

## THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

### LECTURE 86: CHAPTER 13 (II)

#### THE STORY OF AMNON AND TAMAR (PART II)

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#### I. " THIS GREAT WRONG"

As we noted at the end of the previous lecture, Amnon's wickedness did not end with his rape of Tamar. Immediately after committing his heinous crime, Amnon was filled with intense hatred for Tamar:

(15) Then Amnon hated her with exceedingly great hatred; for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her.

What was behind this hatred? The commentators raised several possibilities,<sup>1[1]</sup> but the plain understanding appears to be that proposed by R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik:

He hated her now with such a great vengeance not because he suffered pangs of conscience, but because he suddenly realized not only that she was not beautiful, but how ugly and repulsive she was. His sin was an abomination to him. Because of it, he came to hate himself and subsequently hated her. Sin has a masochistic effect. Amnon hated himself and transferred his hate to Tamar, humiliated

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1 [1] Most of the commentators understood that Tamar injured Amnon in one way or another. Rashi, following *Chazal*, writes: " A fringe got wound around his organ and it became mutilated." The Ralbag adds: "She fought as well as she could to counter his desire, and perhaps she injured him in the fight, or else she cursed him, and for this reason he hated her." The Radak, on the other hand, sees this hatred as a miracle: "This hatred was caused by God in order to magnify the shame, when he sent her from his house, so that Avshalom would hate him more to the point that he thought to kill him."

through no fault of her own. The same wondrously beautiful Tamar was transformed in his mind into a symbol of abomination and hate.<sup>2[2]</sup>

And indeed, Amnon's hatred brings him to take a most despicable step:

...And Amnon said to her, " Arise, be gone." (16) And she said to him, " Not so, because this great wrong in putting me forth<sup>3[3]</sup> is worse than the other that you did to me." But he would not listen to her.<sup>4[4]</sup> (17) Then he called his servant that ministered to him, and said, " Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her." (18) Now she had a garment of many colors upon her; for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins appareled. And his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her.

However strange it might seem to us, Tamar wanted Amnon to take her as his wife, for no other man would want to marry her now that she was no longer a virgin. This is the assumption that underlies the Torah law that a rapist must marry his victim if she so desires – and normally she would want him to do so (see [Devarim 22:25-29](#)). But Amnon, in his cruelty, mercilessly sends Tamar out of his house, and even has the door bolted behind her.

As she had become so hateful and despicable to him, he was not satisfied with calling out to her "Arise, be gone," but "he called his servant that ministered to him, and said, ' Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her.' " Even the name of Tamar, his heart's desire, had become an abomination to him. "This woman" – he is unable to form her name on his lips; the feelings of abhorrence and

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2 [2] Pinchas H. Peli, *On Repentance, The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik* (New York, 1984), p. 199. not

3 [3] "Let this be that you send me away, for this wrong and the shame and the humiliation is greater than the other that you did to me [i.e., the rape]. Yonatan understands the word 'al' as if it were written with an *ayin*, rather than with an *alef*" (Radak).

4 [4] The Malbim notes that regarding Tamar's proposal prior to the rape, Amnon's response was "But he would not hearken to her voice," (ibid. v. 14) – in other words, he heard her words, but he would not accept them. Regarding her request following the rape, however, it says, "But he would not listen to her" – that is, Amnon refused even to listen.

defilement envelop him and choke him, "and bolt the door after her" – he felt threatened by her presence. Only a short while ago, he had so admired her and loved her – and now he was filled with loathing for her.<sup>5</sup>[5]

Besides the psychological turnaround, we have here an expression of the gulf between the sin of Amnon and the sin of David and Bat-Sheva, despite the similarity between the two stories. In chapters 11-12, we saw the praiseworthy elements in David's character; even when he was mired in sin, his sense of responsibility prevented him from ignoring Bat-Sheva's plight. Amnon acts in the very opposite manner. Owing to his feelings of frustration, he sheds from himself all responsibility for Tamar's fate, and evicts her from his house in a most humiliating manner.

The wretched Tamar is left with no other option but to weep over her bitter fate:

(18) Now she had a garment of many colors upon her; for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins appareled. And his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her. (19) And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent<sup>6</sup>[6] her garment of many colors that was on her; and she laid her hand on her head,<sup>7</sup>[7] and went her way, crying aloud as she went.

## II. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AMNON AND SHEKHEM

In order to fully appreciate Amnon's wickedness, let us examine the parallel between his story and another story of rape in Scripture – the incident

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5 [5] *On Repentance*, *ibid.*

6 [6] This action has twofold meaning. First, this is an ordinary act of mourning; second, since Tamar was no longer a virgin, she can no longer wear the attire of virgins.

7 [7] The laying of hands on the head as an expression of distress and humiliation appears also in the prophecy of [Yirmiyahu \(2:36-37\)](#): "You shall be ashamed of Egypt also, as you were ashamed of Ashur. From him also shall you go forth, with your hands upon your head."

involving Dina in Shekhem ([Bereishit 34](#)). We will first list the parallels between the two stories:<sup>8[8]</sup>

1. The two stories relate in similar terms the story of the rape of a woman (Dina/Tamar), the daughter of one of the leaders of Israel (Yaakov/David):

And he took her, **and lay with her, and forced her.** ([Bereishit 34:2](#))

But being stronger than she, **he forced her, and lay with her.** ([II Shmuel 13:14](#))

2. The severity of the act is also described in similar terms:

**Because he had wrought a vile deed in Israel** in lying with Yaakov's daughter; **which thing ought not to be done.** ([Bereishit 34:7](#))

**For no such thing ought to be done in Israel; do not you this vile deed.** ([II Shmuel 13:12](#))

3. The family's reaction to what happened is also similar:

And the sons of Yaakov came in from the field **when they heard it;** and the men were grieved, **and they were very angry.** ([Bereishit 34:7](#))

But when king David **heard** of all these things, **he was very angry.** ([II Shmuel 13:21](#))

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8 [8] For an expanded discussion of this parallel and the parallel described in the next section, see my book: "*Makbilot Nifgashot – Makbilot Sifrutiyot Be-Sefer Shmuel*" (Alon Shevut, 5766), pp. 149-65.

4. In both cases, the initial reaction is silence:

And Yaakov held his peace until they came. ([Bereishit 34:5](#))

But when king David heard of all these things, he was very angry. And Avshalom spoke unto Amnon neither good nor bad. ([II Shmuel 13:21-22](#))

5. In both cases, the rape victim's brothers (Shimon and Levi/Avshalom) in the end kill the rapist (Shekhem, Amnon), taking advantage of his weakness:

And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain...and they slew Chamor and Shekhem his son with the edge of the sword. ([Bereishit 34:25-26](#))

And Avshalom commanded his servants, saying, " Mark you now, when Amnon's heart is merry with wine; and when I say unto you, ' Smite Amnon,' then kill him, fear not." ([II Shmuel 13:28](#))<sup>9[9]</sup>

What is the significance of this comparison? It seems that the similarities between the two stories help to highlight the differences between them:

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9 [9] This parallel may help us understand another detail in the story. Shimon and Levi do not content themselves with the killing of Shekhem and his father Chamor, but rather kill all the inhabitants of the city, "And they slew Chamor and Shekhem his son with the edge of the sword" ([Bereishit 34:26](#)). After Amnon was killed, there were those who thought that Avshalom had acted in similar manner: "And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that the tidings came to David, saying, ' Avshalom has slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left' " ([II Shmuel 13:30](#)). The rumor turned out to be inaccurate, but what was its basis? It is possible that it was founded on the precedent of Shimon and Levi's conduct in the story of Shekhem!

1. The main difference relates to the acceptance of responsibility. Shekhem the son of Chamor is willing to accept responsibility and take Dina as his wife:

And Shekhem said to her father and to her brethren, " Let me find favor in your eyes, and what you shall say to me I will give. Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as you shall say to me; but give me the damsel to wife." ([Bereishit 34:11-12](#))

Amnon, on the other hand, treats Tamar with great cruelty, and shows no sense of responsibility towards her.

2. Shekhem's action began with lust, but afterwards, he also demonstrated his love for Dina:

And Shekhem the son of Chamor the Chivite, the prince of the land, saw her; and he took her, **and lay with her**, and forced her. And his soul did cleave to Dina the daughter of Yaakov, and **he loved** the damsel, and spoke comfortingly unto the damsel. ([Bereishit 34:2-3](#))

In a most surprising manner, it was only after the rape that Shekhem became filled with intense feelings for Dina,<sup>10</sup>[10] and he then deals with her with great delicacy.

With Amnon, the course was precisely the opposite. He acted exclusively out of lust, and after he committed his crime, his lust turned into unprecedented hatred:

And Amnon the son of David **loved** her...He forced her, and **lay with her**. Then Amnon **hated her with exceeding great hatred**; for the

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<sup>10</sup> [10] The expression "cleaving of the soul" is found in this sense in only one other place in Scripture, in the verse: "My soul cleaves to You; Your right hand holds me fast" ([Tehillim 63:9](#)) (In [Tehillim 119:25](#) – "My soul cleaves to the dust; quicken You me according to Your word" - the meaning is different.) This indicates the intensity of Shekhem's feelings for Dina.

hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. ([II Shmuel 13:1-15](#))

The significance of the parallel is self-evident: Through this parallel, Scripture wishes to emphasize the severity of Amnon's actions, which is much greater than the wickedness of the Canaanites with whom the sons of Yaakov were forced to contend. Both Shekhem and Amnon were guilty of heinous offenses, but their subsequent behavior was totally opposite: Shekhem began to conduct himself with sensitivity, which atoned a bit for his wicked deed, whereas Amnon only added sin to iniquity.

### III. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOSEF AND AMNON

We can now consider another clear parallel between Amnon and another figure in the book of *Bereishit* – Yosef – and especially the parallel between the story of Amnon and Tamar and the story of Yosef and the wife of Potifar. Let us list the main parallels:

1. In the two stories, a request is made that a certain person have relations with another. Amnon's words to Tamar, "Come lie with me, my sister," bring to mind the words of Potifar's wife to Yosef, "And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Yosef, and she said, ' Lie with me' " ([Bereishit 39:7](#)).<sup>11</sup>[11]

2. In v. 20, Avshalom describes Amnon's act with a euphemism: "Has Amnon your brother **been with you?**" This wording is also found in the story of Yosef and Potifar's wife: "That he listened not to her, to lie by her, or **to be with her**" ([Bereishit 39:10](#)).

Both the request and the euphemism are found exclusively in these two places.

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<sup>11</sup> [11] This (and other) parallels was already noted by R. Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon in his commentary to the Torah (ed. Greenbaum [Jerusalem, 5739], on [Bereishit 39:7](#)): "And she said to him, 'Lie with me,' just as Amnon said to Tamar: 'Come lie with me, my sister' – both are a despicable and savage expression."

3. Tamar says to Amnon: "Because **this great wrong** in putting me forth is worse than the other that you did to me" (v. 16). Yosef uses the same wording: "How then can I do **this great wrong**, and sin against God?" ([Bereishit 39:9](#)).<sup>12</sup>[12]

4. In both stories, mention is made of "going out" after the incident. In our chapter, it says: "And said, ' Put now this woman **out** from me' ...And his servant **brought her out**" (vv. 17-18). In the story of the wife of Potifar it says: "And he left his garment in her hand, and fled, **and got him out**. And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, **and had fled out...**" ([Bereishit 39:12-13](#)).

5. In both cases, the head of the house was exceedingly angry when he heard what happened: "But when king David heard of all **these things, he was very angry**" (v. 21); "And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke unto him, saying, ' **After this manner** did your servant to me' **that his wrath was kindled**" ([Bereishit 39:19](#)).

In addition to these substantive and linguistic parallels, there are two elements in our chapter that create a direct link to Yosef. The first, of course, is Tamar's colored robe, which brings to mind that of Yosef ([Bereishit 37:3](#) and elsewhere). The second is the famous words of Yosef, which Amnon also uses: "Cause every man to go out from me" (v. 19; [Bereishit 45:1](#)).<sup>13</sup>[13]

What is the significance of this correspondence? It would seem that Scripture wishes thereby to present the absolute contrast between these two figures in their struggle with their passions. The righteous Yosef withstands the seductions of the wife of Potifar, recognizes that her desire is "a great wrong," and flees the house in order to save himself from sin. Amnon, in contrast, is unable to overcome his passions; he sins with a great wrong, and

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<sup>12</sup> [12] R. Shmuel ben Chofni (see previous note) also noted this parallel (commentary to [Bereishit 39:9](#)).

<sup>13</sup> [13] Here, too, R. Shmuel ben Chofni explained in his commentary the significant difference between Yosef's command ([Bereishit 45:1](#)) and that of Amnon: "As for Amnon, he meant to remove them only in order to carry out his evil design against Tamar."



not only does he not accept responsibility for his actions, but he adds sin to iniquity and removes the victim of his crime from his house.

*Chazal* were also aware of this contrast. On the verse, "And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands; whoso pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" ([Kohelet 7:26](#)), they expound: "Whoso pleases God shall escape from her" – this is Yosef...Another explanation: 'Pleases' – this is Palti; 'but the sinner' – this is Amnon" ([Kohelet Rabba 7:3](#)).<sup>14</sup>[14] Yosef succeeded in escaping from the seduction, whereas Amnon was trapped by his passions and sank into the abyss of sin.<sup>15</sup>[15]

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14 [14] Elsewhere, *Chazal* state that Yosef serves as a precedent that obligates all of mankind to struggle against the evil inclination: "To the sensual person they would say: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah? If he said: I was beautiful and upset by sensual passion, they would say to him: Were you perchance more beautiful than Yosef? It was told of Yosef the virtuous that the wife of Potifar every day endeavored to entice him with words. The garments she put on for him in the morning, she did not wear in the evening; those she had put on in the evening, she did not wear in the morning. She said to him: Yield to me! He said: No. She said: I shall have you imprisoned. He said: 'The Lord releases the bound.' She said: I shall bend your proud stature. He replied: 'The Lord raises those who are bowed down.' She said: I shall blind your eyes. He replied: 'The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.' She offered him a thousand talents of silver to make him yield to her, to lie with her, to be near her, but he would not listen to her; not to 'lie with her' in this world, not 'to be with her' in the World to Come. Thus [the example of] Hillel condemns the poor, [the example of] R. Elazar ben Charsom condemns the rich, **and Yosef the virtuous condemns the wicked**" ([Yoma 35b](#)).

15 [15] It should be noted that there is also a parallel between the story of Amnon and the story of Yehuda and Tamar ([Bereishit 38](#)):

a. First and foremost, the name Tamar – the primary female character in both stories.

b. "Remain a widow in your father's house" ([Bereishit 38:11](#))/ "So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Avshalom's house" ([II Shmuel 13:20](#)).

c. "And in the process of time...and he went up to his sheep-shearers" ([Bereishit 38:12](#))/ "And it came to pass after two full years, that Avshalom had sheep-shearers in Ba'al-Hatzor" ([II Shmuel 13:23](#)).

d. "And his friend Chira the Adulamite" ([Bereishit 38:12](#))/ "But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Yonadav" ([II Shmuel 13:3](#)).

(Translated by David Strauss)

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e. "Come, I pray you, let me come in to you" ([Bereishit 38:15](#))/ "Lie with me, my sister" ([II Shmuel 13:11](#)).

It seems that this too is a contrasting parallel. Yehuda sins against Tamar, but in the end he knows how to repair his sin and admit to it, in absolute contrast to Amnon.

This parallel also strengthens the contrast between Amnon and David. As may be recalled, the incident involving Bat-Sheva also parallels the story of Yehuda and Tamar, and we already saw that the responsibility that David accepted with respect to Bat-Sheva was even greater than the responsibility that Yehuda accepted regarding Tamar.