



Text Message Q&A #81

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Learning Tanach with Emunah

Biblical Criticism

Q: It is permissible to mention the questions of Biblical Criticism in order to bring our answers?

A: Our Rabbi Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah once yelled at someone who asked this question. We should not mention Biblical Criticism at all (see Rambam, Avodah Zarah 2:2).

Moral Message

Q: Why don't we describe our Forefather's actions as immoral in order to impart a moral message?

A: A shrewd trick to slander our Forefathers.

Holiness of our Forefathers

Q: Were our Forefathers and Foremothers in the Tanach holy people?

A: What a question! Holy with a holiness beyond our understanding.

Where is it Written

Q: Where do we find in the Tanach itself that our Forefathers were spiritual giants and not merely regular people?

A: If they were merely regular people, why did Hashem reveal Himself to them and establish their path as a guide for us?

Lashon Ha-Ra about People in the Tanach

Q: What is the problem with speaking negatively about people in the Tanach?

A: Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein relates in the preface to the volume 8 of Shut Igrot Moshe, an incident which occurred in the city in Russia where he served as Rabbi. A man became ill with a horrible sickness: his tongue swelled up within his mouth, he was unable to speak and he eventually died. A day before his death, Rav Moshe came to visit him and the man asked that everyone leave the room. He had something private and of great importance to discuss with the Rav. He explained that he had given a class and had discussed Lot's older daughter who named her son Moav – from father. She was the progenitor of the Moabite People, which means that she is the ancestor of Rut, who is the great-grandmother of King David, from whom the Messiah will descend. How could it be, he had asked, that this woman, who had no shame, and therefore publicized her illicit and immoral behavior by giving her son a name that would ever recall her sinful act, was granted such honor? He spared no words in denigrating her behavior. He continued: "That night, two elderly women appeared to me in a dream. Their heads and faces were covered, and they said they were Lot's daughters. They had heard my complaint about their behavior and came from the World of Truth to convey to me a justification for their actions. Since it was well-known that Avraham Avinu, their uncle, was an individual for whom miracles were commonplace, they feared that people might say that their sons were conceived by immaculate conception. There were no men around, so how else could they have been conceived? In order to prevent another religion such as Christianity from being established by this misunderstanding, they decided to publicize the source of their conception. Their motives were pure and lofty. Since he had spoken ill against them and defamed their character, he was to be punished as the spies in the wilderness were punished. Their tongues swelled, and they died an unusual death." Ha-Rav Feinstein says that this seems correct.

Don't speak Lashon Ha-Ra about people and incidents you don't know about. And if this is true for the daughters of Lot, it is all the more so for our holy Forefathers and Foremothers.

The Essence – The Mitzvot

Q: What is the problem with saying that our Forefathers were not completely morally upright? After all, isn't the essence of the Torah to perform Mitzvot?

A: This also uproots the obligation to fulfill the Mitzvot.

We are Morally Superior to the Forefathers

Q: What is the problem with saying that we are morally superior to the Forefathers?

A: I will give you the benefit of the doubt that you do not know them.