

# A GOLDEN RAY OF HOPE

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

Shimon and Levi are brothers; stolen tools are their weapons... For in their rage they killed a man and in their wish they hamstrung an ox. Accursed is their anger for it is mighty and their wrath for it is harsh ... (Breishis 49:5-7)

Where's the blessing for Shimon and Levi? It looks like they got a curse from their father in the last moments of his life. While everyone else got a positive reading Shimon and Levi were singled out for condemnation. Certainly they had exercised a cruel nature in wiping out the city of Schem and when they assaulted Yosef but that was years ago and maybe now should have the time to forgive and forget and move on, but father Yaakov chose to severely rebuke them at that prescient moment for some reason that cries out for explanation.

Perhaps the first hint is found in that part of the verse "accursed is their rage" where Rashi explains, "He only cursed their rage." That means he didn't curse them. Rather he focused on the negative trait they exhibited in those two tragic incidents. What are they to do with this information that their father dumps on them on his death bed?

The words of the Vilna Gaon's recorded in a book entitled Even Shlema are as follows, "All service of HASHEM is dependent upon improvement of one's character...All sins stem from unimproved character traits...A man should not go completely against his nature even if it is bad, for he will not succeed. He should merely train himself to follow the straight path according to his nature. For example: One who has an inclination to spill blood should train himself to become a Shochet- the intermediate approach or a Mohel- which is the more righteous way..."

How does that help us to understand how Yaakov was trying to help his sons with his parting words? Why did they get only a rebuke? Where was their blessing?

To find an answer we have to roll the film of history a few short generations later to discover the blessing in disguise proffered by Yaakov that fateful day.

Forty days after the national reception of the Torah on Mount Sinai, Moshe became delayed and the Jewish People panicked in the final hours before his descent. In the meantime as a replacement for Moshe, in a moment of spiritual insecurity, they constructed a Golden Calf. When Moshe saw what had occurred, he called out for help to put out the fiery lust for idolatry that was raging amidst the masses. This crisis turned out to be a blessed opportunity for whoever was ready to answer that clarion call. As it is written, "Moshe stood at the gateway of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for

HASHEM, join me!" - and all the Levites gathered around him... Moshe said, "Dedicate yourselves this day to HASHEM- for each has opposed his son and his brother- that He may bestow upon you a blessing this day." (Shemos32:26-29)

That day Levi used their anger that had been mismanaged and misappropriated now for the sake of performing as it were a life saving operation. They merited a blessing and a special role for all time for having disciplined and focused their ferocity to be employed surgically and precisely in only legitimate causes. That was their hidden blessing. It was embedded in the the challenge to channel tendencies into talent.

I went to Daven Maariv at a nearby Shul. During the quietude of the service while most were absorbed in Tefillah, a few other fellows were involved in playfully irreverent behavior. With laser pointers they were aiming harmless beams at the backs and heads of those deep in their prayer, amongst whom were some prominent Rabbis. Their giggling set off a slight contagion of silliness.

After Maariv they were huddled together and still laughing amongst themselves. When I was passing by I decided that, in a positive way, I might just say something. So I put my arms around the backs of two, and leaned in and asked in a friendly manner, "Do you know what we can learn from a laser beam?" I had their attention so I continued, "If you focus- you can go very far, but if you don't - you're not going anywhere." They nodded agreeably visualizing- **a golden ray of hope.** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).