

“Water-like impetuosity – you cannot be foremost.” (49:4)

Yaakov *Avinu* addresses his *bechor*, firstborn, Reuven, as *kochi v'reishis oni*, “my strength and initial vigor,” his hope, the one who should have been the leader of the brothers, but who lost it due to his impetuosity. He was the most precious gem in the family treasury, but he was not qualified for the leadership of the family. He was missing the ingredients which are requisite for a leader.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l., notes that the word *pachaz*, which has been translated as impetuous, is found in *Sefer Shoftim* 9:4, *Anashim reikim u'pochazim*, a reference to men who possess a shortcoming in their character. What was Reuven's character deficiency? Yaakov compares him to water. Hardly any other substance displays such a wide variety of qualities. Yet, water has no internal stability; hence, it could mean that Reuven was as unstable as water. Water always flows downward to the lowest level; this implies that Reuven strives after lowness. Water is a liquid, flowing rapidly forward, denoting impetuosity.

All of these are character deficiencies. *Rav Hirsch* however, focuses upon the instability of water and the parallel implication that Reuven was too unstable for a leadership role. To achieve preeminence, one must have strong inner resolution, a firmness that is stable. He can neither be moved by flattery, nor succumb to pressure. He stands tall, erect, stable, withstanding any and every assault on his leadership. Reuven did not have it. Thus, he was demoted from the position of leadership.

Yet, *Chazal* compare Torah to water. It has become the symbol of everything that is positive about Torah. If water is unstable and flows downward to the lowest point, why is it seen in a positive light? We may suggest that a lack of internal stability is a constructive feature in regard to Torah. It can fit into all situations and reach out to all people, regardless of their background and ability. It molds itself around the individual, as it encompasses every aspect of his life. It is able to flow downward to the lowest dregs of society and elevate them with its refreshing spiritual therapy. Yes, Torah conforms itself around a person, so that all of him is enveloped by it. Torah is structured, but its water-like capabilities give it the flexibility to structure itself around those who accept it.