

“CORRECTING OUR FLAWS”

Yaakov Avinu delivers his farewell address to his sons. Yaakov begins by first praising Re'even, “*You are my firstborn, my strength, foremost in rank and foremost in power*” (49:3). Then, he faults him with criticism, and says that for these faults “*You lost your opportunity to national leadership*”. Yaakov refers to Re'even as “unstable”, *Pachaz KaMayim*” (49:4), and continues: “You are impulsive and unstable as water.

Yaakov is referring to the incident when Re'even, in a state of anger, switches the bed of Yaakov into Bilhah's bedroom (35:22). Re'even acted impulsively, hastily and recklessly, without a thought to the consequences of his act. A leader, Yaakov was saying cannot afford the luxury of acting impulsively, but must be deliberate and thoughtful in what he says and does. That's the first Mishna in Pirkei Avot-“*Hevei Metunim Badin*” (1:1)

The question we ask is why was this revelation necessary? Re'even was well aware of his transgression and needed no reminder. Furthermore, Re'even had done Teshuvah, he repented for his sin at least 39 years ago according to Rashi (37:29). So why would Yaakov fault him now for something done a long time ago, and presumably, was forgiven for? As a matter of fact, since the offense was done in a manner of rash impulsiveness rather than in a calculated and premeditated manner shouldn't that in itself mitigate the seriousness of the crime?

What we learn from here is something very profound and significant. Yaakov is saying to Re'even, I am aware of your repentness concerning the transgression, but I am not looking at the offense. I am looking at the flaw in your character that led you to do the offensive act; I am referring to your impetuosity. Therefore, I do not believe you have the qualifications of a true leader. The leader of a nation must teach his subjects self-control. For this to be possible, the leader must himself project an image which reflects the highest standards of self-control. Therefore, Re'even, who has displayed behavior in an unrestrained manner, is denied the opportunity to having the monarchy stem from his descendants.

For us, the message rings loud and clear. It is not enough to repent over what we did wrong, it is more important to reflect upon the cause of that wrongdoing. If it turns out to be a flaw in our character then we must first work on correcting that shortcoming; and eradicating that problem within ourselves. That is the ultimate true Teshuvah, for as long as that character flaw exists within us, the problem will only continue to recur. That's what Dovid HaMelech said: *Sur Mei'Ra- Va'asei Tov* (Tehillim 34)- First remove the flaw and afterwards you will succeed in doing good.

Shabbat Shalom from Deerfield Beach, Fla
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