

Kehillah

Chiddushim and Insights for Shabbos | 7 Tevet, 5783 | 2



Two Leadership Models: Top Down and From Within

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer

Why was the leadership of Yehuda perpetuated, while that of Yosef did not last?

The opening of our Parasha describes an encounter between two great leaders, Yehuda and Yosef. It is a meeting to which the Midrash applies the Pasuk, “For behold, the kings have assebled” (Tehillim 48:5). Both Yehuda and Yosef were kings; Yehuda led his brothers, while they all bowed before Yosef. And yet, only one of them perpetuated the leadership within the Jewish people.

While Yosef received the double inheritance reserved for firstborns (his two children become tribes), Yehuda alone was able to bequeath the kingship to his offspring. As Yaakov Avinu notes on his deathbed, “The scepter shall not depart from Yehuda” (Bereishis 49:10). The lineage of David claimed the true kingship and we await its return with the coming of Mashiach.

What distinguishes one leadership from the other? Why was the one perpetuated while the other did not last?

It seems that Yehuda and Yosef represent two different leadership models. Yosef’s leadership was top-down. In the words of Yaakov Avinu, he was *abir Yaakov*, the power of the patriarch. Yosef thus continued the stature of our Forefathers into the next generation by begetting tribes – Efraim and Menashe. The Book of Bereishis, the book of the Forefathers, concludes only with the death of Yosef.

Indeed, Yosef’s relationship with his brothers was top-down from the beginning. His policing them and playing the role of informant, his dreams of grandeur and his brothers’ jealousy and resentment, and his rule from the dizzy height of the Egyptian throne – all these represent a top-down leadership that looks down upon subjects from above.

In contrast, Yehuda exemplified leadership from within. To cite again from Yaakov Avinu, “Yehuda, your brothers shall acknowledge you” (Bereishis 49:8). Yehuda’s power was not granted him from an external source but rather from the people. Later, his descendant Shlomo was able to declare before Hashem, “Your servant is among Your nation, which You chose” (I Melachim 3:8). This is quite unlike Shaul (from Binyamin) who was “taller than any of the people” (I Shmuel 9:2).

This is an entirely a different leadership model. It succeeded

where Reuven failed in convincing the brothers to spare Yosef and Yaakov to release Binyamin. Not for nothing does the Torah highlight how Yehuda sinned, yet knew how to repent and admit wrongdoing. Without eliminating the hierarchy that leadership demands, the brothers knew that he was “one of us.” Later, so was King David.

The Leadership that Lasts

Leadership from within is leadership that lasts. Rather than impose domination from above, it draws authority from the people; and rather than smitten subjects before a great monarch, it calls them to grow with a great leader. Yosef may continue to represent the Jewish People to the world (Mordechai did to Persia). The leadership, however, is Yehuda’s.

And what of today?

The Jewish tradition is well acquainted with leadership from within. Even concerning Chazal, the Rambam writes (Introduction to Mishnah Torah) that their binding authority draws from the universal acceptance of the Jewish People. Throughout the generations, rabbis and community leaders have emerged from within and led from among the people.

Moreover, we know the model from our personal lives. Whether as parents, family and community members, employers, and any other social situation, we appreciate the need for balance. Leadership, even hierarchical, is only effective if executed from within.

In our times, the democratic system accentuates this model. Notwithstanding weaknesses, democracies possess the inherent advantage of leadership from within. Yet, the model and its positive aspects require constant vigilance. As Alexis de Tocquville emphasizes throughout his *Democracy in America*, a democratic society is only as strong as the spirit of the people.

Perhaps as English-speakers with a heightened civic awareness, we have a special responsibility to ensure that here, in the Jewish State, our “leadership from within” (on local, municipal, and national levels) represents us truly and faithfully. It must be a Torah leadership, a leadership of integrity and trust, and a leadership dedicated to our core values. The more representative it is, the more stable and effective it will be.

Recognition is in the Mindset of the Beholder

Rabbi Yitzchak Adlerstein

Why did a small thing like the growth of a beard stop all the brothers from recognizing Yosef?

The moment that they met after their long separation, Yosef recognized his brothers. They, however, did not recognize him. R. Chisda explains that this was because when they last saw him he did not yet have a beard. R. Levi, however, approaches the Pasuk very differently. He reads it as, "He recognized them when they fell into his hand, although they had not recognized Yosef when he fell into their hands." What could this mean? They recognized Yosef all too well when he checked on them at his father's request on the fateful day that they sold him into slavery!

The two approaches, argues Rav Yechezkel Libshitz in *HaMidrash V'HaMaaseh*, do not oppose each other. In fact, one cannot be understood without the other. If a young person from a family of uneducated, menial workers, leaves town and returns decades later as an aging menial worker, people will recognize him. He may have grown a beard in the interim, and it may have turned white, but people will look at him and be able to recognize the young man they once knew.

Should that same person return to town as a cultured aristocrat, however, people will not make the association. The change in his physical features, coupled with a radical shift in his life-situation, will suffice to prevent people from seeing any resemblance.

When the brothers threw Yosef into the pit, they saw a young person of diminished value who preened over his good looks

The special closeness that Yaakov evinced with young Yosef cascaded into tragic consequences in the relationship with his brothers. Had they realized that Yaakov's special treatment of Yosef was an artifact of his birth position, they would not have been jealous. Birth order doesn't say anything about a person's essence. There is often a special, understandable place in the hearts of parents for their youngest child. The brothers, however, thought that Yaakov somehow implied that Yosef was better or more accomplished than they were. That led them to jealousy, which then turned to hatred. Jealousy and hatred cloud perception.

When the brothers threw Yosef into the pit, they saw

a young person of diminished value who preened over his good looks. They detected none of his greatness and saw only his faults. In their eyes, he was not somebody who would ever accomplish anything, and, moreover, he threatened to undermine the basic integrity of the family. When they later regretted their behavior and set out to search for him in Egypt, they looked for him, says a midrash, in the prostitutes' quarter.

Find him in a high position in Pharaoh's court was unthinkable. Had his features not changed over many years of absence, they would have recognized him nonetheless. But the growth of the beard sufficed to block the recognition. This is what R. Levi meant. Why did a small thing like the growth of a beard stop the brothers from recognizing Yosef? Because when they last saw him, they failed to recognize his true value. When they met Pharaoh's viceroy, each one of the brothers dismissed the glint of familiarity they saw. Seeing Yosef as the power behind the throne was just too incongruous, given their assessment; their minds completely shut down the possibility. Their understanding of him, however, was warped by the jealousy and hatred they had felt so many years earlier, even though it had long receded.

Greater after Death

Chazal tell us that *tzadikim* are greater after death than in life. Why is it, though, that whatever accomplishments and greatness that people find in a person only after his demise go unnoticed during his lifetime? The explanation is that we appreciate people only within a context. While a person lives among us, countervailing factors skew how we perceive them.

This often includes two factors. One is jealousy. We are jealous of others, however, only when we perceive them to be active competitors – but not after death. A second factor is hatred. A *tzaddik* often assumes a public role. This means that he will sometimes have to admonish wrongdoers. Some of those will hate him for it. He will sit on a *beis din* – and some litigants will lose, though they are convinced their claims are just. The jealousy and animosity cease after death, the veil of negativity lifts, and his sterling qualities can shine in their purity.

Much of the strife in our communities owes to distorted images of people we hold before our minds' eye. Were it not for our own small-mindedness, we would recognize their true worth and judge their actions far more favorably.

Asara b'Tevet and Reversing the Deterioration

Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Why do we fast on the day the siege of Jerusalem began, when the significant event was the eventual destruction of the Mikdash?

The month of Tevet opened with the conclusion of Chanukah, and in another few days we will be observing the fast of Asara b'Tevet.

The official reason given by the Mishna for the fast of Asara b'Tevet is the siege of Jerusalem by Nevuchadnetzar three years before the actual destruction of the Holy Mikdash. But on the face of it, the siege lost its significance once the walls were breached, and certainly after the Temple was destroyed. Why do we fast for this "opening shot" of the Destruction?

The *Ba'al Halachos Gedolos* (also cited in the Shulchan Aruch, *Orach Chaim* 580, based on *Masechet Sofrim*) describes an additional event connected with the day: "On the eighth of Tevet, the Torah was translated into Greek in the days of King Ptolemy (Talmi). It was as grave a day for the Jewish people as the day the Golden Calf was made, *for the Torah could not be adequately translated*. And darkness descended upon the world for three days."

Translating the Torah into Greek seems like a neutral act, possibly even a positive one, enabling more people of the time to have greater access to Torah wisdom. What was so terrible about this action, and what darkness was created that is being compared to the making of the Golden Calf? It appears that the darkness is connected to the specific language, which represents a full culture. In the Greek worldview, the only reality acknowledged is what is perceived with man's senses and understood with the tools of human intellect. No "givens" can precede or circumscribe the human perspective of reality. This philosophy, moreover, has served as the foundation for the development of modern wisdom. Humanity, with its self-centered goals, base instincts and personal, subjective understanding, takes center stage, and can be extrapolated even to Torah, limiting its understanding to that of other disciplines. This was the motivation of having the Torah translated into Greek.

But Torah is Divine wisdom, revealed to us by Hashem, and its understanding can be achieved only within *that* framework. It requires both striving for objectivity and character refinement, making the Torah student G-d-like and enabling the development of *Torah Shebe'al Peh*. This is the exact opposite of the Greek perspective.

Translating the Torah into Greek gave the false sense of the Torah's being accessible with no need for the struggle and character refinement that is required to access Divine Wisdom. The natural result is misinterpretation of the Torah, encapsulated in the critique that it simply "could not be translated in an adequate way."

Deterioration is a Gradual Process

The Torah provides us with the opportunity to illuminate the hidden realities of G-d's world. What King Talmi commissioned was a document to hide that illumination, replacing clarity of Divine revelation with the illusions of human instinct. Illusion replacing reality is the root of idolatry, hence the "Golden Calf" analogy. The translation of Torah into Greek, emptying it of its transcendent nature, is not an act of "understanding the world" but rather the creation of an independent world.

The culmination of the three days of darkness coincided with the anniversary of the siege of Jerusalem by Nevuchadnetzar centuries earlier, the event for which the formal fast was legislated. The common denominator was the principle that things of value are vulnerable to deterioration. Deterioration, entropy, is a gradual process that is not immediately perceptible. The fast of Asara B'Tevet was instituted to mourn deterioration rather than destruction. The failure to perceive deterioration and protect against it is the first step towards destruction.

In a world built on "Torah translated into Greek," fantasy overshadows reality, the shallow triumphs over depth, and we value surface over substance. It leads us to deterioration. We fast to remind us that we must invest hard work in reversing the deterioration we continue to witness in our connection to the most precious gift that G-d has given us – His Torah.



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Why Does Halacha Disapprove of Personal Servitude?

Rabbi Asher Meir

The Egyptians, faced with starvation, offered themselves as slaves. Yosef, however, accepted only their lands

In our Parasha, Yehuda boldly offers himself to the imperious Egyptian viceroy in place of his brother Binyamin, explaining that he vouched for his brother's return home and hence is personally responsible for his return. To what extent does Yehuda's promise to his father have halachic validity?

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 173b) learns from Yehuda's promise that an unconditional guarantor (*arev kablan*) of a loan has a valid obligation to the lender for the sum of the loan. This is rather different than the very personal nature of Yehuda's promise (to bring Binyamin home) and the sanction he was willing to suffer (substituting for Binyamin).

Perhaps surprisingly, in a scenario much more similar to that of Yehuda, where the promise is to bring the debtor to the judgment (similar to a modern bail bondsman), the Rambam (*Halvaa* 25:14) rules that there is no recourse against the bondsman. Even if he agrees to pay and then fails to deliver, the agreement is an *asmachta* (a nonbinding conditional agreement) and legally void.

The Raavad, however, does not agree: "However, it seems that one body is surety for the other, until [the lender] reaches a compromise with him." This approach seems congruent to our Parasha: A guarantor for a sum of money must deliver a sum of money; a guarantor for a person must "deliver" a person – if not the debtor, then himself.

Later authorities do not accept the Raavad's position empowering a person to stake his liberty. The reservations the Poskim have about the Raavad's ruling are one example of the far-reaching disapproval of halacha to any kind of personal servitude. Chazal root this aversion in our collective subjugation to Hashem, in the wake of the Exodus; it is a subjugation that pre-empts any other kind of servitude.

In particular, the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 10a) rules that a worker can not be compelled to work; he is allowed to retract even in the middle of the contract period. The worker is even exempt from the usual sanction dictating that if one side withdraws from an agreement he has "the lower hand" and must compensate the other party. The reason:

[A]s it is written: "For to Me the children of Israel

are slaves; they are My slaves whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 25:55), which indicates: They are My slaves, and not slaves of slaves, i.e., of other Jews.

The Ideal of Human Liberty

The Rema (*Choshen Mishpat* 333:3) cites the view of the Mordechai, who considered this ethical principle of freedom from servitude so important that he disapproves of any employment contract of more than three years duration, even though the worker is empowered to quit any time. Another example is the halachic ruling whereby a person cannot be compelled to work to pay off a debt (*Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat* 97:15); such compulsion would be an excessive infringement on the debtor's liberty.

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The ideal of human liberty applies at some level to all of humankind. We see in our Parasha that the Egyptians, faced with starvation, offered themselves as slaves to Pharaoh: "Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh" (*Bereshis* 47:19). But the Ramban points out that Yosef accepted only the land: "So Joseph gained possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh". Regarding the servitude, he merely "removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other."

Yosef understood that he had responsibility not only for his own family, but also for the entire Egyptian people, as he states, "Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people" (*Bereshis* 50:20). This responsibility included accustoming them – to the best of his ability – to high standards of human dignity and freedom.

Will Caring for My Son with Autism Hurt My Other Kids?

Rebbetzin Tamar Pfeffer

Question:

I have a child with autism that requires much attention and care. He is young and so are the rest of my children. I am afraid that caring for him might hurt the others in the future. Is this fear vindicated? The other kids love him, and he's an easy-going boy, but I am concerned for the future.

Response:

Dear Brave Mother,

First, I want you to know how much I respect you. You are a caring, thinking, and involved parent who wants to do all you can on behalf of your children in the present and the future.

Your question is very important, relating first and foremost to the domain of Emunah – faith in Hashem, faith that He is our Father, who loves us and takes care of us and believes in us at all times. He is by your side, accompanying you in every choice and decision and creating the reality that is best for you.

.....

***This is a basic principle in parenting.
Whoever gets more , is not more loved.
Very much not. The kids know it too,
they feel it***

.....

Having a child with autism does not hurt you or your family. Hashem is the origin of all goodness, and if this, too, came from Hashem, then it cannot be that your children will be inevitably harmed by the situation.

You ask whether caring for a child with autism might hurt the other kids – a question that comes up, in its own way, in virtually every family. All of us sometimes have a child that requires special attention. Does it necessarily hurt the other children? The answer, as most mothers eventually learn, is that it doesn't. Special attention given to one of the children is not hurtful, but rather part of the healthy dynamic of every family.

Every child has his own, individual path, and Hashem trusts us to care for every child according to his unique path. *Chanoch le'naar al pi darko*. Diversity among

siblings is the very beauty of a family. Parenting is the art of supporting children in all their variety – not in designing them to be the same, but in giving them the ability and power to develop in *different* ways. They need have nothing more in common than their family name. One needs a certain food, another certain clothing, and a child with autism needs more attention. This is what a family is about.

When parents are caring, know how to pause for reflection, and are attentive to the different needs of every child, the kids feel they have a secure place in their parents' hearts. Attention is not measurable because every child needs something else. It is the place a child has in his or her parents' heart – a place that cannot be measured by time or effort.

This is a basic principle in parenting. Whoever gets more gifts, attention, whatever, is not more loved. Very much not. The kids know it too, they feel it. The main thing is the attitude. Once parents confidently give whatever level of attention is necessary for every child, according to his or her needs (which change, of course, over time), kids will feel the safety, the calm, and the internal peace that their parents grant them.

Your family situation, the number of children and the existence of a child with autism, are a given. It isn't up to you. One of your children obviously requires more attention than the others. This is your reality. The faith in Hashem that gave you this role of raising your children also bequeaths power and self-confidence in your choices. It gives you the strength to stop, watch, listen, reflect and continue and to grant each one of the children what he or she needs.

I wish you much peace, happiness, and good health,

Tamar Pfeffer

Tamar Pfeffer is a parenting and relationship counsellor with years of experience, certified under Mrs. Rachel Arbus. Questions should be submitted to info@kehillah.org.il

Life after Miracle Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

As parents and as educators, the task at hand sometimes feels impossible.

I once accompanied a group of secular students to a "Discovery" seminar. For those of you who are not familiar with the seminar program, it is an exciting and impressive display of hidden codes in the Torah.

Based on the vilna Gaon's claim that everything, but truly everything, can be found in Bereishis, a group of Rabbis and mathematicians put it to the test and found hundreds of words encoded in their shortest skip (intervals of letters) in the Torah. The crowd was literally shrieking as they watched this glorious display of words appear before them. All of them, that is, except for Jill.

I asked Jill why she was so unenthusiastic, so unenthralled.

"I don't get you people," she said.

"If you're so sure that G-d is the Infinite Being, why are you so surprised that He can do crossword puzzles?"

Yet here we are, thousands of years later, still excited that Hashem can assist the Jews in their victory and make a jug of oil last 8 days.

Why are believing Jews so impressed by miracles?

To understand this, we have to examine some of our favorite miracles in Jewish history. We have Chanukah, of course. Then there's the miracles the Torah makes explicit like splitting the sea and the ten plagues, or those elaborated by the Midrash like Batya reaching out to Moshe or Pinchas carrying a body through a small door. The list goes on and on.

All these miracles have something in common. They were not a magic display wherein Hashem wows us with His tricks. They were a deviation from the natural rules of the world in response to an action performed by humans. Nachshon had to start walking even when the traverse was impossible. Moshe had to raise his staff. Batya had to reach out even when the reach was impossible.

All these miracles have something in common. They were not a magic display wherein Hashem wows us with His tricks

As parents and as educators, the task at hand sometimes feels impossible. Raising moral children in a world gone morally mad. Teaching our kids to do what's right in a world that's all about doing what feels good. Imbuing emotional health in a generation of emotional chaos.

Yet, we believe and have always believed in miracles. That means believing that we have to and can do our utmost to accomplish what is within the realm of the possible, and to know that when we have exhausted our natural efforts, Hashem, who has no limitations, will take over where we left off.

Chanukah was the last of the great canonised miracles. From now on, the Jewish people will not be granted open miracles. We will have to find the miracle hidden in the natural world, much as the military victory of against the Greeks. As we move into the winter *zman* and with Chanukah is behind us, we take hope in its message.

The Billboard Rabbi Shmuel Kimche

Martin made a quick calculation. He had \$90,000 in his savings account. Would he be crazy enough to spend it all?

350 Talmidim attended a wonderful Talmud Torah in Brooklyn, New York. This Talmud Torah was located just off the BQE Highway, and right across this highway stood a massive billboard.

Every day, after hours of sweet Torah learning that filled the minds and Neshamos of many talmidim, the boys left the school to be faced with... the billboard. Usually, the billboard contained silly and irrelevant commercial advertisements, but billboards tend to change.

One day, a truck came and plastered a new massive 60-foot picture on the board. To the horror of teachers and parents, the picture was very immodest – not *tzanua* at all! Every day, the boys still left the Talmud Torah, but now

they were faced with a picture that should not be anywhere near a Jewish home or school.

The school management were quite beside themselves. They figured that this will quickly pass, but it seemed that this ad had become a permanent fixture on the street! Time went by, and the ad remained.

Now listen to the amazing turn of events.

Martin, a frum member of the community, was driving down the highway. As he was driving, he couldn't help noticing the massive billboard (and its unsavory contents) on the side of the road. "That's New York for you," he thought silently to himself. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed dismissal at the Talmud Torah across the road, and watched with frustration as young boys streamed out of the



» school. Thoughts began swirling. “This can’t be allowed! This cannot continue!”.

That night, Martin was really bothered. How could it be that pure children at the Talmud Torah were exposed daily to such inappropriate content? He decided to act.

The next morning, on his way to work, as he passed the billboard, Martin took down the number of the advertising company and later called them up. “Hi. I saw you have a billboard on the highway just outside Brooklyn. How much would it cost to take down the ad on the board?” “Hi, Sir,” came the reply. “The billboard you’re calling about is one of our more expensive ones, on a highway with a large volume of viewers. To hire it would cost you \$1000 per day!”

Martin made a quick calculation. He had \$90,000 in his savings account. Would he be crazy enough to spend it all?

“If I was to wire you money to hire the billboard, would you be able to take it down within the next few hours? Like before the kids leave school?” “Yes, Sir. For the right price, we would start a new contract with you within the hour!”

Martin started trembling. “I’ll wire you \$90,000. I want the billboard for 90 days. I will send you the money within the hour, on condition that the ad is down before school is out today!”

With that, Martin continued to work, trembling and wondering whether this was the right thing. I guess the Torah says *be’kol me’odecha* – with all your resources – so you need to serve Hashem even with your savings. Martin wired the money. The ad and its offensive went down. An empty billboard.

The next day it was 88, then 87. People realised it was a countdown.

Later that day, the company called back – “Hey Mister. We took the picture down – but what do you want in its place? You just want to leave it blank? Time is running out. There are now only 89 days left! What should we put on the billboard?”

Martin hadn’t thought about that. “What do I want in its place?” he wondered. “Should we just make a countdown?” joked the agent. “Yes, that’s exactly it! Make a countdown! Tomorrow will be 89, then after that 88, all the way down to 1.”

The next day, a 60 foot “89” adorned the highway. The school management, as well as parents and teachers, breathed a deep sigh of relief, but everyone else was puzzled. 89? What kind of commercial is that??

The next day it was 88, then 87. People realised it was a countdown. Wow. What for? Everyone started talking about

the sign on the BQE. It became a news item – and puzzled the entire Brooklyn community. “Who’s investing all this money in a countdown?” The radio stations began picking up on it – and speculations began to go wild! “We have inside information...” “It must be...”

But of course, WE know it was Martin’s *mesirus nefesh*.

The billboard was down to “4” when the phonecall came in. Martin was sitting in his home when an agent called.

Martin started trembling. “I’ll wire you \$90,000. I want the billboard for 90 days. I will send you the money within the hour, on condition that the ad is down before school is out today!”

“Hi, my name is Andy, and I represent Coca Cola. Everyone is talking about your countdown. We called the advertising company, and they gave us your number. We don’t know where the countdown is heading, and we’re not interested. We want to do is to buy it from you! On the day after Day 1 we’ll display a huge Fountain of Coca Cola. For the spectacular campaign we’re willing to pay \$3 million.”

And so it was that Martin’s \$90,000 payment brought him an income of \$3,000,000. Is this simply another story of Hashgacha, or is there something deeper?

Martin felt deeply for Hashem and for the Jewish People. He was *Mekadesh Shem Shamayim*, but had no desire that people should know about it! The Kiddush Hashem was there for everyone to see, but it was done quietly.

Yehuda and Yosef. Two brothers. Two Leaders. Both were *Mekadesh Shem Shamayim*. Yosef did so in private, and Yehuda in Public. Yosef – the son of Rachel (whose characteristic is silence) – always wanting to remain private. Yehuda – the son of Leah (whose characteristic is public thanks-giving) – always leading in public.

The moment of connection is in *Vayigash*. Yosef is hidden behind the visor of viceroy. Yehudah steps forward and lays all his cards on the table. Both are consistent. Yosef in his hidden assisting role. Yehudah in his open assertive role.

We all hear about the Yehuda-type of Kiddush Hashem. We almost never find out about the Yosef-type.

Our Martin is quietly saving the day. When we make a Kiddush Hashem quietly, and no-one knows about it, Hashem rewards us secretly. We don’t know who Martin is. All we know is that investing in Kiddush Hashem is always a winning investment.

Parashas Vayigash - Playing Tricks

Is a person responsible for damage caused by *gerama*?

In the first *aliyah* of this week's Parsha we find Yosef in the middle of playing a clever trick on his brothers. They believe he is a cruel stranger about to make their brother Binyamin a slave. Yosef had a good reason for executing his plan. He needed to know if the brothers would protect Binyamin or abandon him as they abandoned Yosef years before. Sometimes, we might be tempted to play tricks on our friends and family. That is the topic of our story.

Once upon a time:

"Have a good time, girls! Be safe and don't open the door for anyone," called out Sarah and Rikki's mom as she left the house with their dad for an evening out. Sarah was left "in charge" as she was fifteen and had been babysitting for a little while. Her little sister, Rikki, wasn't very happy about this babysitting arrangement, especially since she felt that all afternoon her sister had been ignoring her.

"Sarah," called Rikki, "can we play something together before bedtime? You promised me last week that we could play hide-and-seek and we never ended up playing!"

Sarah felt bad that they hadn't ended up playing, but she

had homework to do and really wanted to organize her room that night. "Rikki, give me an hour for my stuff, then I'll try to play with you, okay?"

"No fair," murmured Rikki, and went back to sit in her room to flip through her comics.

A few minutes later, Sarah heard a yell coming from Rikki's room, "Sarah!! Help! Come quick!!"

Sarah dropped what she had been holding and ran to her sister's room. She found Rikki giggling on her bed.

"Sorry, Sarah," said Rikki in between her laughs, "You should see your face! I was just joking around with you. Nothing happened! I was bored and wanted to see if you even remembered I was here!"

"Rikki, that's not funny! I was so scared that I dropped everything and ran here like crazy to see if you were okay!" Sarah paused, "Omigoodness, I think I dropped my new calculator on the floor!" She turned and ran out of the room to check.

Rikki's smile quickly disappeared and she sheepishly followed Sarah back to her room to see if the calculator was broken. It was. Rikki saw Sarah sitting on the floor, trying in vain to piece together the broken pieces of her calculator.

Discussion:

Q. Did Rikki cause the breaking of Sarah's calculator?

A. Yes, but indirectly. Her shout scared Sarah, causing her to drop the calculator, which broke. This is called a *gerama*, an action that indirectly causes something to happen (*Chosen Mishpat* 410:31, 420:32).

Q: Is a person responsible for damage that they caused by *gerama*?

A: If the person's intention was to cause damage then they are *chayav b'dinei shamayim*. This means they have a moral responsibility to pay. However, they cannot be forced to pay for the damage by a court of law (*Rema* 386:3). If the damage was caused by accident (the case in our story) there is no responsibility to pay at all (*Pischei Choshen, Nezikin* 3:39). Therefore, Rikki should not be expected to pay for the damaged calculator.

Q Where else in Halacha do we have the concept of *gerama*?

A The same *gerama* is also used in the laws of Shabbos. It refers to indirectly performing a melacha. For example, on a winter Shabbos day, if we open up the front door, cold air will enter the house which will eventually turn the heater on in the house. Turning on a heater forbidden on Shabbos, but we don't sit in our homes all day to avoid opening up the front door! This is a *gerama*. Indirectly, we may be causing the heater to turn on, but this is not considered a halachic issue because it is so indirect. Opening up a fridge on Shabbat will often make the motor start to run to cool off the inside of the fridge again, but many Poskim rule that we are still allowed to open the fridge on Shabbos because it is not a direct action.

(Note: The halachic applications of *gerama* are complex and involve many intricate details; a Rabbi or *halachic* authority should be consulted concerning all practical questions.)

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