

# THE PASSIONS OF YOUTH

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

"The student motivated by the desire to know the truth, and act on the truth, is fearless in the face of challenge or criticism."

The story of Dina, Shechem, Shimon and Levi has been the source of enormous controversy and Lashon Harah. Biblical critics use this episode in the lives of the Shevatim - tribes to depict the brothers as rash, vindictive, and barbaric. Their conspiratorial nature in planning and executing the plot against the city of Shechem, and eventually Yoseph, is used as further proof of the Shevatim's less than noble characters. Their massacre of the entire city, rather than just punishing Shechem who had perpetrated the crime against Dina, revealed the brothers' lack of judicial process and moral stature. (Yakov's criticism of his sons following the massacre and at the time of his final blessings, (Parshas VaYichi) is presented as proof that Yakov agreed with the Biblical critics. However, the truth about the brothers, their actions, and Yakov's criticism is a whole different story.

This week's Parsha begins in the year 2205. Yakov was 97, Reuven -13, Shimon - 12, Levi - 11, and Yoseph and Dina - 6. The story of Dina's abduction and Shechem's punishment took place the following year. Following the massacre of Shechem, Yakov criticized his sons for endangering both the safety and moral standing of the family.

Without question, Shimon and Levi were wrong for doing what they had done. However, why they were wrong had nothing to do with their lack of judicious acumen. Yakov criticized them for not conferring with him and challenging their own feelings, before acting on them.

The system of Halacha is founded on the student - teacher relationship. Our responsibility is to do our best to ascertain G-d's will in any given situation. Some cases are addressed directly in Halacha, and many others require the thoughtful and scholarly analysis of the Talmid Chacham, Posek, and teacher.

The student motivated by the desire to know the truth and to act on the truth is fearless in the face of challenge or criticism. In fact, he welcomes it! Shimon and Levi failed themselves and their family when they did not first confer with Yakov. They should have presented their pain, passion and plan to the truth of Yakov's scrutiny and comment. Yakov, who is described as the paragon of truth, would have taught his sons what to do with their outrage. He would have shared with them the benefit of his wisdom and encompassing far sightedness. Remember that Yakov was the master strategist who had bested the likes of Lavan and Eisav. Without doubt, he would have known what

to do with Shechem. He would have known the best way to confront the absence of moral conscience that characterized the city and society of Shechem. Yakov would have taught the city of Shechem to accept responsibility for their complicity in the crime against Dina.

Yakov's criticism of Shimon and Levi was directed at their immature and limited response to an otherwise complex and potentially dangerous situation. Even after Yakov explained the long range and immediate consequences of their actions, they responded with the simplistic self-centeredness of their immaturity and passion. "What else could we have done? Are we to allow our sister to be treated as a harlot? (34:31)

Yakov's blessing to Shimon and Levi as he lay on his deathbed was intended as directive, not just critical. Shimon and Levi had displayed enormous devotion and courage in defending the honor of the family, even if it was misguided. Yakov's "blessing" of Shimon and Levi was intended to direct that same devotion and courage into constructive channels. As the Pasuk says, "Into their conspiracy I will not enter, with their congregation I will not join." (49:6) Because they did not first seek Yakov's advice and direction, he would not have anything to do with their actions. However, if Yakov's teachings and truth would direct their passion and strength, they would be indispensable to the nation's survival.

Good Shabbos.

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