



## הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד  
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,  
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### Parashat Vayechi

#### **Hastiness Causes One to Lose Everything**

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."

#### **Questions:**

- 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, then why 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?

#### **A Path Upon Which Many Stumble**

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. If we take, for example, the Azaria trial; all of the noise has been caused by hastiness. 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 was Fit to Receive Three Crowns**

The *Pesikta Zutrat* (*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 *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" [עַז], refers to the kingship, which is alluded to by the word "power" [עַז], 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.

#### **How Reuven Lost Three Crowns With One Deed**

In *Parashat Vayishlach* (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



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hasty like water, it is because a king needs patience and council 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 is Control Over One's Character Traits

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

### Shaul Lost the Kingship Due to Hastiness

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.

### Patience Saves Life

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



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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 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."

### Story of R' Meshulam Igra's *Shidduch*

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*, 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."

### Words of Mussar

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



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is not totally clear to him requires patience and thought in a clam 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.

*Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach,*  
Rav Mordechai Malka