

NAME WITHHELD I

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Shimon and Levi are a pair; instruments of violence are their wares. Let my soul not enter their plot; may my honor not be associated with them. (Bereshith 49:5, 6)

In this passage, Yaakov refers to two plots which were spearheaded by descendents of Shimon and Levi.¹ The meraglim (spies) who investigated the land of Israel caused national panic when they reported that the Jews would not be able to conquer the land because of the strength of its inhabitants. The main instigator of this uprising appears to have been Shafat ben Chori from the tribe of Shimon.² Shortly afterwards, Korach, a descendant of Levi, assembled a large group to oppose Moshe and Aharon. Since it is common for the Torah to trace ancestry back many generations when relating an incident, Yaakov feared that his name would be associated in the Torah with the names of these nefarious individuals. His prayer was answered, for when the Torah recounts these stories it omits Yaakov's name from the lineage.³

Why was this so important to Yaakov in the last few moments of his life? At first glance, there appears to be a certain similarity between these disputes and that which took place between Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov, Korach and the spies seemingly used falsehood in order to challenge the leadership. Yaakov posed as Esav in order to get the blessings of the first born from his father Yitzchak. The spies spiced up their report with falsehood when they claimed that the Jews could not conquer the land, in order to show that Moshe's plan was unachievable, and cast doubt on his leadership abilities. Korach claimed that Moshe was only interested in promoting his family's honor, and that he was not a Divine emissary.⁴

However, on closer inspection, it is clear that there is a major difference between them. Yaakov only agreed to deceive his brother Esav because his mother Rivka received a prophetic message that God's will was for Yaakov to receive the birthright. The spies and Korach both had only one motivation - self aggrandizement.⁵

Yaakov was adamant that his name not be associated with any future disputes which would arise among the Jewish People. Since evil acts often have their roots in the actions of ancestors, Yaakov wanted to show that he did not condone any acts motivated by falsehood (like those of the spies and Korach) and that the blessings rightfully belonged to him and to those of his descendants who are motivated by truth.⁶ The spies and Korach were motivated by falsehood, while Yaakov was motivated by truth. Yaakov's dying wish was to separate truth from falsehood.

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1. *Sanhedrin 109b.*
 2. Maharasha ibid.
 3. Bamidbar 16:1.
 4. Sanhedrin 109b
 5. The Zohar (Parshath Shelach) says that although the spies started their expedition as tzaddikim, they were corrupted by their desire for power when they found out that their leadership would end when the Jews entered Israel.
 6. Vilna Gaon, Adereth Eliyahu 29:17.
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