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# PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayeishev  Rabbi Baruch Klagsbrun

## The Great Awakening

The word na'ar (or na'ara) is usually used to describe the stage of life known as adolescence. There are, however, several places in the Torah where the word cannot be used to describe the age of the person. One of them is in this week's parsha.

The Torah describes Yosef as being a na'ar. In this case, it cannot be taken as a description of his age, as the Passuk just previously informed us that he was seventeen years old. Rashi tells us that Yosef was 'performing the actions of an adolescent- tending to his hair and eyes in order to appear handsome'. In this case, the word na'ar can be seen as a verb, or even as an adjective- a description of Yosef's actions. From the context of Rashi, it appears that the term na'ar is used in this case in a derogatory manner. While it is important for a Ben Torah, especially one of Yosef Hatzaddik's caliber to present himself in a dignified manner, Yosef was apparently spending an inappropriate amount of time and effort in this pursuit.

The Malbim, in Sefer Hakarmel, his great work on the nuances inherent in the words and phrases of Lashon Hakodesh, writes that the word "na'ar" is related to the word "le'hisoerer", to awaken. A person approaching and entering the years of adolescence is given this title due to the fact that it is at this point of his life that he awakens to who he is. He begins to understand what his interests are and where his strengths lay. He experiences great growth in physical strength and stature. In short, he becomes the person that he will be for the rest of his life. In the case of Yosef Hatzaddik, Yosef's awakening apparently was one that included an awareness of and stress on his physical appearance on some level. In the Torah's eyes, this is seen as a flaw in the character of someone as great as Yosef.

Another person described in the Torah as being a na'ar is

Yehoshua Bin Nun. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe Rabbeinu moves his tent and pitches it outside of the camp. Those Jews with Torah questions had to come out to him and then return home. Moshe himself would enter the camp only when there was a need for him to teach the Bnei Yisroel. Yehoshua, however, would remain behind in Moshe's tent, awaiting his return. For this, Yehoshua is given the title of na'ar- adolescent. It should be pointed out that Yehoshua was in his mid-fifties at the time. (He was niftar at the age of 110. If we deduct the 40 years in the desert and the 14 years of conquest of Eretz Yisroel, we arrive at 56.) This seems a bit old to be going through adolescence!

Perhaps we can understand this based on the aforementioned Malbim. Having seen the heights that the Yidden had reached at Har Sinai and then witnessing their swift plummet into the world of idolatry, Yehoshua had an awakening. It became clear to him how fast the Jew can lose everything he gained if he strays from the Torah. This realization brought him to a new understanding of the importance of learning Torah and investing all of one's strength in this endeavor. Just as an adolescent can channel almost superhuman strength into something that is important to him, Yehoshua now found new strength that he used in the service of Hashem- and therefore, lo yamush mitoch ha'ohel.

(As an aside, it is worth noting that Yehoshua was a great-grandson of Yosef Hatzaddik, and it is possible that this trait was passed down in the family. See also B'reishis 48:16)

May all of us, no matter what age, be zocheh to spiritual awakenings.

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# HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

## Embarrassing Others

*Rabbi Henoch Plotnik*

**R**' Yochanan said in the name of R' Shimon Bar Yochai, "Better one should allow himself to be thrown into a burning cauldron than to publicly embarrass his fellow". This well known ma'mar chazal is derived from the pesukim in this week's sedra that tell of Tamar, willing to give her own life rather than to humiliate her father-in-law, Yehuda. The Maharal M'Prague explains that although the punishments of the Torah do not necessarily reflect the negative character trait which led to the performance of each aveirah. However, when it comes to embarrassing someone publicly, the Rishonim treat the aveirah with utmost severity. The simple reading of Tosfos in Mesechta Sotah (10b) teaches us that if someone was given the choice of being killed *r"l* or to publicly shame his friend, he is obligated to choose death, just as he would be obligated to had he been given the choice of murdering someone or of being put to death. That what the gemara compares "malbin p'nei chaveiro", causing someone to turn white from shame, to murder, is to be taken literally and has practical applications. Rabbeinu Yonah (Sha'arei Teshuva Ch. 3, 139) echoes the opinion of Tosfos, and he adds that only a malbin p'nei chaveiro loses his share in *olam habo* as the likelihood of his repenting is remote. This is not said of a true murderer, who generally comes to realize the gravity of his sin, and he does teshuva. These Rishonim clearly seem to understand the gemara- not merely as extolling a midas chassidus but rather as a halachic norm. Tosfos explains why the gemara doesn't list this as one of the cardinal sins that one needs to give up his life for. It is simply because embarrassing one's fellow is included in murder.

Furthermore, the gemara in Bava Kama (90a) compares malbin p'nei chaveiro to "slapping the Shechinah", and if the victim of the embarrassment has passed away, the sinner must express "v'chataasi L'Hashem Elokei Yisroel", I have sinned to Hashem. This is because the sinner has dealt a damaging blow (*k'viyachol*) to the image of Hashem, for we are all made in His image. (See *Alshich Hakadosh Parshas Noach* as quoted in *Chumash Medrash Halacha*).

Lest we think that only the rare individual is challenged by this awful sin, the Talmud Yerushalmi in *D'mai* reports how Rav Pinchos decreed that a certain river split, and he told his disciples that only someone who has never embarrassed his friend will be able to pass through safely.

We are reminded to be careful in this area weekly, when we cover the challah during Kiddush "so the bread will not be *embar-*

*assed*" by being relegated to secondary status to the wine. Rav Dessler explains that this is done in order to inculcate sensitivity within ourselves for embarrassing others. Although the challah is an inanimate object, we are careful with his "feelings". Apparently we need a lot of training.

Despite the above mentioned Tosfos and Rabbeinu Yonah that treat malbin p'nei chaveiro as murder, the actual issur that one transgresses is not necessarily "Lo Sirtzach"- "Do not murder". According to the Sefer Hachinuch, he is transgressing the aveirah of "ono'as devorim", verbal abuse, as he is diminishing one's dignity. According to the Rabmam, he transgresses the aveirah of "lo sisa alav chait", the same aveirah attributed to someone who embarrasses his friend when delivering constructive rebuke. If even there, where his intention was of a positive and constructive nature, he transgresses by shaming his friend, he is surely transgressing when he brazenly shames him for no reason at all (as explained in *Kiryas Sefer*)!

The Gemara (Megillah 28) quotes Rav Zeira as saying that the reason he merited to live a long life was due to his being careful not to use nicknames. Tosfos adds that even if the nickname is not of a derogatory nature, it is still included in "kinui". According to the Ben Ish Chai's interpretation of the gemara, a second understanding of Rav Zeira's words was that he didn't call his friends by anything but their first names. A person's name is a part of his living neshama and the mere mention of it actually strengthens his composition!

In conclusion, it is explained in the name of the Tashbetz why public embarrassment takes away one's portion in *Olam Haboh*, while this punishment is not even mentioned in conjunction with murder. Murder, awful as it is, can only be committed on the victim one time. However, someone who suffers public disgrace carries that shame with him forever. This is why Chazal use the expression describing a malbin p'nei chaveiro as "*k'ilu shofech damim*", tantamount to shedding blood. The word "damim" is plural as if to say he is murdering his fellow over and over again. Every time the victim of humiliation encounters anyone who is aware of his disgrace, he relives his embarrassment over again. Using an unflattering nickname, although perhaps not as severe as flagrant embarrassment, can often border on causing the same feelings of shame and disgrace.

We would all do well to heighten our sensitivity to our friends' feelings and sense of dignity. Perhaps in doing so, we will be *m'zakeh* ourselves with a long life.

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