

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [308]

"...he would have taken him to his father on his shoulder"

Insights into Ruth Rabbah 5:6

With appreciation to Devash: Hadar's Weekly Parashah Magazine for Children & Families



Background to Our Story

Genesis 37:12-30

¹² Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, ¹³ and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, ¹⁵ a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

¹⁶ He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

¹⁷ "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. ¹⁸ But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

¹⁹ “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. ²⁰ “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”

²¹ When Reuven heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. ²² “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuven said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing— ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

²⁶ Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? ²⁷ Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

²⁸ So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuven returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. ³⁰ He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?”

? What is your first reaction when reading verses 21 and 22? What do you think of Reuven?

Exodus 4:10-17

¹⁰ Moses said to the LORD, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

¹¹ The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

¹³ But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

¹⁴ Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. ¹⁶ He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. ¹⁷ But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.”

? You are all familiar with the encounter of Moses and God at the burning bush. God tells Moses to go to Egypt to free the Children of Israel and Moses is reticent to accept God's mission. What were Moses' concerns?

? God reassures Moses by telling him about Aaron: "...Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.." How are these words reassuring to Moses? What might be these words of reassurance tell us about an additional concern of Moses (not so evident from the exchange at the burning bush)?

Ruth 2:11-14

¹¹ Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

¹³ "May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants."

¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar."

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.

? How is Boaz described in the above verses?

The Text: Ruth Rabbah 5:6

אמר רבי יצחק בר מריון בא הכתוב ללמדך שאם אדם עושה מצוה יעשנה בלבב שלם, שאלו היה ראובן יודע שהקדוש ברוך הוא מקתיב עליו (בראשית לו, כא): ישמע ראובן ויצילהו מידם, בכתפו היה מוליכו אצל אביו. ואלו היה יודע אהרן שהקדוש ברוך הוא מקתיב עליו: (שמות ד, יד): הנה הוא יצא לקראתך בתפים ובמתולות היה יוצא לקראתו. ואלו היה יודע בעז שהקדוש ברוך הוא מקתיב עליו: ויצבט לה קלי ותאכל ותשבע ותתר, עגלות מפטמות היה מאכילה.

Rabbi Yitzhak bar Maryon said: The verse comes to teach you that if a person performs a mitzvah he should perform it wholeheartedly, as had Reuven known that the Holy One blessed be He was dictating in his regard:

“Reuven heard and he rescued him from their hands” (Genesis 37:21), he would have taken him to his father on his shoulder.

Had Aaron known that the Holy One blessed be He was dictating in his regard: “Behold, he is emerging to meet you” (Exodus 4:14), he would have emerged to meet [Moses] with drums and dancing.

Had Boaz known that the Holy One blessed be He was dictating in his regard: “He handed her roasted grain, and she ate, was sated, and there was some left over,” (Ruth 2:14) he would have fed her fattened calves.



Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Our story talks about Reuven not performing a mitzvah wholeheartedly. Which mitzvah was Reuven performing?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? In which way didn't Reuven perform the mitzvah wholeheartedly?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? Why do you think Reuven did not perform the mitzvah wholeheartedly?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Our story talks about Aaron not performing the mitzvah wholeheartedly. Which mitzvah was Aaron performing?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Our story assumes that Aaron was not very effusive when meeting his brother. Based on which words does our story make this assumption?

? Why do you think Aaron didn't come to greet his brother with drums and dancing?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Extra Bonus ? Why would it have made a difference to Moses if his brother would have come to meet him with drums and dancing as opposed to just coming and meeting him as he did?

Bonus ? Why did Boaz give Ruth roasted grain to eat, as opposed to fattened calves, or chicken with vegetables?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

One More Analysis Question

Bonus ? Our story seems to imply that Reuven, Aaron and Boaz would have acted differently had they known their actions would be recorded by God forever. Can you think of a different way to understand the message of our story without focusing on Reuven, Aaron and Boaz's possible ulterior motives?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from This Text

! Act always wholeheartedly! You never know! Your actions may be way more important than you realize!



By Rabbi Manes Kogan

Why do we do things half-way? This is the question our story strives to tackle. Reuven, Aaron and Boaz are intrinsically good men, with good intentions and good hearts, and yet they don't translate their full potential in their actions. Reuven doesn't finish the job he started, Aaron limits his emotional involvement with his brother, and Boaz acts kindly, but not as generously as he could. While each of the

Biblical characters portrayed in our story may have his own particular reason for not acting wholeheartedly, their common denominator is that they underestimate the impact of their actions. Our story invites the reader not to do the same.



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Our actions may be way more important than we realize. Sometimes, a simple act can even change history. The midrash seems to be suggesting that we should try to always act as if what we are doing will have a major impact, and will be remembered forever.

Why is it so hard to know how important our actions are? Can you think of some examples of small acts you can do that might have a huge impact on others? If you knew that your actions would be written in a book that people would read for thousands of years, how would that change the way you act? Can you imagine acting with this kind of intention all the time? What would that feel like?