

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Vayishlach

“AND YISRAEL HEARD; AND THE SONS OF YAAKOV WERE TWELVE.”
(BEREISHIS 35:22)

Reuvain was not disinherited

AFTER ROCHEL'S DEATH, Reuvain relocated his father's bed from Bilhah's tent to Leah's (Rashi *ibid.*). Although Reuvain had a very good reason for doing this, it nevertheless represented a slight imperfection in the totality of his *kibud av* – honoring one's father – and the bed should not have been moved. The Ramban (*ibid.*) tells us that because of Yaakov's humility, Reuvain was not disinherited and was still counted amongst the twelve tribes.

We cannot assume that Yaakov bent over backwards to pardon a sin which disqualified Reuvain from membership in the Nation of Israel. If Reuvain did not deserve to be included in the twelve tribes, Yaakov was doing a disservice to the future of the entire Jewish Nation. We must conclude that Reuvain's mistake did not disqualify him, but that Yaakov nevertheless would have banished him, if it were not for Yaakov's outstanding trait of humility.

Why, then, was Yaakov's humility so crucial?

Can this be possible? Would our forefather Yaakov have taken revenge on his eldest son? Yaakov is praised for his love of truth, as the Torah states, “Give truth to Yaakov” (Michah 7:20). Yaakov should have judged the issue with only one consideration – that of justice. Additionally, Yaakov must have loved Reuvain greatly; if anything, he should have treated Reuvain more leniently rather than more severely. Why, then, was Yaakov's humility so crucial?

Had Yaakov not perfected his attribute of humbleness to such an exceptional degree, and had he allowed feelings of self importance to creep in, he would have lacked the complete clarity required to make a proper decision. With all his truthfulness, with all the profound love that he felt for his first born son, and with all his awareness of the severity and implications of eternally disinheriting one of the tribes of Israel, Yaakov still could have erred. If Yaakov had possessed even a slight degree of arrogance in him, he would have misjudged the situation and disinherited Reuvain.

This episode illustrates how strongly *ga'avah* – pride and arrogance – tugs at our hearts. We have an innate tendency to take things personally. When we are wronged, hurt, or insulted, our injured egos demand revenge. As fair and detached as we think we are, our judgment is colored by this powerful drive. This impulse could have overpowered Yaakov's longing for truth, on an almost imperceptible level, and could have even eclipsed his love for his eldest son. Only Yaakov Avinu, with his perfection in humility, was able to expel all feelings of self importance from his character, and thereby avoid unjustly banishing Reuvain forever from the Nation of Israel.

This can only be accomplished by eliminating any trace of pride and ego

We are constantly called upon to make decisions in disciplining and correcting others – when we reprimand our children, our students and our subordinates. At these times we must make every effort to banish the feeling of “he/she did this against me!” This can only be accomplished by eliminating any trace of pride and ego. The “I” cannot exist in the court of judgment. The *midah* of *ga'avah* attacks our souls constantly. If we are always on alert in our battle against it, we will merit Heavenly assistance in overcoming these detestable feelings and be confident of our judgment in all our decisions.