

May Reuven live and not die... and this to Yehudah, and he said. (33:67)

Yehudah's blessing is juxtaposed upon Reuven, because they had in common their individual confession of guilt to a corrupt act for which they were jointly responsible. Reuven was chastised by his father, Yaakov *Avinu*, for his impetuosity in moving Yaakov's bed from Bilhah's tent. (After Rachel *Imeinu*, who was Yaakov's primary wife, died, Yaakov moved his bed into the tent of the concubine, Bilhah. Reuven felt this was an affront to the honor of his mother, Leah *Imeinu*.) Yehudah's role concerning his inappropriate relationship with Tamar, which almost led to her execution, was the reason for his confession of guilt. Furthermore (according to *Rashi*, citing the *Talmud Makkos* 11b), it was Yehudah's confession of guilt that spurred Reuven on to do the same. Indeed, Reuven's public confession of guilt (he had performed *teshuvah* earlier) greatly benefitted Yehudah's soul. *Chazal* teach that, during the forty-years that *Klal Yisrael* traveled in the wilderness, Yehudah's bones – which were in his coffin being transported by *Klal Yisrael* for burial in *Eretz Yisrael* – were rolling in his coffin. This was due to a self-imposed *nidui*, excommunitary ban, resulting from his assurance to his father that would return Binyamin home. When Reuven confessed and was forgiven, Yehudah's bones became intact. It was only proper that Yehudah's "sin" (his sin was assuming a self-imposed *nidui* that requires a formal annulment – which did not occur. Thus, he/his bones were in *nidui* until his *z'chus*, merit, of catalyzing Reuven's confession brought him forgiveness should also be forgiven.)

Let us digest this *Chazal*. *Zikui ha'rabim*, bringing merit to the multitude/people, is an inspiring act of goodness. A Jew performs a *mitzvah* or a good deed, and, as a result of his positive action, another Jew benefits – spiritually, emotionally, materially. Another form of *zikui ha'rabim* applies when one's positive behavior is the catalyst for others to act likewise. I go to *davening* – others go to *davening*. It is as simple as that. The incredible lesson from Yehudah's positive act of confession, explains *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, is that the *z'chus* occurs even if the person is unaware. Yehudah had no clue concerning the effect of his confession. He did not know that it would positively influence Reuven to act accordingly. The manner in which we *daven*, learn or perform any spiritual activity is not carried out in a void. People take notice. Some are inspired. Others put it away in the back of their minds – for a later opportunity. The observation, for the most part, will not go to waste.

The flipside, however, is frightening. If Reuven does not learn or learns dispassionately – if he *davens* without devotion and feeling or worse does not *daven* – it has a deleterious effect on others (Visiting a *shul*, putting on *Tallis* and *Tefillin* and walking around schmoozing is not *davening*.) They, too, become lax in their spiritual commitments – resulting in a dereliction of their duty to Hashem. All of this is tallied up in Heaven and entered in Reuven's spiritual debit column. It is called *chillul Hashem*, desecrating G-d's Name. People watch. People seek excuses for their own failures in life. Why not blame it on "Reuven"?

Rav Karlinstein quotes a comment from the *Ricanti*, which is sobering and should encourage us all to consider the far-reaching effect of our actions. In *Divrei HaYamim* (II 33:11,12), it is recorded that Menashe was an evil king who reigned for fifty-five years, during which he committed just about every reprehensible behavior and abomination. Yet, when he was captured by the Assyrian army and placed in a large pot over a burning fire to slowly die, he pleaded to Hashem Who accepted his *teshuvah*, repentance. Menashe returned a penitent, corrected the breaches in Jewish observance which he had catalyzed, and died as a *baal teshuvah*. This is the record as redacted in *Divrei HaYamim*. The anomaly which is conspicuous is the lack of any mention of Menashe's *teshuvah* by Yirmiyah HaNavi (in *Sefer Melachim* which presents a "current" history of Menashe's life). His *teshuvah* is chronicled as one of the exemplars of repentance from a most despicable, calumnious abyss. Yet, Hashem listened and welcomed him home. Why does Yirmiyah not make mention of this "wonder"?

The *Ricanti* explains that a *Navi* sees far beyond the parameters of this temporal world. His gaze penetrates the Heavens, and he is granted the ability to see the lasting and far-reaching efforts of people's worldly endeavor. While indeed Menashe repented, what about the countless souls that were destroyed as a result of his spiritual malignancy? Menashe repented, but the sins that he generated lived on! Yirmiyah could not record the positive final phase of Menashe's life. The *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*, Men of the Great Assembly, who wrote *Sefer Divrei HaYamim*, lived at a time when the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, for idol worship had been expunged. They did not perceive the evil that Menashe had wrought. It was no longer existent. Thus, they could record his repentance.

We should never lose sight of our actions and their enduring effect for posterity. What we do today might not achieve fruition for years to come, but it will not be a wasted, as evinced by the following vignette. The *Maggid* of Kolmay was traveling by train. When he arose to walk around the car, he was shocked to see a Jewish soldier eating a sandwich of non-kosher meat. The *Maggid* approached and asked in a state of shock, "What are you eating?" "Yes, yes, Rabbi, I am eating what you think I am eating."

"Are you a Jew?" the *Maggid* asked.

"Of course," the soldier replied.

"A Jew eating pork?" the *Maggid* asked, almost spitting out the words as he enunciated.

The *Maggid* went into a lecture on the evils of eating non-kosher food, the harmful effect it has on the Jewish soul, and the negativity that it engenders within the Jewish heart and mind. As soon as the *Maggid* finished speaking, the soldier dug into his backpack and produced another such sandwich. The *Maggid* buttressed his earlier words with another speech, as if he had not spoken already concerning the evils of non-kosher food.

“*Rebbe*,” the soldier asked, “are you with the program? Are you sane?”

“Why do you ask such a question?” the *Maggid* countered.

“Well, you saw that I ate the first sandwich, while I ignored everything that you said. I just took out a second sandwich. What does that indicate? That I am not interested in anything that you have to say. Why do you bother? Unless – you are not one hundred percent.”

The *Maggid* replied, “Listen to me, my young friend. I will continue speaking, regardless of your negative reaction. You wonder why I am doing this. First, let me assure you that I am in complete control of my faculties. You are now young, strong, healthy, and your entire life before you. This will change. There will be periods of illness, challenge, upheaval and, of course, age. There will come a time when you will not be so sure of yourself. When you will have second thoughts regarding the choices that you made in life. Then – you will remember what I said to you today! It may take some time, but I am hopeful that my words will not go to waste.”

Zikui ha'rabim, bring merit to the many, is such an important act of kindness. It is the gift that keeps on giving, because we never know how far and how long it will continue to inspire.