

# BECAUSE I CARE

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

*"...And Yosef would bring evil reports about them to their father"(37:2)*

The Torah records that Yosef's brothers hated him because he reported to Yaakov transgressions which he had observed them commit.[1] Most commentaries agree that although Yosef's motivations were sincere, he was punished for misinterpreting his brothers' behavior.[2] It is for the assumptions he made that he was later punished, but not for reporting their actions. Where in the verse is it intimated that Yosef's intentions were pure?

The verse states that Yosef would bring evil reports concerning his brothers to their father. Why does the Torah not state his father, remaining consistent with the former part of the verse, where the Torah focuses upon the relationship between Yosef and his father?

There are two reasons why a person would inform a father as to his sons' negative behavior. If the informant is unrelated, generally, his intention is to assist the father in correcting his sons' evil ways. However, if the informant is also a son, it is possible that he sees an opportunity to bolster his standing in his father's eyes by discrediting his brothers. The Torah specifically records that Yosef brought the information to their father in order to emphasize that his intentions were altruistic; he wanted to inform Yaakov of his sons' wrongdoing so that Yaakov would correct their ways. If the Torah would have stated that Yosef brought the information to his father, the implication would have been that he did so to benefit his own relationship with this father.

1. See Rashi 37:2

2. See Mizrachi and Gur Aryeh ibid.

## The Customer Is Always Right

*"There Yehuda saw the daughter of a Cananite whose name was Shua. He married her..."(38:2)*

Rashi interprets the term "Cana'ni" - Cananite as "merchant". This follows the opinion of the Talmud that it is not possible for a son of Yaakov to marry a woman of Cananite descent, since Avraham and Yitzchak instructed their children against doing so.[1] Therefore, the verse is to be understood as Yehuda marrying a merchant's daughter. We find other examples in the Torah where "Cananite" refers to merchants.[2] The Abarbanel adds that the Torah calls Yehuda's father in law "ish Cana'ani". The term "ish" denotes importance and would not be employed in the description of a Cananite, in and of itself a derogatory term, since Noach cursed Cana'an the son of Cham with eternal

subservience to his brothers.[3] Why then is a merchant called a Cananite, which is generally a term of derision?

The generic term for a slave is "Cana'ani" because Cana'an's name reflects the curse which he received, subservience to his brothers. In Hebrew, "hachna'a" means "subservience". The same expression is used to refer to a merchant because the success of a merchant is dependent largely upon his ability to serve the needs of his clientele. A customer must perceive that the salesperson is catering to the customer's agenda. If he senses that the salesperson is catering to his own agenda, he will desist from doing business with him.

1. Pesachim 50a
2. Yeshayahu 23:8, Zecharya 14:21, Mishlei 26:24
3. 28:24

### **A Moral Obligation**

*"There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has denied me nothing but you, since you are his wife. How then can I perpetrate this great evil? I will have sinned against G-d!" (39:9)*

Yosef refused to acquiesce to Potiphar's wife's advances and he attempted to explain to her why it would be wrong for him to comply with her wishes. Yosef presented the following two arguments: It would be the ultimate display of ingratitude for him to take advantage of the trust his master had placed in him. Furthermore, since the prohibition against adultery is one of the Noachide laws, he would be sinning against Hashem[1]. Yosef's sense of priorities requires explanation. Why does he mention the injustice against his master before his sinning against Hashem? Furthermore, Rashi cites the Talmud's view that Yosef would have submitted to the advances of the wife of Potiphar, were it not that he saw the image of his father before him[2]. How does this coalesce with the reasons which Yosef himself gives?

In his introduction to Even Sheleima, the Vilna Gaon teaches that the ultimate goal of the observance of mitzvos is to inculcate the Jew with ethical and moral values. The mitzvos help hone a person's sensitivities to live a life of moral fortitude and integrity. Only then can a Jew reflect the attributes of his Creator.

Yosef was primarily concerned that committing adultery would be a betrayal of the trust vested in him by his master. This ultimate breach of trust would indicate a complete lack of integrity. Violating the Noachide laws is only a secondary concern, since observance of the Noachide laws does not require a person to be a G-dly being. However, being a descendant of Avraham, Yitchak and Yaakov demands such behavior. Seeing the vision of his father reminded Yosef of his roots and emphasized to him his obligation to act in a manner which reflected his mission in life, to imitate his Creator. The actions of a Jew should not be governed only by what is permitted and prohibited, but, more importantly, by Hashem's requirement of him that he be a moral and ethical human being.

1.Rashi 39:9

2.39:11, Sotah 37b