

## CHAPTER 7, VERSE 16-18

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

### (7:16)

*"And Yehoshua awoke in the morning and scrutinized the Jewish nation in tribe division and the tribe of Yehuda was caught."*

### (7:17)

*"And he brought closer the tribe of Yehuda and he caught the Zarchi family and he brought closer the Zarchi family in male division and Zavdi was caught."*

Rashi quotes our Sages who explain that the initial selection process differed greatly from the subsequent ones. The scrutiny of the tribes was done through the Heavenly indication of the stones on the "Urim V'Tumim." The Kohain Gadol wore a sacred breastplate with twelve precious glowing stones - corresponding to the twelve tribes - affixed to it. Hashem informed Yehoshua that the sinful tribe's stone would appear dimmer than the others, thereby identifying the tribe of the sinner. After this initial selection, Yehoshua used the drawing of lots to determine the specific identity of the sinner. We previously learned that Hashem refused to reveal the identity of the sinner to Yehoshua. Why, then, was this first dimension determined through this sacred process? If Hashem was willing to provide lead information, He could have identified all the categories, save the last one - the sinner himself. Conversely, if Hashem would not reveal the remaining factors, why did He reveal this first one? In addition, why didn't Hashem inform Yehoshua of this crucial information at the outset when revealing the Jewish people's sin?

The above concerns suggest that this revelation served a unique purpose unrelated to determining the sinner's identity. We can explain that the dimming of Yehuda's stone was a message to the entire tribe. Each of Israel's twelve tribes personified a unique quality amongst the nation, and the varied precious stones on the breastplate reflected this. These qualities were identified by Yaakov Avinu in his parting words to his children. Therein, Yaakov told Yehuda that he was destined to rule over the entire Jewish nation. The quality of leadership encompasses enormous sensitivity to the needs of the nation. Maimonides expresses this best through his classic statement, "The king is the heart of the entire nation." Accordingly, the tribe of Yehuda's stone represented their perfect leadership qualities accompanied by a total sense of concern and responsibility for the entire nation.

We can therefore suggest that the Urim V'Tumim process conveyed a deafening message to the entire tribe of Yehuda. Although the entire nation in general was faulted for Achan's sin of theft, their

stones continued to shine. Achan's sin did reveal a national insensitivity towards theft but did not suggest any serious flaw in the essential qualities of the individual tribes. Their shining character, reflected through their glowing stones, was unaffected, and Hashem continued to view them in their perfect light. The tribe of Yehuda, however, raised a more serious concern. Achan's sin displayed a serious inadequacy in the basic quality of the Judean tribe. How could anyone from Yehuda be so insensitive to the security needs of their nation? Everyone heard Yehoshua's stern warning about the severe consequences of trespassing the ban. In this light, Achan's crime wasn't an insignificant private act but a national felony! How could any Judean be involved in a crime of that sort?! The thought of any such involvement was absolutely unacceptable for a Judean. In this light the entire tribe of Yehuda came under question. Could they be trusted with their leadership privileges after this?

This then was the purpose of the unique Urim V'Tumim process. Hashem informed Yehoshua that the stone of the sinful tribe would appear dimmer than the rest. This was not done to assist in the process of identification, rather to awaken the Judean tribe into action. Yehuda's stone no longer shines! This meant a serious inadequacy in their supreme quality amongst the people. Their course of action, after this point, was clearly defined for them. Hashem expected them to immediately respond and rid themselves of their serious blemish. However, as we will soon learn, Achan's outrageous behavior ran interference even with this powerful Heavenly message. Instead of taking this message to heart, the Judean tribe came to Achan's defense thereby identifying themselves even further with his fault.

This could be part of Scriptures initial message when focusing on the tribe of Yehuda and stating, *"And the Jewish people violated the ban and Achan partook...from the tribe of Yehuda from the ban."* We noted earlier that the accompanying reading notes reflect a direct focus on the tribe of Yehuda. We can now suggest that these words were said out of astonishment.

They convey that Yehuda, out of all tribes, violated the ban. Yehuda, who is sanctioned with the outstanding qualities of leadership and communal responsibility, actually committed an act endangering the entire nation! This reflected a serious flaw in the Judean tribe and its future leadership which demanded immediate attention.

### **(7:18)**

*"And he brought near the households and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zavdi, son of Zerach from the tribe of Yehuda was caught."*

Although Achan's entire lineage was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, it is repeated here in full. Our Sages learn from here that it is appropriate to extend credit and fault to all the preceding generations (see Vayikra Rabba 32). If Achan's name was mentioned in context of sin, it reflects back on all his predecessors who must have harbored such imperfection. Conversely, if Betzalel's name is mentioned in context of merit, this reflects on all his predecessors who excelled in this quality.

Indeed, Achan's experience reflected a serious blemish in the leadership qualities of Yehuda. However, as we remember, two distinct lines came from Yehuda: Peretz and Zerach. Achan's fault identified more specifically with his predecessors: the line of Zerach. Their level of personal interest was a serious factor in their actions and could conceivably bring them to abuse their power of authority. The moment of truth had finally arrived, and Achan's sin revealed that Zerach's descendants could not be trusted with the kingdom of Israel. There did remain, however, a second line of Yehuda coming from his other son, Peretz, which would eventually be appointed with the leadership of the entire nation.

This lesson is taught to us during the birth of Peretz and Zerach. The Torah informs us of the peculiar circumstances revolving around their birth in which Zerach pushed his hand out of his mother's womb and then retracted it. Our Sages note that the word hand is mentioned four times, referring to the four times Zerach's descendant, Achan, violated a ban. Kli Yakar explains that although Yehuda's wife gave birth to twin boys, only one child would be worthy of the throne. Achan's future atrocious behavior reflected a serious flaw in the entire line of Zerach. Although no descendant carried things as far as Achan did, they all possessed a slight imbalance regarding self-interest and self-pursuit.

This faint dimension could surface at any point, and, as it did now, it could jeopardize the entire Jewish nation. We can suggest that Achan's entire lineage is repeated here for this reason - to underline that this fault belonged to the Zerach line and not to the Peretz line. In fact one of Jewish history's most unassuming people was destined to come from the line of Peretz, Dovid Hamelech himself.

We have much to learn from this lesson regarding self-improvement and the road towards perfection. It has been often said that when raising our children, we are actually raising our grandchildren as well. Today we have learned that our imperfections affect the character of all our descendants, and that their credits and faults can and are traced all the way back to us. May we merit to follow carefully in the Torah's ways guiding us on the road towards perfection.

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