

# THOSE LITTLE 'YUDS'

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 177, Magic Shows: More Than Meets the Eye. Good Shabbos!*

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## Reuven & Shimon's Grandchildren Never Saw Rabbi Meir's Back

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, the Torah lists the genealogy of Moshe Rabbeinu [our Teacher]. The Torah begins by listing the sons of Reuven and Shimon, without listing their grandsons. Then the Torah lists Levi's sons and grandsons and even some of his great-grandsons (Moshe and Aaron), and finishes with Aaron's sons and grandsons [who were Levi's great-great-great-grandsons].

The Seforno asks why in discussing the first two tribes the Torah only lists the names of the children, but when it reaches Levi, the Torah lists the names of the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren as well. The Seforno answers that Levi's grandchildren were special individuals so they merited having their names mentioned. Reuven's grandchildren and Shimeon's grandchildren were not significant individuals so they did not merit having their names mentioned.

The reason why Levi's grandchildren were special, the Seforno explains, is because Levi lived longer than Reuven and Shimon. Therefore Levi saw and lived with and taught his grandchildren. Since Levi had a personal connection with his grandchildren, the grandchildren became special.

This teaches us that there is something special about having a zeida [grandfather] around. A grandfather can impart something that a father cannot. Unfortunately, Reuven and Shimon died earlier and never had a chance to learn with and share with their grandchildren. Levi's grandchildren had the benefit of having Zeida Levi in the house. That made all the difference in the world.

Part of the background to the Seforno's explanation is that Levi was not just any grandfather. Levi was the son of Yaakov Avinu. Levi's grandchildren had a grandfather in their house that was from a different generation, a generation that saw Yaakov Avinu and even Yitzchak Avinu. Therefore, Levi was a special person.

The Talmud [Eruvin 13b] relates that Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi [Rabbeinu HaKadosh] attributed his own greatness to the fact that he had seen "the back" of Rabbi Meir. Rabbeinu HaKadosh, the editor of the Mishneh felt that the fact that he saw Rabbi Meir from his back made him better in learning than all of his colleagues. Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi added, "Had I seen him from his [Rabbi Meir] front, I would have been even greater".

This passage is perhaps allegorical. I once heard a very nice interpretation of this Gemara from Rabbi Berel Wein. The Gemara is saying that Rabbi Meir was from a different generation. Rabbeinu HaKadosh was the last of the Tanaim. But there was a whole generation of Tanaim that preceded Rabbeinu HaKadosh and Rabbi Meir was the last of that generation. What Rebbi is saying is, "I at least saw the tail end of a different generation. I saw Gedolim! I saw Rabbi Meir. I saw what it meant to really be a Tanna. Even if it was the tail-end, even if it was Rabbi Meir towards the end of his life, that made an indelible impression upon me."

Rabbi Frand added the following observation:

I feel bad for my students, because I can say that at least "I saw Rabbi Meir from the back." I was fortunate to have at least seen the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, zt"l. I can at least say that I saw someone who knew the Chofetz Chaim. Those who learned in the Yeshivas Ner Yisroel during the Rosh Yeshiva's lifetime knew someone who talked to Reb Chaim Ozer, who sat at Reb Chaim's table. We at least saw the back of that generation. Therefore, we are different. And so are all those of my generation, who saw the giants of the past generation in whatever Yeshivas that they may have studied. But my students did not see that. They never even saw the "back of Rabbi Meir".

That is what the grandchildren of Levi saw. They at least saw someone who saw Yitzchak Avinu and Yaakov Avinu. They at least had a relationship to that generation. That made all the difference. Therefore Levi's grandchildren were different. They had a link to something irreplaceable, a connection to a more beautiful generation, something that was unfortunately lost from the grandchildren of Reuven and Shimon.

### **Don't Start Tampering With the "Little Yuds"**

There is an interesting Medrash in this week's Parsha: When G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He gave them positive and negative commandments, and He gave the king his own set of commandments such as "Do not take too many wives". King Solomon said that this law did not apply to him. He felt that he could have many wives without being negatively affected. At that moment, the letter yud at the beginning of the word Yarbeh in the verse 'Lo Yarbeh lo Nashim' (do not take too many wives) came and complained before G-d that Solomon was ignoring him. "Today it is a little yud, tomorrow it will be the word, until the entire Torah is nullified". G-d responded to the yud, "Solomon and a thousand like him will become nullified, but even the little point of the yud will not become nullified." The Medrash concludes, "Solomon took many wives and in fact they affected him."

The Sefer Beis Av by Rav Elyakim Schlessinger quotes an opinion that gives a tremendously keen insight into this Medrash. Technically speaking, Solomon was right. He saw in himself that he had the ability to take many wives without being affected and he was right! But G-d caused it to affect him, because the little yud was also right. The yud was right that if Solomon can start tampering with Torah and saying this applies and this does not apply, then the whole show is over. The whole Torah will become nullified.

If Torah becomes a smorgasbord from which one can pick and choose, then it is no longer Torah. This is the meaning of the Medrash. Let Solomon fall from his stature (where in fact the multiplicity of wives should not have affected him) -- I will cause Solomon embarrassment, but that will be worthwhile because if we start up with the 'kutzo shel yud' then the whole package will unravel. Therefore, in order to set a precedent, G-d caused Solomon to be influenced.

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## Glossary

**Gedolim** -- Great (Torah scholar)s

**Tana(im)** -- Rabbi(s) from the time of the Mishneh

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## Sources and Personalities

**Seforno** -- Rav Ovadiah Seforno (1470-1550); Italy.

**Rav Elyakim Schlessinger** -- a Rosh HaYeshiva in London

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#177). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Magic Shows: More Than Meets the Eye . The other halachic portions for Parshas Shemos from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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