

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 20

Miketz, Sicha 1

The Verse:

And to Yoseph were born two sons before the year of the famine set in.... (*Bereishis 41:50*)

The Rashi:

Before the year of the famine set in — From here it is derived that a person may not engage in marital relations during years of famine.

The Question:

Levi's wife gave birth to Yocheved as the family entered Egypt, in the beginning of the second year of the famine; Yitzchak also fathered a child during a year of famine. Why does Rashi not address this obvious counterexample?

The Explanation:

Rashi's comment is drawn from the Talmud (*Taanit 11a*) but he adds the words "from here," which implies that this practice is specifically derived from Yosef's behavior. This means to exclude the narrative of

Noach in the ark as the source for this prohibition.

On the phrase "And Noah went in and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives," Rashi comments, "the men separately and the women separately, because they were prohibited from engaging in marital relations since the world was steeped in pain." (*Bereishis 7:7*)

This derivation does not apply to Yosef's situation, however, as the "world steeped in pain" included Noah and his family, who were directly experiencing the pain of being isolated in the ark. Yosef, on the other hand, was not experiencing the effects of the famine, as he had stored food in Egypt. The prohibition on marital relations during a time of famine, even if one is not directly impacted by the famine, could only be "from here," from Yosef, who refrained from marital relations even though he had food.

Thus, it seems that Rashi does not see the "world enduring suffering" as a reason to refrain from marital relations if the suffering does not affect the person himself. What, then, is the reason Yosef refrained from marital relations?

The answer can be detected in Rashi's formulation, "a person may not engage in marital relations **during years of famine.**" Significantly, this is a departure from the singular tense of the verse "And to Yosef were born... before the **year of the famine** set in." The difference is important: When there is an isolated year of famine, there is no need to refrain from procreation because the event can be seen as an anomaly. But when there is a protracted stretch of famine, "years of famine," it is an indication that G-d is disrupting the natural order of the world. Therefore, it is appropriate to refrain from settling and populating the world as normal, because G-d has clearly diverted the world from the natural pattern.

We can now understand why Levi and Yitzchak did not refrain from marital relations. The famine during Yitzchak's lifetime was one year, and Levi procreated in the beginning of the seven year famine. Only Yosef knew with certainty that the

famine that had just begun was going to last years. Therefore, he would not engage in procreation.

This explanation satisfies a further point: Yosef did not only refrain from marital relations during the famine, he ensured that his children would be born before the famine as well. According to the explanation that sees the prohibition as deference to the "suffering of the world," this would only apply to engaging in marital relations, a form of pleasure, during a time of suffering. It would not preclude the giving of birth of children during that time. But if the reason is, as Rashi says, because the world is enduring a period of instability and therefore populating the world is inappropriate, then even having children during a time of famine is problematic, which is why Yosef ensured his children would be born prior to then. Of course, only Yosef was in a position to observe this prohibition, as he had advance knowledge of the impending famine.
