

And Reuven returned to the pit, and behold Yosef was not in the pit! So he rent his garments. (37:29)

The *Midrash* questions from where did Reuven return? They respond that he was sitting in sackcloth and fasting, remorseful over his impetuous reaction to Yaakov moving his bed into Bilhah's tent. Although Reuven did nothing more than tamper with his father's bed, the *Torah* viewed his action as being a transgression. He now repented for his sin. The *Midrash* continues that Hashem told Reuven that previously no one had ever sinned and repented. Since he initiated *teshuvah*, he was to merit that his descendant, Hoshea, would petition *Klal Yisrael* to perform *teshuvah* with the clarion call of "*Shuvah Yisrael*." Two questions confront us upon learning this *Midrash*. First, why does the *Torah* allude to Reuven's *teshuvah* specifically now during *mechiras* Yosef, the sale of Yosef? Second, was Reuven truly the one to originate *teshuvah*? Are we to ignore Adam and Kayin, who repented long before Reuven?

Horav M.D. Soloveitchik, Shlita, cites an interesting answer to these questions. When the brothers sold Yosef, they ostensibly knew that their actions would cause great pain to their father. Yet, they proceeded with their plans. To a certain degree, they had lost respect for their father. They sold his beloved Yosef despite their father's obvious feelings. Reuven blamed himself for this lack of respect. Had he not slighted his father, perhaps the brothers would have retained their esteem for Yaakov. Inadvertently, Reuven felt he had caused *mechiras* Yosef. He humiliated his father to the point that the brothers were no longer sensitive to his feelings, thereby leaving them no regrets over the sale of their brother.

A single sin on the part of one individual can catalyze a number of sins for a group. Reuven feared the worst. He feared that his error, the result of a moment of impetuous zeal, caused the sale of Yosef, an error of such grave proportion that we still feel its punitive effect today. Reuven's *teshuvah* was unique. He repented not only for his own sin, but also for the sins that were caused by it. His *teshuvah* is consistent with the *parsha* of *mechiras* Yosef, because he earned the onus of guilt over *mechiras* Yosef.

Reuven's concept of *teshuvah* was novel. One repents for the sins of his own commission. One feels remorse for his own actions. When do we find an individual accepting the blame for the consequences of his actions? Where do we find someone repenting for a sin that he did not himself commit, --but inadvertently caused? Do we ever take into account the effect of our sins? How many people permit themselves to relax their levels of observance as the result of an inappropriate action they saw another individual perform? Reuven's *teshuvah* was different. Such repentance had never before been reported. He repented not only for his wrongdoing, but also for its repercussions.