מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 21:26

Real love and real peace both include honest rebuke

Bereshit Rabbah 54:3

Avraham's rebuke of Avimelekh over the stolen well becomes the occasion for two teachings: Rabbi Yosei bar Ḥanina holds that true love must include reprimand (as in Proverbs 9:8), while Reish Lakish holds that true peace likewise requires reprimand. The midrash then clarifies the definition of a gazlan (robber) as one who takes something openly, in public or before a quorum of people, distinguishing him from a thief who acts in secret, and notes that robbery is defined by physically removing an object from another's hand. AI SUMMARY

"Abraham said: I will swear" (Genesis 21:24). "Abraham reprimanded Avimelekh regarding the well of water that Avimelekh's servants had stolen" (Genesis 21:25). "Abraham reprimanded Avimelekh..." – Rabbi Yosei bar Ḥanina said: Reprimand leads to love, as it is stated: "Rebuke a wise person, and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:8). This is consistent with [another] opinion of Rabbi Yosei bar Ḥanina, as he said: Any love that is not accompanied by reprimand is not [true] love. Reish Lakish said: Reprimand leads to peace – "Abraham reprimanded Avimelekh." This is consistent with [another] opinion of his, as he said: Any peace that is not accompanied by reprimand is not [true] peace.

"Regarding the well of water that Avimelekh's servants had stolen [gazlu]" – what is a robber [gazlan]? Bar Kappara said: It is one who steals something in public, as it says: "They robbed everyone who passed them on the road" (Judges 9:25) – just as the road is in public, so, too, robbery is in public. Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai derived it from here: "You brought [as sacrifices] the stolen [gazul] [animal], the lame, and the ill" (Malachi 1:13) – just as lameness and illness are visible, so too, a robber [gazlan] is visible [when he steals]. Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Reish Lakish: [If one steals] in the presence of nine people, he is a thief; in the presence of ten people, he is a robber. Rabbi Tanḥuma in the name of Rabbi Huna: One is not considered a robber until he takes something out of someone's hand, as it is stated: "He stole [vayigzol] the spear from the hand of the Egyptian" (II Samuel 23:21).

"Avimelekh said: I did not know who did this matter, neither did you tell me, nor did I hear of it, other than today" (Genesis 21:26). "Avimelekh said: I did not know...neither did you tell me" – by means of a messenger, "nor did I hear of it, other than today."