

And he (the Melech Yisrael, Jewish king) shall not have too many wives, so that his heart will not turn him astray. (17:17)

Apparently, with his extraordinary wisdom, Shlomo *Hamelech* felt that this prohibition did not apply to him. He had his reasons for marrying seven-hundred wives and keeping three-hundred concubines. The Torah teaches that numerous wives would have an adverse effect on the king's exclusive devotion to Hashem. Shlomo felt that he could rise above the prohibition and its consequences. He was wrong. While all this is history, why did Shlomo fail? His superior wisdom should have protected him. When he said, "I will have many wives, and they will not sway me from my utter devotion to Hashem," he knew what he was saying. It was not pure aggrandizement. It was reality. Yet, he failed. Why?

Similarly, we learn (*Shabbos* 12:B) that Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, a *Tanna* of note, felt that a Rabbinic decree was not applicable to him. *Chazal* teach that one may not read by lamplight on *Shabbos*, lest he tilt the lamp. Rabbi Yishmael maintained, *Ani ekra v'lo yateh*, "I will read and not tilt the lamp." One time, he read by a lamp and sought to tilt the lamp, but caught himself. He said, "How great are the words of the sages, for they said that one should not read by lamplight (because he might err and tilt the light). A second opinion in the *Gemorah* contends that Rabbi Yishmael did, in fact, tilt the lamp. He later declared, "I, Yishmael ben Elisha, read by lamplight on *Shabbos* and tilted the light. When the *Bais Hamikdash* will be rebuilt, I will offer a fat *chatas*/sin offering." We question his after-the-fact declaration. Was it only now, once he had erred, that he was prepared to concede to *Chazal*?

Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, explains that, indeed, Shlomo *Hamelech* on his own would not have erred. His superior wisdom would have circumvented any indiscretion on his part. The mere fact that the Torah includes a prohibition against a king taking many wives, because they might cause him to stray, however, is, in and of itself, sufficient reason to say that it will occur. The Torah's warning creates a verity that, regardless of wisdom or any other quality, if a king takes too many wives – he will stray. The Torah has spoken; thus, it has become part and parcel of the fabric of Judaism. It will happen! We can do nothing to prevent this reality. Therefore, even though Shlomo did not err with regard to his natural, G-d-given ability to overcome the temptations and influences that would dominate over another person, he was unaware that what the Torah says is truth. If the Divine Author entered into His Torah that a king who takes too many wives will eventually stray – he will stray. This is similar to the position taken by the *Chazon Ish (Emunah u'Bitachon* 3:30) that when the Torah writes that bribery blinds the eyes of the wise, it will happen, regardless of one's wisdom, virtue and total fear of Hashem.

Likewise, explains *Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl*, Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha did not make a mistake when he said, "I will learn by lamplight and will not tilt the lamp"; he was correct. He had the self-mastery to reign over his actions. Once *Chazal* has stated in their decree that one would tilt the lamp, however, it will happen. The question posed by *Rav Elya Baruch* is why Rabbi Yishmael

did not derive a lesson from Shlomo *Hamelech*. If the wisest of all men could err, certainly Rabbi Yishmael should have acknowledged that his level of commitment would not provide him with a bulwark against error.

We must say, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, that Rabbi Yishmael distinguished between an *issur d'Oraysa*, Biblical prohibition, and an *issur d'Rabbanan*, Rabbinic safeguard/prohibition. His error lay in the fact that once *Chazal* make a decree based upon their perceptual understanding of human nature and tendencies, it becomes fact. It is an immutable decree not given to human cognition and tampering. Thus, all the *issurim d'Rabbanan* are in full force – even if in our minds they seem irrelevant to us.