

אמור

SHELOMIS AND HER SONS

Dasan, the husband of Shelomis bas Divri, was forcibly evicted from his home at dawn by his Egyptian slavemaster. His wife Shelomis had apparently caught the Egyptian's eye, resulting in this staged event. Now the slavemaster could be alone with her. Once he had removed her husband from his home, the Egyptian entered and had relations with Shelomis. Since she thought that the Egyptian was her husband, she did not protest, and she became pregnant from him. The next day, when the Egyptian realized that Dasan was aware of what had transpired, he provoked and punished him (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:28).

That was the day Moshe *Rabbeinu* left the protective environment of Pharaoh's house and sought to align himself with *Klal Yisrael* (Ramban, Seforno, *Shemos* 2:11). Moshe wished to avenge the unjust punishment of Dasan, and so he struck the Egyptian. Moshe's intention was to hit the Egyptian, not to maim him; but this was one of those instances where the end result was more severe than what was intended (*Rabbeinu Saadyah Ga'on, Mishlei* 17:19). The Egyptian died.

Within the entire episode of *Galus Mitzraim* — the Exile of Egypt — the story of Shelomis marks the only instance of illicit relations between a Jew and a Gentile (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:28). Shelomis is blamed for this tragedy due to her being too talkative to strangers. She would go out of her way to greet and say “*Shalom*” to everyone she encountered, hence the name “Shelomis” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5). This unflattering characterization is reminiscent of the characterization of Dinah as a “*yatzanit*” — one who goes out frequently (Rashi, *Bereishis* 34:1). Dinah had a gregarious personality and was interested in exploring her new environment. She should have remained within the protective custody of her father's house, but instead she yielded to her adventurous instincts and wandered into a strange area. This resulted in the tragic encounter with Shechem son of Chamor. Thus, Dinah, by dint of her inquisitive nature, is also blamed for her own downfall. Controlling one's impulses is vital for living safely and modestly.

Similarly, Rashi (*Devarim* 22:23) uses the *Sifri* to explain the sin of the *na'arah me'orasa* — betrothed virgin maiden — in the city. The betrothed maiden is found by a man in the city, and together they commit an immoral act. “As a result of this he lay with her; a breach invites a thief. But if she had remained at home, this would not have befallen her.”

Shelomis is blamed for her own downfall because she would not control her exuberant and unnecessary urge to greet everyone. Her unnecessary greeting of this Egyptian taskmaster is what caught his eye. Shlomo *Hamelech* states (*Mishlei* 10:8): “but a prating fool will weary (*yelaveit*).” This is interpreted by *Targum Yonasan* (ibid.): “but the fool is caught by his lips.” Self-control is essential for self-preservation.

The Maharal echoes the sentiment of numerous *Midrashim*. Shelomis did not intentionally violate any precept. In fact, she thought she was lying with her husband. Nevertheless, she is

called a *zonah* — harlot — by *Chazal* because she had relations with a gentile. She is, in fact, responsible for bringing this tragic episode upon herself. She did not exercise self-control, but rather was “a prating fool.”

Shelomis transmitted a similar character defect to her two sons. The manifestation of Shlomis’ lack of self-control took the form of being too talkative. In her sons, this defective trait manifested itself in the form of a quarrelsome personality. The “*Ish Hayisraeli*” — “Israelite Man” — with whom the *Mekaleil* — the one who cursed — feuded (*Vayikra* 24:10) was his half-brother, the son of Shelomis and her Jewish husband. The two brothers were arguing because the son of the Egyptian father wanted equal rights of inheritance with the son of the Jewish father. The Torah lists Dasan as a scion of *Sheivet* Reuvain (*Bamidbar* 26:9), while this episode actually occurred in the camp of *Sheivet* Dan. The reason for this was that Shelomis bas Divrei was of *Sheivet* Dan, and her offspring’s claim in *Klal Yisrael* was through her. In effect, this dissension challenged the Torah’s handling of matters related to *yichus* — inheritance and genealogy. The consequence of this dispute was that the *Mekaleil* cursed the name of Hashem (see *Zohar*, *Vayikra* 24:10).

The Torah employs an unusual manner in describing the two disputants:

בן הישראלית ואיש הישראלי

“the son of an Israelite woman and the Israelite” (*Vayikra* 24:10).

The Abarbanel (*ibid.*) explains that the Torah is emphasizing that both brothers are to blame, because they fought within the *machaneh* (camp). They should have fought out in the open field, and there “*Kol de’alim gabar*” — “Whoever prevailed would be declared the victor” (*Gittin* 60:; see *Bava Basra* 34:). The right of possession in cases in which the judge is unable to decide is determined by he who is more powerful. The fact that they fought within the camp indicated that they both were dishonorable, and resulted in catastrophe.

Similarly, the *Kli Yakar* (*Vayikra* 24:10) and the *Or Hachaim* (*ibid.*) comment on the fact that neither of the disputants’ names are mentioned, indicating that they are both culpable. They both suffered from defective ancestry. Hence, the Torah states, “and they quarreled in the camp,” indicating that they were individuals who were constantly involved in strife.

Rabbeinu Bechaya (*Vayikra* 24:11) states that despite the genetic input of a father, man’s character is primarily influenced by the maternal genetic contribution. Hence, the Torah mentions Shelomis only after the narration of her children’s sin to indicate that she was the one responsible for their aberrant character. This is also the reason that the *Navi* identified the various kings of *Klal Yisrael* by their mothers’ names (*Melachim* I 22:42; 15:2). This principle is underscored when the Torah goes into unusual detail in relating the story of Amram and Yocheved (*Shemos* 6:20). The point made is that it is no wonder the offspring were three outstanding *tzadikim* — their mother was an extremely righteous individual of the highest calibre. David *Hamelech* exclaims in *Tehillim*:

אני עבדך בן אמתך

“I am Your servant, son of Your handmaid...” (*Tehillim* 116:16).

David attributed all his accomplishments to the fact that he was the son of a virtuous mother, because the major factors in the character development of an individual are maternally derived (Redak, *ibid.*).

Lavan greeted Yaakov *Avinu* with the expression:

אך עצמי ובשרי אתה

“You are my bone and my flesh” (*Bereishis* 29:14).

This salutation intimated that Lavan felt kinship to Yaakov through both of his parents (Vilna *Ga'on, Kol Eliyahu, ibid.*). The *Gemara* states that the father's physical contributions to his offspring are tendons and bones while the mother's contributions are flesh and blood (*Nidah* 31•). *Chazal* recognized that the real physical essence of man is flesh and blood. That is how man is consistently identified, and that is the mother's legacy to her offspring. The Torah clearly emphasizes this :

כי נפש הבשר בדם הוא

For the life of the flesh is in the blood (*Vayikra* 17:11).

At the time of conception, the angel Lilah appears before Hashem inquiring about the embryo's fate. Will he be strong or weak, wise or foolish, rich or poor? No questions regarding righteousness are asked — for virtue is the only matter not predetermined. That element of *bechirah* is largely influenced by the endowments of the mother. *Middos* — character traits — can be molded by and taught to the individual. *Techunos* encompass the innate character of an individual which is not subject to change. This aspect of human development is determined by the mother. That is why David *Hamelech* shouted out, “I am Your servant, son of Your handmaid” (*Tehillim* 116:16). David understood that whatever he was and whatever he accomplished in large measure was due to who his mother was.

Resolution of *yichus* — inheritance and genealogy — is determined by the father, but the most basic, the most elementary measure of who is a Jew can only be certified by the mother. Mothers are invested with the ability to define their child. Hence, the reverse is also true: Shelomis bas Divri is defined by her offspring.

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