

And Yaakov said to Shimon and to Levi, “You brought trouble upon me by besmirching me among the inhabitants of the land” And they (Shimon and Levi) replied, “Shall he treat our sister like a harlot?” (34:30,31)

When do we act zealously, striking back with force? When do we placate, look for reasons and ways to seek a diplomatic solution? We see two contrasting approaches in our *parsha*, surprisingly from a father and his sons. Shimon and Levi struck with vengeance. They had no room for negotiation: If you touch a Jewish girl, you and your entire city will pay. Yaakov *Avinu* was not as quick to seek vengeance.

Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl, observes that both approaches have their place in Jewish life. When their sister, Dinah, was violated by Shechem, Shimon and Levi avenged her and her family's dishonor. Their righteous indignation did not allow for them to be placatory in any way. This was a time for vengeance and reclaiming honor- not for diplomacy.

Yaakov *Avinu* viewed the tragedy from a different perspective. He understood the pain and disgrace that drove his sons to shed blood, but from his view, it was not the correct approach. He was concerned with the future of his family and how his sons' violent reaction would possibly jeopardize the future of the Jewish People. As the Patriarch, his nature was to consider the full implications of his actions carefully. The same action that is correct and proper now might be harmful later on. Therefore, in the long run, impetuosity is a dangerous course upon which to embark.

We see the Patriarch taking such a position in his original confrontation with Eisav (at the beginning of the *Parsha*). The Torah indicates clearly that Yaakov had been prepared to fight – if necessary. He saw this option only as a last resort. He succeeded in quelling Eisav's anger, diffusing that which could have turned into a tragic situation and transforming it instead into one of reconciliation and brotherhood.

Now that we have presented the two approaches, apparently it seems that they are divided between youth and maturity – not simply in age, but in perspective. Young people often lack the willingness to compromise on principles. They are more than willing to go to battle to right a wrong – as evinced by Shimon and Levi. They are loathe to be considered weak. For them, this is an unforgiveable failing.

Contrasting youthful exuberance and inflexibility are the wisdom and calmness evinced by experience and maturity. The advice of the elders often has a calming effect on the zealous nature of youth. The elders guide and temper, when the youth are willing to listen and heed their advice. To paraphrase the *Rosh Yeshivah*, “Their wisdom and breadth of vision can harness the well-

intended yet reckless enthusiasm of others, ensuring that any action taken is the right one, not only for the moment, but also for the longer term.” Yaakov *Avinu* exemplified such wisdom.

This does not in any way mean that we are to cast aside youthful enthusiasm. Indeed, the role of the younger *Kohanim* on the night of *Yom Kippur* is highlighted. Their task was to keep the *Kohen Gadol* awake by firmly reminding him of his responsibility. To fall asleep would mean risking the possibility of ritual impurity, which would invalidate him from performing the holiest service of the year. All night, they would snap their fingers and remind him to remain awake. They did this incessantly - but respectfully. Why use younger *Kohanim* (as opposed to older ones)? They represent youthful energy, which, in contrast to the wisdom of maturity, does not lead to being overly cautious and indecisive.

In his inimitable manner, Rav Belsky sums up what should be the perspective of Torah-oriented Jews concerning which approach to employ, given a time-sensitive situation when a decision is mandatory – immediately – if not sooner. In other words, we do not always have the luxury of seeking out *daas Torah*, the wisdom of Torah, as expounded by a Torah giant. Sometimes a person must rely on his own common sense, coupled with a profound understanding of how the Torah views his present predicament. The *Rosh Yeshivah* encourages us to learn from everyone: the people around us, our *rabbanim*, our friends, even from people who oppose us. If we can open our eyes to view the situation objectively, we are able to cultivate and blend the above two approaches, in order to decide which is most situation-appropriate.

The problem arises when we begin to fall spiritually asleep, when we are losing our grasp of a situation. This is when we must know how to “snap our fingers”, to wake up and maintain a clear perspective on the question before us. We may never lose our mind to passion, nor should we lull ourselves into complacency by remaining too calm. There is a happy medium between losing control, acting impetuously and listening to the voice of calm reason, to the point that we do nothing and allow everyone to walk all over us. Some people, however, are “happy” about choosing the “happy” medium. Their error (I think) is in comparing themselves either to Shimon/Levi or to Yaakov *Avinu*. Their approach worked for them, because they were spiritually on the plateau which permitted their actions. We are obligated to attempt to blend both approaches and seek the most appropriate option.