



Parashat Vayeshev tells the tragic and painful story of Yosef and his brothers, culminating with the brothers' unthinkable decision to eliminate their younger brother by selling him as a slave. We read that the brothers' envy of Yosef, who enjoyed a degree of preferential treatment from their father, was intensified as a result of his dreams of leadership. Yosef dreamt first about the brothers' sheaves of grain bowing before his sheaves, and then of the sun, moon and eleven stars – a transparent allusion to his brothers and parents – prostrating themselves before him. After Yosef relates his first dream to his brothers, we are told, "They despised him further, on account of his dreams and his words" (37:8).

Rabbi Avraham ben Ha-Rambam, in his Torah commentary, cites his father as explaining that Yosef's dream itself did not intensify his brothers' rage and envy. Rather, they were angered by his choosing to relate the dream to them, that he found this vision significant enough to share it with his brothers. The relaying of this information to his brothers demonstrated that he afforded a certain importance to this dream, that he viewed it as something for the family to carefully consider.

While not excusing the brothers for their harsh treatment of Yosef, this interpretation casts at least part of the blame onto Yosef himself. Even if he rightfully recognized the prophetic implications of these dreams, it was imprudent to report them to his brothers. Not all news needs to be shared, and not all of one's thoughts should be relayed to others. A person must exercise sound judgment and careful discretion in choosing how and when to speak. Had Yosef kept his dreams and aspirations to himself, had he exercised the proper restraint with regard to speech, this terrible tragedy may very well have been averted.

Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel famously remarked, "All my life I have grown among the sages, and I have found nothing better for the body than silence" (Avot 1:17). Maimonides, in his commentary to this Mishna, elaborates on the virtues of reticence and the dangers of indiscriminate talking. He writes:

The wise man [King Solomon] has already said, "With abundant words, iniquity will never cease" (Mishlei 10:19). The reason for this is that most words are superfluous, excessive and sinful...for when a person speaks abundantly, he will necessarily sin, because it is impossible for his speech not to contain some matter that should not have been said.

Abundant speech will almost always result in inappropriate or imprudent speech, and for this reason Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel extolled the virtue of measuring one's words and limiting one's speech. Even Yosef, whom *Targum Onkelos* describes as a *bar chakima*, a wise son, made the unwise decision to disclose to his brothers information that would have been far better kept to himself. The tragic story of Yosef and his brothers should thus remind us to think at least twice before we speak, to ensure that the words that leave our mouths are indeed worthy of being shared.