

BLESSING NOT IN DISGUISE

by Rabbi Label Lam

Shimon and Levi are brothers; stolen instruments are their weapons. Let my soul not enter their counsel; my honor, you shall not join their assembly, for in their wrath they killed a man, and with their will they hamstrung a bull. Cursed be their wrath for it is mighty, and their anger because it is harsh. I will separate them throughout Yaakov, and I will scatter them throughout Israel. (Breishis 49: 5-7)

This was the beginning Yaakov blessing the brothers before his passing on. Things got better and more flattering from here and on but the first three really received a rugged treatment. Yet these too are counted amongst Birkas Yaakov-the blessings of Yaakov. It certainly shatters our impression of what a blessing sounds and feels like. The average person would imagine a blessing is some general or generic wishing of wellness, "Hope you win the lottery!" Now we find out, the hard way, that that is not the case. What then is blessing? Why is it so prized? How can it be riddled with seeming negativity and still be considered a blessing?

Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Shapiro ztl., the Piaseczna Rebbe writes in his introduction to Chovos HaTalmidim, *"Every father and every teacher knows that their children and students will not remain children forever, but will eventually grow in years and possibly in Torah knowledge and spiritual devotion. Yet there exist fathers and teachers who are concerned only with what they see right now. Since all they see, right now, are children, the goal of their efforts is to educate their charges to become good children. They wish to infuse them with only a child's measure of Torah and awe of God. This they consider sufficient. But a teacher or parent who does this is sinning against God and against His people."*

Fathers and teachers must know that their task is to educate and uncover children of the Lord and giants of Israel. They must see the children sitting in front of them as great souls still immature; their task is to get them to grow and flourish. A teacher is a gardener in the garden of God, assigned to cultivate it and guard it from harm.

Even if some of the children seem rebellious, or flawed in their character, the teacher must know that the nature of soul-seeds; of unripe angels, is to taste bitter as they are ripening and to be filled with nectar in their maturity. Neither the nature, nor any particular quality of a Jewish child, is absolutely evil.

This is what the holy Baal Shem Tov and his disciples have taught us. What is necessary is just to know how to use these qualities and how to help them develop and grow. For example, a particular

child may be very stubborn- which is a character flaw. His teacher may suffer greatly because of the child's stubbornness. Yet if the teacher were to reflect, he would realize that when this child matures and receives as his own the yoke of Torah and of service to God, he will perform all his service of God with great stubbornness and self-sacrifice...he will be as strong as the wall of a fortress."

When "HASHEM saw everything He created and it was Tov Meod-very good", the Talmud explains what gave creation an upgrade from "good" to "very good". The statement reads, "Tov meod, zu Yetzer Hora"- Very good, this is the Negative Inclination!" What's very good in the child can become a Yetzer Hora. Too neat and clean or being overly sensitive can be dangerous. The opposite is true too. What's negative about the person or child can be sublimated and disciplined into very goodness, if not greatness. Whoever can give someone a real read on anything flattering or even painfully true about them is helpful like an MRI.

Yaakov told Shimon and Levi that their anger was cursed, and not them. In the end, Levi held onto that fiery nature and reserved it for special emergencies. It came to positive fruition by the sin of the Golden Calf when Levi stepped up to defend the honor of heaven when others were less prepared to do the same. It was the proper employment of that anger that put them on a pedestal for all time. What Yaakov told them, and the way it was received was ultimately the ultimate **blessing not in disguise**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.