

## **"Yosef was seventeen years old ... and he was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah ... and Yosef would bring evil reports about them to their father." (37:2)**

A number of questions regarding the text of this *pasuk* demand clarification. First, what is the meaning of "*he was a youth*," and what purpose does it serve in the narrative? Second, the word "*tchu*," "*And he would bring*," doesn't seem appropriate. One does not bring reports; rather, one relates them to others. Third, why does the *Torah* refer to Yaakov as "*their father*"? Was he not also Yosef's father?

*Horav Yechiel Michel Rabinovitz z.l.*, the author of the *Afikei Yam*, derives the following important lesson from this *pasuk*. One who sees his friend acting inappropriately may hope to prevent his further transgression by notifying his friend's father or *rebbe*. Before pursuing this course, he should take the following three steps. First, the friend should personally speak to the offender, reproving him for his actions. This act demonstrates his sincerity and noble intentions. Only after his rebuke falls on deaf ears should he relate the offenses to a higher authority. Second, in describing the offense, he may not add his own interpretation of what has transpired. He must relate the incident exactly as it happened, not what he thinks he witnessed. Third, it is imperative that one's objective in rebuke be purely to benefit the offender, not for revenge or personal advancement.

With these ideas in mind, we can approach the text of the *pasuk* in order to better understand Yosef's actions. Yosef was a *rgb*, a youth, who favored the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the *bnei ha'shfachos* -- maidservants. He chose to spend his time with those brothers who were not held in the highest esteem. Therefore, his stature in the eyes of his other brothers was greatly diminished.

Yosef felt he should not bother reproving his older brothers, for they would view his words disdainfully. Furthermore, when Yosef related his brothers' apparent iniquity, he related exactly what had happened. There was no *rpshu*, narrative description; it was simply *tchu*, a pure unembellished retelling of the actual facts. Yosef's intention in "delivering" these disturbing events to Yaakov was solely for the betterment of his brothers. There was no tinge of personal interest involved. Lastly, it was as if he went to "their father," not his father. He divorced himself totally from the interaction. Yosef's intentions were noble, his motives selfless. If only his brothers had viewed them in this light.