



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Vayechi

HAMELECH

Reuven, Don't Be Nimble!

Our *parasha* states 49:3-4, "Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and first vigor; foremost in rank and foremost in power: Hasty like water, you cannot have more, because you ascended your father's bed ..." A subsequent *pasuk* (8) states, "Yehudah, you confessed to your brothers; your hand is at the nape of your enemies; the sons of your father bow to you."

Points to Ponder

- 1- We must explain the expression, "hasty like water."
- 2- Our Sages state that Reuven was fit to receive the three gifts of kingship, *kehunah*, and the birthright. However, he lost all of them because he stumbled by moving his father's bed. Why did he receive such a punishment on account of one error?
- 3- It states in *Masechet Shabbat* (55b), "Said Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeini in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Anyone who says that Reuven sinned is mistaken, as the *pasuk* states, 'And the sons of Yaakov were twelve' – this teaches that they were all equal to one another." Since Reuven repented and did not truly sin, why then did he lose the three gifts?
- 4- Yehudah merited kingship because he confessed; therefore his brothers will bow to him. We know that Hashem rewards an individual measure for measure. Therefore, why did Yehudah receive the kingship on account of the fact that he confessed?

Patience Breeds Success

We are witness to a reality that many times an individual is caught up in a fire of desire, vengeance, and anger, wishing to run and insult someone who hurt him. Or sometimes he is caught up in a desire for honor or money. He spontaneously does everything in his power to attain them, without considering the results of his actions. This can occur in the home with his family, or at work, when he wishes to respond sharply and quickly to display his strength and wisdom. This, however, is a mistaken path and generally leads to error, since he did not carefully weigh his words or deeds, or consider what the results would be. He is ultimately filled with regret that he spoke or acted the way he did. But by then it is too late; he cannot reverse his actions, and the damage that has been done is difficult to rectify. However, when an individual is patient and weighs each word and deed carefully, and is not hasty to do everything that crosses his mind, then he will usually succeed, as we will learn from our *parasha*.

Reuven Fell Down and Lost His Crown

The *Pesikta Zutrati* (*Lekach Tov*, *Bereishit* 49:3) expounding on the words, "foremost in rank and foremost in power" states that Yaakov told Reuven that he was fit to receive an additional three portions more than his brothers. These portions were the birthright, *kehunah*, and the kingship. "Foremost in rank" refers to the birthright which merits receiving a double portion. "Foremost in power," refers to the



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kehunah, which merits 24 gifts. Alternatively, based on a different *pasuk*, the Midrash states that "Foremost in rank" is a reference to the *kehunah* and "Foremost in power [עז],"² refers to the kingship, which is alluded to by the word "power" [עז], as the *pasuk* states (*Shmuel 1, 2:10*), "And He will give power to His king." The Midrash concludes that now the birthright was given to Yosef, the *kehunah* to Levi, and the kingship to Yehudah. Rashi explains similarly.

Don't Lose It!

In *Parashat Vayechi* (49:3-4), Rashi explains, "And what caused you to lose all of these? 'Hasty like water.' The hastiness and the frenzy with which you hurried to show your anger, like these waters which run hurriedly. 'Therefore you will not get more.' You will not take exceedingly, all of these extra things that were intended for you." This is what the Radak writes (*ibid.*), "He [- Yaakov] said to him, 'You were fit to be foremost in rank and foremost in power, had you not committed a great sin. This is what it states, 'Hasty like water. You had swiftness and quickness like flowing water; so too, did you hurry to perform your desire, and your evil inclination overpowered you. You did not stand before it, and you did contemplate [-what you were doing], and it is a great sin.'" And so writes the *Toldot Yitzchak*, "When the *pasuk* states that [-Reuven] lost the kingship because he was hasty like water, it is because a king needs patience and counsel in all of his deeds." [Also see the *Kli Yakar* who writes similarly.] We see, then, that "hastiness" means to act without thinking; to react quickly and impatiently. This is the opposite of a king who

must remain patient, for he makes every decision and issues each order. Nevertheless, we still must understand why this was so severe a misdeed that he lost all of the gifts – especially given the fact that Reuven repented for his misdeed.

Majesty Begins With Self-Control

It appears that the negative trait of hastiness stems from a lack of control over man's evil inclination; he is unable to refrain, be patient, and weigh his deeds. This is the opposite of "majesty," which means to exercise control over his character traits and not the opposite. This was demonstrated by Yehudah's admission in the episode with Tamar. Yehudah had gathered together the *beit din* to judge Tamar for harlotry and to sentence her to burning. Then she sent the stick and the wrap, saying that the man to whom these belonged had fathered the child. In those moments, Yehudah was placed in an enormous trial whether or not he would reveal the truth. For there is no greater disgrace than this, to publicly admit a deed which should not have been committed. He could have chosen to ignore her words and let the sentence remain as it was, and then he would have spared himself embarrassment. This is a test of man's dominance over his character traits – if he is capable of admitting his failures in public. It is then that he is truly a king, and possesses the ability needed to rule as a king. Therefore Yehudah merited the kingship – measure for measure. We see therefore, that Reuven's punishment was not due to the act of hastily reversing his father's bed, for he repented. Rather, it pointed to the fact that he lacked the ability to control his traits and urges.



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He was therefore unfit to be a king and to receive the three gifts.

Shaul Lost the Kingship

Now we can understand how Shaul lost his kingship. The Navi relates (*Shmuel 1 perek 10*) that Shmuel had instructed Shaul to go down to Gilgal and wait seven days. At that point, Shmuel would arrive and offer burnt offerings. In *perek 13*, the Navi relates that the Jews were standing opposite the *Plishtim*, who were threatening to wage an enormous war. Shaul, as previously instructed by Shmuel, waited seven days for him to arrive. But at the conclusion of the seventh day, Shmuel had not yet arrived. At that point, members of the Jewish army began to disband, leaving Shaul. Therefore Shaul decided not to wait for Shmuel and to offer up the burnt-offering himself. As Shaul finished offering up the sacrifice, Shmuel appeared. He asked him what he had done and admonished him severely for not waiting. He then told Shaul that had he listened to Hashem's command to wait, then his kingdom would have endured forever; now it would not.

We must understand why Shaul lost the kingship by bringing the offerings instead of Shmuel; all the more so, since he *did* wait the seven days that Shmuel had requested. R' Chaim Shmulevitz *zt"l* explains by posing the following question: We find that David Hamelech also sinned as king, yet he was forgiven. Why was Shaul not forgiven for his act? He explains that, yes, for the sin itself one can certainly repent, and can be forgiven for it. However, a negative and inappropriate character trait cannot be overlooked. Someone who loses

his good sense in a stressful moment is not fit to be a king in Israel. This flaw decided the fate of both Shaul and Reuven. Certainly, the sin was erased with repentance, but kingship and *kehunah* require specific traits and abilities, which Reuven and Shaul did not possess to a large enough degree. This was also the deciding factor in Shaul's next sin, not killing Agag, the king of Amalek, as he was commanded to do. This occurred because of the same reason – not being able to withstand pressure, as he told Shmuel (*ibid 15:24*), "For I feared the Nation, and I listened to their voice." This was the reason that his remorse over his misdeed did not help; for while it is possible to repent for a sin, as did David HaMelech, regret cannot rectify a negative trait.

Moshe Rabbeinu exhibited patience. When it was time to fight Amalek, he said "Tomorrow." When Korach rebelled, Moshe said, "Tomorrow morning, Hashem will make it clear whom He chooses."

Patience Saves Lives

The *Sefer Chassidim (siman 655)* relates a story about a son who honored his father greatly. The father said to him, "You honored me in life; honor me in death as well. I command you to delay your anger one night and refrain yourself by not speaking." After his father passed away, he went to a different land, and unbeknownst to him, left his wife pregnant. He was delayed on his travels for years. When he returned to his city, he arrived at night and went to the room where his wife was lying. He then heard the voice of a young man kissing her. He drew his sword and



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wanted to kill both of them. He then remembered his father's command and returned his sword to its sheath. He heard his wife saying to the young man next to her, her son, 'It has already been many years since your father has left me. If he would know that a son was born to him, he would already have come with a woman for you to marry.' When the man heard this, he said, 'Open up for me, my sister, my beloved. *Baruch Hashem* that I controlled my anger, and blessed is my father who commanded me to control my anger for one night. Because of this, I did not kill both you and my son.' They rejoiced greatly. They made a feast for all the Jews, and greatly rejoiced.

Coffee, Please?

There is a story about a very wealthy man who was searching for a *ben Torah* to be a match for his daughter. He went from yeshiva to yeshiva until he found an amazing *bachur* named Meshulam Igra, who was extraordinarily diligent, and he took him as a son in law.

At the *eirusin* [engagement] celebration the *bachur* was given coffee to drink, something which was a novelty at the time and very expensive. Since he was totally immersed in Torah study, R' Igra did not know how a cup of coffee was prepared. They placed the coffee, sugar, and boiling water in front of him. He thought to himself how he should proceed. He decided that according to the Torah, first one eats and then he drinks. He therefore took the coffee grinds, and he started to eat them. Afterwards, he ate the sugar and then drank the water. When the bride and her father saw this, they were

horrified. They were sure that the *chatan* was socially inept, and they annulled the *shidduch*.

Shortly thereafter, the wealthy man found a *bachur* who was a genius and extraordinarily diligent, and he took him for his daughter. The most prominent rabbis and *roshei yeshivot* were invited to the wedding, and the *mesader Kiddushin* was none other than the legendary *gaon*, the author of the *Mesorat HaShas*. The time of the wedding arrived, but the great *gaon* had still not arrived to officiate at the wedding. Therefore, the wealthy man travelled in his coach to bring him to the *chuppah*.

At that time, the great *gaon* sat in his house, totally immersed in a letter he was reading, from which he could not divert his mind. When he saw the wealthy man, he apologized for his tardiness, and explained that he just received a letter from a special young man who is destined for greatness. In this letter, the young man disproved a ruling of the *beit din* related to the matter of an *agunah*. He was very taken with this letter, as the young man had developed extraordinary novel Torah thoughts, which neither he nor the rest of the *beit din* had thought of. The wealthy man was curious to know exactly who this young man destined for greatness, whom the *Mara D'Atra* was speaking about with such awe was. "Meshulam Igra," he answered.

When the wealthy man heard the name, he fell on a chair and almost fainted. The Rav was concerned over his wellbeing. He did not understand what caused the wealthy man to have such despair on the joyous day of his daughter's wedding. "This was my daughter's first *chatan*,



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and we annulled the *shidduch*, because we thought that he was socially inept," he explained. He then went on to tell the Rav the story. The Rav was incredulous, "You cancelled a *shidduch* with R' Meshulam Igra? It is worthwhile to faint an additional time. If you would not have acted hastily," remarked the Rav, "You would have merited the *gadol hador* as your son in law."

Haste and Waste

Shlah HaKadosh (Sha'ar HaOtiot, Letter Mem) brings Gem. Berachot 20a that patience can save a person a lot of money. He then quotes his father (Sefer Yesh Nochalin): Do not act impulsively, think before you act. Haste makes waste. I said, "In my haste, every person is unsuccessful" (cf. Tehillim 116:11). I.e., one who acts too quickly, quite often his plans will backfire.

Tehillim (75:3) teaches, "When I take my time, I judge fairly."

Yeshaya (30:15) teaches, "With calm and tranquility, you will be saved."

All of the above is from the Sefer Yesh Nochalin.

Shlah HaKadosh continues: Tehillim (119:59): I calculated my ways, and I turned my feet towards Your testimonies. With this, Dovid Hamelech is teaching that those who think before they act have much higher chances at being successful.

Shlah continues: While it is true that alacrity for *mitsvot* is praiseworthy, that is in respect to something which is clearly the right thing to do. However, when something is questionable, one ought to think before he acts. For example, a

gabbai tzedakah must take a lot into consideration before allocating charity to each needy cause.

Mother of Yeshivot

Reb Chayim of Volozhin came to his revered master, the Vilna Gaon to mention his novel idea of opening a Yeshiva. All excited, he told the Gaon of his plans. The Gaon listened and then discouraged the opening of the Yeshiva.

Reb Chayim was quite disappointed. He had really thought that it was a great idea. He sat down and thought it through. Weeks and months went by, and Reb Chayim kept thinking about it. He came up with many possible reasons to open the Yeshiva and he worked on a schedule and plan, how to succeed.

A year later, he returned to the Gaon and asked permission to bring up the topic again, after having dissected the issue from all sides. The Gaon heard him out and told him to go ahead with it.

Reb Chayim asked what made him change his mind; why had he originally been opposed.

The Gaon responded that when Reb Chayim had come the first time, he was very excited and the Gaon was suspicious that in all the excitement, perhaps there was not enough deliberation and forethought. But now that he saw how every detail and motive had been analyzed, he was all for it.

Ride the Train

Rav Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky, the Steipler Gaon, married the sister of the Chazon Ish. After they met once, Miriam Karelitz had her hesitations.



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She went to her brother and told him that the bochur fell asleep at the meeting. She thought that this was a bit rude.

The Chazon Ish told her to be patient and he would investigate the matter. The Chazon Ish went to the Steipler and found out why he fell asleep. He had come on a very long train ride. Before the train ride he had learnt for many hours straight, planning on sleeping on the train. But when he entered the train, he saw that the seats were all covered with material. He had been expecting wooden benches. Now he was suspicious that perhaps the material was made of *Shatnez*, a mixture of wool and linen, so he chose to stand for the entire journey. So it was no wonder that he fell asleep at the meeting.

This woman's patience earned her a *shidduch* with the *Gadol HaDor*. Had she acted hastily, according to her initial instinct and not revealed the reason for her hesitation to her brother, she would have lost out for a lifetime.

Keep Your Eyes in Your Head

We have learned to what extent an individual must act patiently and not hastily when the matter pertains to his relationship with others. He is required to weigh his actions, and to act and speak wisely. He must foresee the consequences of each word and action. "A wise man has eyes in his head," we are taught. In other words, a wise man acts with foresight, because he can lose his World to Come with one action. It is said that the Baal Shem Tov found an allusion to this in a *pasuk*, "*va'avaditem miheirah*," which literally means, "And you will be lost quickly." The Baal Shem Tov said that these words hint that man

must lose his hastiness and tendency to rush. However, if the matter pertains to Torah and mitzvot, if the matter is clear to him, then on the contrary, he must act with alacrity, as our Sages state, "*Zerizim makdimim le'mitzvot*, Those with alacrity come early to mitzvot." They additionally state, "*Mitzvah ha'baah le'yadcha al tachmitzena*, If a mitzvah comes to your hand, do not be tardy" [*tachmitzena* can refer to waiting, such as waiting for dough to ferment (*machmitz*)]. However, something which is not totally clear to him requires patience and thought in a calm state of mind before he acts. What one can merit by controlling his character traits and not allowing them to control him, is the difference between Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah. Those whose traits overcame them lost everything, while Yehuda controlled his traits and merited the kingship. So too, should everyone constantly think how to overcome his negative character traits, and by doing so, he will merit much good and blessing.

Also in the home, husband and wife should be very patient with each other, never jumping to conclusions, always calmly asking for explanations for any inconvenience or disturbance. Those who remain in control and do not allow anger to get the better of them, will come out ahead. Their homes will be peaceful and successful.

Certainly before getting involved in an argument, a person must weigh all the considerations and possible consequences and think deeply and consult the wise before taking action.

Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach,

Rav Mordechai Malka