



PARSHAS VAYECHI – COLIN BERGMAN

When Yaakov is giving the brochos to his children, his comments to Shimon and Levi are very harsh:

May my soul not come into their conspiracy, with their assembly my soul will not unite... (49:6).

Rashi comments that this is referring to two future events which stemmed from each tribe. The lineage of the protagonists in each one of these cases is never traced all the way back to Yaakov, stopping at the name of their tribal ancestor.

The perpetrator in the case of Shimon was Zimri who publicly took a Midianite woman into his tent. Here the possuk names him as “Zimri ben Solu, beis ov leShimoni” (Bamidbar 25:14), with no mention of Yaakov. Similarly when Korach, who was descended from Levi, disputed the rights to the priesthood, he is labelled as “Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehas ben Levi” (Bamidbar 16:1), again with no mention of Yaakov.

After bringing this possuk with Korach, Rashi points out that when mentioning the lineage of Korach’s descendants in relation to the platforms where they sang in the Beis Hamikdash (Chronicles 1 6:22&23) it says “... ben Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehas ben Levi ben Yisrael”.

This gives rise to a potent question, isn’t this the same Korach with whom Yaakov wanted no connection?

There is a well-known gemara in Sota (3a) where Reish Lakeish says, “A person doesn’t sin unless a spirit of foolishness enters him”. Even so, this isn’t an excuse for sinning; we’re still liable for our actions!

A deeper understanding can be gained from the next possuk in our sedra (49:7) where Yaakov continues, “**Curse their anger...**”. What Reish Lakeish is trying to tell us is that people aren’t intrinsically bad, just sometimes they do bad things.

The gemara in Brachos (10a) relates a story of two boors in the neighbourhood of Rav Meir who were constantly harassing him and he wanted to daven for them to die. His wife pointed out that in Tehillim (104:35) it doesn’t say “sinners will cease,” rather that “their sins will cease” and then the possuk concludes “... and there will no longer be wicked people”. Thus, Rav Meir davened for them to repent, which they did subsequently.

Similarly we say three times a day in “Velamalshinim” within the Shemoneh Esrei: “and all wickedness You should destroy in an instant”. All wickedness, not all the wicked, as without wickedness there are no wicked people. Thus Yaakov was not totally estranging himself from Korach, rather he was alienating himself from Korach’s sinful actions.

This now sheds some light on what Yaakov was saying to his sons. He was blessing them by cursing their anger. Yaakov was purging them of the bad character traits that caused them to act with haste, allowing them to become complete tzadikim. He wasn’t alienating himself from them rather he was stating that when there would be sins from their children, this was not the behaviour expected of a true ben Yisrael, hence his name was not mentioned in conjunction with that event. However, the door to repentance is always open allowing us to become true continuations of the ideals of Yaakov, perfecting ourselves to become proper descendants of Yisrael.

(In honour of my sister’s upcoming wedding, wishing the couple much Hatzlachah and Brachah)