

גדה סא.

"והבור אשר השליך שם ישמעאל את כל פגרי אנשים אשר הכה ביד גדליה" -
וכי גדליה הרגן? והלא ישמעאל הרגן!
אלא מתוך שהיה לו לחוש לעצת יוחנן בן קרח ולא חש - מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו הרגן.
אמר רבא: האי לישנא בישא, אע"פ דלקבולי לא מבעי - מיחש ליה מבעי.

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Niddah 61a

"And the pit into which Yishmael threw all the corpses of the people whom he had killed at the hand of Gedalyah" –

Did Gedalyah kill them?! Yishmael killed them!?

Rather – because Gedalyah should have listened to the advice of Yochanan ben Keireiach and instead he was not concerned – Scripture regards him as if he had killed them.

Rava said: Lashon Hara, even though it is not necessary to accept it, it is necessary to be concerned for it.

This week's installment will be brief, and SBM rather than parshah-related, owing to the generally wonderful but overwhelming workload necessary to keep SBM running. I hope to share with you what we've been learning in more detail soon, as well as the student teshuvot, but as an installment, here are some brief comments on a text that we learned at the public event with Mark Jurkowitz this past Wednesday night.

Yochanan ben Keireiach had warned Gedalyah that Yishmael ben Netinah was planning to assassinate him, but Gedalyah refused to act on this information, and is accordingly assassinated. He is severely censured for this by the Talmud, indeed held responsible for his own death and those of his associates. By placing Rava's comment immediately after this censure, the Talmud suggests that Gedalyah's refusal was rooted in excessive piety – he did not wish to "accept lashon hara", which the Talmud elsewhere calls tantamount to murder in its own right.

So what should Gedalyah have done, or was he given a choice only between modes of committing the moral equivalent of murder? Rava suggests a sort of split-consciousness – one should act on the lashon hara without believing it. This has a peculiar parallelism with Rabbi Norman Lamm's suggestion in Faith and Doubt that cognitive doubt is permitted so long as it does not affect action.

But what if Gedalyah knew himself to be an either-or person, who would be incapable of acting on the information unless he genuinely believed it? And by extension, how practical is it to posit simultaneously that one has an obligation to listen to – and I think it reasonable to say, listen for – all the negative information about people that could conceivably help you prevent them from harming others, and at the same time that you should believe none of it, and on the third hand that you should act as if you do?

One might say that one should believe it with an open mind, that is to say that is entitled to form opinions, but not to form inflexible opinions, and to continually be on the alert for the exculpatory possibilities of new information. But this seems to me an unconvincing read of the text, and I welcome suggestions as to how better to read it, or responses to my challenges above.

Shabbat shalom!

Aryeh Klapper

www.torahleadership.org