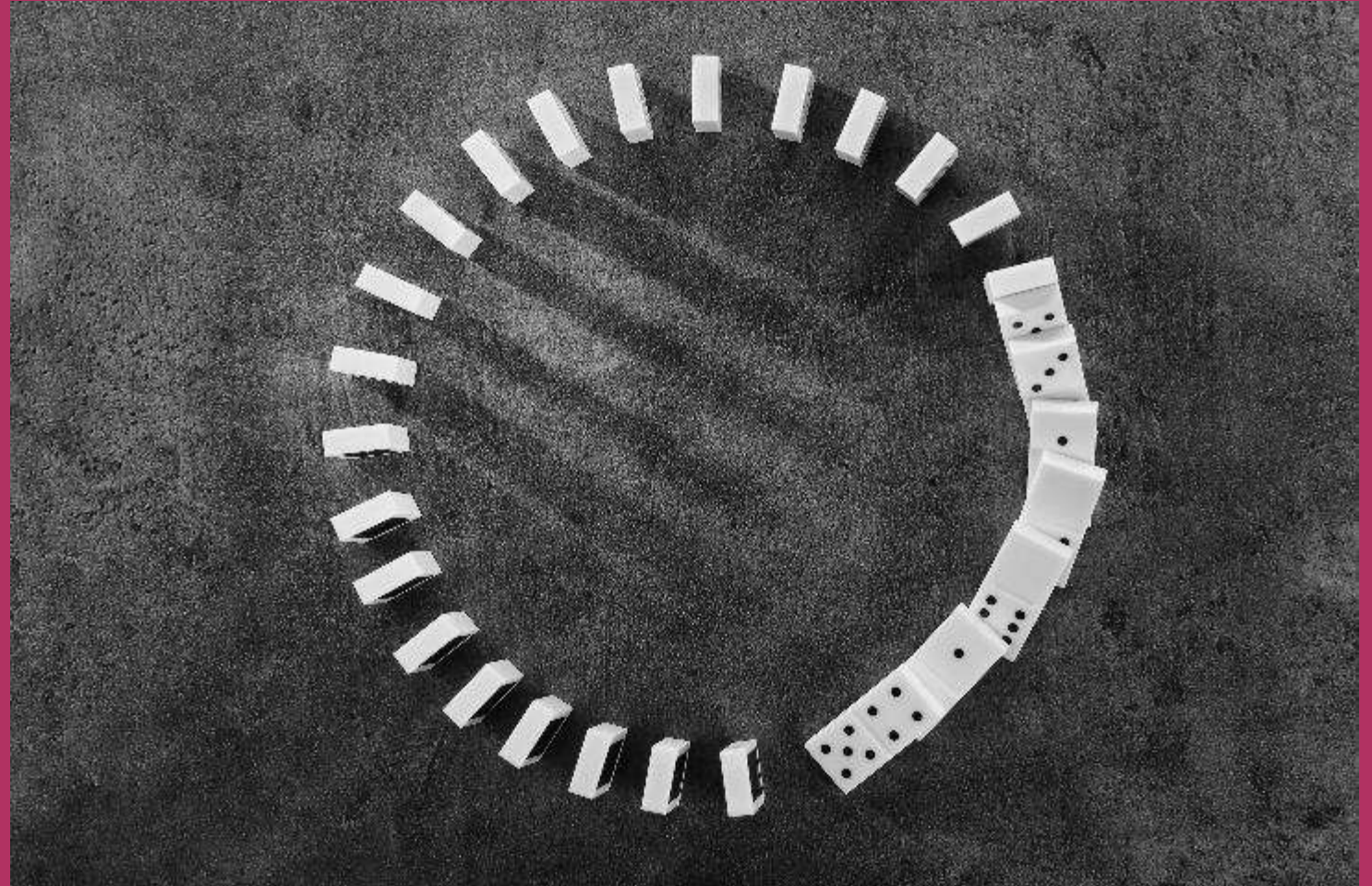
TEXT 13

Rabbi Chaim ibn Atar, *Or
Hachayim*, Genesis, ad loc.

שבא להשיב למה שאמרו שהצרה באה על אשר לא
רחמו על אחיהם בהתחננו וגו', ולטעם זה יכנס גם
ראובן. לזה ענה ואמר, והוא אומרו "ויען ראובן אותם
לאמר", כי הוא לא יחשבו לו עון על זה, כי הלא
אמרתי אליכם אל תחטאו בילד

This was his response to their statement that the reason this trouble befell them was because they failed to have compassion upon their brother when he begged them, etc. In this reason, they included Reuben. Reuben thus responded and told them that he didn't have a part in the sin because "Didn't I tell you, saying, 'Do not sin against the lad'?"

It was Yehudah's confession that inspired Reuven to confess his own sin of interfering with his father's marriage.



TEXT 14A

Talmud, Sotah 7b

יהודה הודה ולא בוש, מה היה סופו? נחל חיי העולם הבא. ראובן הודה ולא בוש, מה היה סופו? נחל חיי העולם הבא . . . מי גרם לראובן שהודה? יהודה.

Judah admitted [that he sinned with Tamar] and was not embarrassed to do so, and what was his end? He inherited the life of the World to Come. Reuben admitted [that he sinned with his father's bed] and was not embarrassed, and what was his end? He too inherited the life of the World to Come. . . . Who served as the impetus for Reuben to admit his sin? It was Judah.

TEXT 14B

Rabbi Chezkihah ben
Manoach, *Chizkuni*,
Genesis 33:7

ראובן אודי קודם, אלא בצנעה אודי, בשקו ובתעניתו,
אבל בפרהסיא לא אודי. וכשהודה יהודה ואמר "צדקה
ממני", עמד ראובן ופרסם הודאתו ואמר: אף אני
בלבלתי יצועי אבי.

Reuben at first admitted his sin privately, with sackcloth and fasting, but he did not confess publicly. However, when Judah said, "She is right, [it is] from me," Reuben got up and publicly confessed, "I too [have sinned]; I interfered with my father's bedding."

TEXT 14C

Talmud, Sotah 7b.

בשלמא יהודה דאודי כי היכי דלא תישרף תמר, אלא
ראובן למה ליה דאודי? והאמר רב ששת: חציף עלי
(בר ישראל) דמפריט חטאיה?
כי היכי דלא ליחשדו אחוהי.

Granted, with regard to Judah, it was proper that he admitted his sin in public, so that Tamar would not be burned. But why did Reuben admit his sin [in public]? Didn't Rav Sheshet say, "I consider one who specifies his sins in public to be brazen [, as one who does so indicates that he is not embarrassed by his actions]"?

The reason was so that his brothers should not be suspected [of having committed the deed].

KEY POINTS

1. By mixing into his father's marital affairs, Reuben forfeited the monarchy. Instead, it went to Judah because he saved Joseph's life, and because he did *teshuvah* for his sin with Tamar.
2. Reuben also saved Joseph's life, and also did *teshuvah* for his sin, but in a way that showed he wasn't fit for royalty.
3. A king is above the people and rules over them, but he is also beholden to them because they give him his power.
4. Therefore, a king is someone who put his subjects' needs above all else and actually solves their problems. Noble personal qualities like piety and good intentions are not enough.
5. Reuben had good intentions but didn't solve problems. When he tried to protect his mother's honor, Reuben hurt more than he helped.

KEY POINTS

6. Though he tried to save Joseph, Joseph was still in danger. Though Reuben did *teshuvah*, he hurt his brothers by not confessing publicly, leaving a shadow of suspicion on them.
7. We are all leaders in some way. True leadership means prioritizing others' needs above our own, and prioritizing results above intentions.

