

# JEWISH IDENTITY THROUGH JEWISH EDUCATION

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

There is a Medrash on our parsha, which says that when Yosef grabbed Binyamin, and said to the brothers that "he will be my servant," Yehudah became very angry. He said, "you've captured Binyamin, and you expect peace in our father's house?" His anger was so great that he let out a loud roar - and the sound traveled so far that Chushim, the son of Dan, heard and came.

The paradox is that Chushim was deaf; a possible answer is that to the contrary - "Chushim" means "senses." Chushim was uneducated, but he was able to sense feelings, even so far away. So even though he was deaf, he "heard" his uncle's anger and pain, and realized something was wrong.

The Avnei Azal uses this Medrash as a parable. Binyamin, the youngest of Yaakov's twelve sons, represents a young Jewish child - torn out of Israel's lap, taken by foreign hands that wish to educate and raise him to assimilate into their society and to abandon Judaism. There are many Jews who should be aware of the problem this poses, but ignore it - they make themselves "deaf" and are not affected.

Only "Yehudah" truly feels the bond of "Yehudim," all Jews, that "all of Israel is responsible one for the other." "For your servant is responsible for the boy." [34:32] He is the one who cannot sleep, realizing the danger faced by this child, and by extension, all of us. When Binyamin is in danger of assimilating, there cannot possibly be "peace in our father's house!" The "house of our father," Israel, cannot be complete ["shalem," from the same root as "Shalom," peace], at ease, when the youth are in danger of being torn away - even one, all the more so when we stand to lose millions!

Therefore the "Yehudahs" cry out, to awaken and arouse all of Israel, pointing out the great danger, and guiding the response. And their voice is so great and powerful that the entire camp shakes - and even the deaf "Chushim" hear the call.

It's a wonderful parable... but although this was written many years ago, it is obviously quite applicable to our time. Where are the "Yehudahs?" If we aren't working to solve the problem, we're "Chushim" - and Chushim is still deaf! We still need to hear the message, to sense the danger.

How do we solve the problem of assimilation? Our forefathers guided us here as well. Later in the parsha, Yaakov himself departs for Egypt - "And he sent Yehudah out before him, to Yosef, to direct him..." [46:28] Rashi quotes the Medrash: the word "l'horos" means "to teach" as well as "to direct," and Yehudah was sent down to Egypt to create a house of study, from which Torah teaching would

emanate. To survive, we must have houses of study.

Jewish "identity" means little without Jewish education - and it is our responsibility to insure that both we and our children have that education. We must create our own houses of study, wherever we may be!

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