

וישלה

REUVEN

Reuven teaches us self-sacrifice. The *Zohar* (*Bereishis* 29:32) reveals the generic nature of Reuven's name "see a son" (ראו בן). In the spiritual world, all that matters is thought and intent; spiritual intent manifests itself in all end products of human endeavor.¹ When Yaakov *Avinu* first consummated his marriage, not realizing that he was actually with Leah, his thought and intent were focused on Rachel. The product of that consummation, therefore, should not have embodied purity of the highest caliber. Nevertheless, Hashem testified that Reuven was spiritually viable and without blemish — not a son of a substitute *ben temurah* — by proclaiming literally "see a son."

Since intent determines realization — the *Bechorah* — firstborn status — could not justifiably belong to Reuven. Yaakov's intent was to be with Rachel, and the product of that consummation was to have been his *Bechor*. It was thus only logical, in the spiritual world of the intellect, that Hashem reserve the *Bechora* for Yosef:

כי הוא הבכור...נתנה בכרתו לבני יוסף

His birthright was given to the children of Yosef (*Divrei Hayamim* I 5:1).

Even though he was actually the first born, Reuven had to relinquish his birth status to Yosef, because in the absolute world, thought determines realization.

Reuven could have borne the greatest grudge against Yosef; he could have felt that what was rightfully his, was stolen from him by his younger brother. Nevertheless, Reuven endeavored to save Yosef from the evil designs of his brothers (*Berachos* 7:). He could have allowed them to murder Yosef, and thereby become the sole contender for the *Bechora*. Due to this tremendous display of self-sacrifice, in attempting to save the life of his "usurper," Reuven was blessed by Moshe:

יחי ראובן ואל ימות

Let Reuven live, and not die (*Zohar Devarim* 33:6).

In *Divrei Hayamim* (I 5:1) the reason given for the loss of Reuven's birthright was that:

ובחללו יצועי אביו

He defiled his father's bed.

The Maharal (*Ibid.*; *Ein Yaakov Shabbos* 55:; Ramban *Bereishis* 49:4) explains the profound significance of that event. Reuven, in his intense loyalty to his mother, was determined to unite

¹. The view that mere intention has a certain force, is even operative in some common, everyday situations (*Berachos* 23:; *Megillah* 26:; *Sanhedrin* 47:; *Menachos* 34:). For example, should someone weave a funeral shroud for a dead body, it is Halachically considered ready for use for the purpose for which it is intended. Also, see *Mishna Sanhedrin* (9:2); *Mishna Chullin* (2:7), *Kesubos* (8a), *Mishna Keilim* (25:9, 26:8).

his father with Leah. This meant that Reuven had to actually commit a sin with Bilhah so that Yaakov *Avinu* could no longer (halachically) live with her. Reuven's wicked intention did not actually come to fruition because he was overcome by a feeling of *teshuvah*. In the absolute world of purity in which Yaakov *Avinu* operated, Reuven's mere intention was sufficient to force Yaakov away from Bilhah. Nevertheless, the *Gemara* states that:

כל האומר ראובן חטא אינו אלא טועה

Whoever claims that Reuven sinned, is only in error (*Shabbos* 55:).

Again, we have witnessed the supreme self-sacrifice of Reuven.

The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 7:) states:

ראובן הודה ולא בוש מה היה סופו? נחל חיי העולם הבא

Reuven was not ashamed to repent; he was therefore rewarded with *Olam Haba*.

The *Gemara* in *Megillah* (25:) states:

מעשה ראובן נקרא ולא מתרגם

The story of Reuven is read but not translated.

We seek not to impugn the integrity of Reuven.

Reuven, however, forever bears a derogatory label:

הרי זה בכור שוטה

This first born is a fool (*Bereishis Rabbah* 91:9).

Reuven, in an attempt to convince his father to permit Binyamin to accompany the brothers to *Mitzraim*, offered Yaakov a proposition.

את שני בני תמית אם לא אביאני אלך

My two sons you shall slay, if I do not return him [Binyamin] to you (*Bereishis* 42:37).

The *Targum Yonasan* (ibid.) seeks to soften the impact of the word “slay” by differentiating between “death by the hand of man” and “death by the hand of Heaven.” What Reuven actually offered Yaakov was the acceptance of Divine retribution (see Ibn Ezra, ibid.). Nevertheless the designation “fool” rings in the ears of eternity — but Reuven's proposition must be understood in its proper context. A parallel can be drawn from the story of the spies (*meraglim*).

The Torah states:

ויהושע בן נון וכלב בן יפנה חיו מן האנשים ההם ההלכים לתור את הארץ

But Yehoshua the son of Nun, and Kaleiv the son of Yefuneh, remained alive of those men that went to spy out the land (*Bamidbar* 14:38).

The *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 118:) questions the use of the words “remained alive.” For it is explicitly stated later on:

ולא נותר מהם איש כי אם כלב בן יפנה ויהושע בן נון

And there was not left of them a man, save Kaleiv the son of Yefuneh, and Yehoshua the son of Nun (*Bamidbar* 26:65).

Therefore, the *Gemara* infers that the words “remained alive” must refer to the fact that Kaleiv and Yehoshua were rewarded with the inheritance of the spies in *Eretz Yisrael*, “alive” referring to inheritance. The converse of the well-known statement “a poor man is considered dead” (*Zohar, Terumah* 158), would be “a wealthy man is considered to be alive.” Hence, a man who gains an inheritance is considered “alive,” while one who loses his inheritance is considered “dead.” Reuven did not actually foolishly offer the physical lives of his sons as security for the safe return of Binyamin. Reuven’s security offer to Yaakov was to risk his children’s future inheritance in *Eretz Yisrael*. Yaakov rejected Reuven’s offer, but accepted Yehudah’s (*Bereishis* 43:9). For unlike Reuven’s mere worldly stake, Yehudah offered his entire portion in the world to come (Rashi *Bereishis* 43:9), a much more serious risk (see *Torah Temimah, Bereishis* 42:37; *Pirkei D’Rebbe Eliezer* 40). Again, the willingness of Reuven to self-sacrifice for the benefit of others is abundantly evident.

Supreme self-sacrifice, the underlying characteristic of Reuven, was also the hallmark of his aunt Rachel. Both Rachel and Leah desired to marry Yaakov, because they understood that he possessed the seed of what would be the *Shivtei Kah*. Yaakov wanted to marry only Rachel; he had no plans for Leah at all. It was only through Lavan’s chicanery that Leah even entered the picture. Yaakov and Rachel had established a strategy to circumvent any potential trickery, and Rachel could have been Yaakov’s sole wife, and mother to all twelve tribes. This is what Yaakov wanted (*Rabbeinu Bechayai, Bereishis* 44:27), and there were no logical reasons for any deviations from this plan. However, in order not to cause embarrassment to her older sister, Rachel gave almost everything away (*Megillah* 13:). Because of Rachel’s pity and love for her sister she allowed her greatest nightmare to occur. Rachel invited in a rival for her husband’s affections, and a competitor for her husband’s offspring. There is no greater self-sacrifice than this.

Hence, in Yaakov’s first union with Leah, when he imagined he was actually with Rachel, the spirit of Rachel’s character emerged in the product. In the world of absolute truth, where mind prevails over matter, the essence of Rachel had to be reflected. This was the origin of Reuven’s characteristic of self-sacrifice.

aA