

## **Vayechi: The Brachot Dvar Torah based on Rav Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l, and Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky**

- Nisson Shulman. Question: why Yaakov does not praise all the sons in his final bracha. Rashi, Reuven did not succeed in saving Joseph because he was involved in "Sako veta'anito". Why? Answer by Rav Yoseph Soloveitchik zt"l. Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky's answer about Shimon and Levi, regarding kanaut. When does the Torah approve, and when it does not approve.

### **VAYEHI: THE BRACHOT**

YAAKOV in his appraisal of the 12 shevatim does not have praise for all of them. Reuven – pahaz kamayim... Yet when the brothers tried to kill Yoseph, Reuven intervened and tried to save him. He told the brothers to throw him into the pit, because he had intention to return and to save Yoseph. He left, and in the meantime the brothers sold him...

Rashi raises the question, where did Reuven go during this lapse of time? Apparently he was away. The Torah tells us that Reuven returned to the bor and to his shock and horror he found Joseph gone. Rashi quotes Hazal that Reuven was immersed besako vetaanito doing teshuva for his sin, having removed Yaakov's bed from Bilha's tent to the tent of mother Leah...

The question is: "Why now?" It is a critical time, with Joseph in danger. Why choose this moment for teshuva? Reuven knew the seriousness and danger! Why did he find it necessary just at this time to leave to fast and repent?

An answer from Rav Soloveitchik zt"l is that when Reuven observed what the brothers are planning to do to Yoseph, he realized that this conspiracy was the result of the total breakdown of the authority of their father Yaakov. So whatever justification they may have found to punish Yoseph, nevertheless how could they act in this way when they saw how it would affect Yaakov? The brothers could surely have surmised the effect on Yaakov! They need only consider how close their father was to Yoseph! As we find subsequently, that he refused to be comforted. Nevertheless, the brothers seemed not to care. Surely if their father Yaakov had been respected by the brothers, they could not have acted in this way.

Reuven understood that this breakdown in authority could only happen with gradual erosion, which began when he Reuven, the oldest, looked up to by his brothers, committed an act of disrespect. Reuven now realizing to what his sin had led, removed himself to do teshuva. So great was his contrition that he could not bear to stay at the site where his brothers had acted this way to Yoseph. That is why Moshe Rabbenu in his final beracha declares, Yehi Reuven veal yamos, because Moshe Rabbenu realized that Reuven had achieved repentance and therefore deserved to be accepted in the heart of the Jewish people.

Yaakov then went on to rebuke Shimon and Levi. He declares, Shimon veLevi ahim.... referring to the act of vengeance on the people of Shechem. A literal translation would imply that he considers Shimon and Levi completely guilty.

Ramban, however, takes note of the two words ahim hem, and considers them words of praise. Yes, they were wrong. Revenge, retaliation upon a neighboring people, is wrong. Nevertheless, they showed brotherhood, not just brothers to each other, but to all the others! They were true brothers to Dina as well. True, their action was wrong, but they deserve praise for their spirit of loyalty...

It is interesting to note that while Yaakov lumped Shimon and Levi into one basket, rebuking both of them, Moshe Rabenu omits any direct reference to Shimon, but projects a glorious future and role for Levi. Yoru mishpatecha leYaakov, veTorascha leYisrael... What accounts for Moshe's departure from the path of Jacob in this matter?

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky shelit"va answered that Shimon and Levi both displayed the character trait of kanaut, zealotry in their action towards Shechem. Zealotry displays an intolerance of evil. And zealotry displays an impatience to allow time to take its normal time in judicial action to correct the evil. It is the taking of the law in one's hands that was the essence of zealotry.

Does the Torah approve this? The answer is that it depends on the particular situation and how it is exercised. We find that Pinchas reacted with zealotry and was rewarded with the covenant of peace. Many miracles occurred during his great act of courage when he killed Zimri. The law restricts the zealot as to what he is permitted to do and how he should carry out his act. It is only permitted when normal judicial judgment cannot be carried out, only when the actual crime is being committed, and only if the intentions are pure and totally sincere. So the trait of zealousness has to be carefully channeled, limited, and controlled. There is to be no permanent zealot. It is a trait only for a momentary situation of crisis where there is no other alternative.

Shimon and Levi both displayed zealotry with Shechem. Yaakov rebuked them both. There would be reprisals, there is a tarnished image, there is a hilul Hashem...

Levi channeled this towards service of God, resisted egel worship, faithfully complied with Moshe's command to kill even their own brethren who were guilty in the service of the Golden calf. Thus, Pinchas of Shevet Levi, rises in a moment of crisis to challenge the person of Zimri, leader of Shevet Shimon, and slays him.

What did Pinchas return to? – The covenant of peace. Torah, praise of God, worship, ki sifse kohen yishmeru daas... What is the symbolic mission of Aharon? Ohev shalom verodef shalom.

Shimon allowed his zealousness to exceed its limit and became involved in creating the spirit of dissention instead of peace and harmony, manifested by the leadership of Zimri, who took his entire shevet to rebel against the leadership of Moshe Rabbenu. Thus, Moshe Rabbenu distinguishes between Levi and Shimon. Levi is praised, Shimon left out and omitted from the praise of Moshe Rabbenu.

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