

He took Shimon from them and imprisoned him before their eyes. (42:24)

Yosef took Shimon as a hostage until the brothers would return with Binyamin. *Rashi* explains that it was Shimon who had thrown Yosef into the well, and he was the one who had contemptuously referred to Yosef as the *baal ha'chalomos*, "the dreamer." Alternatively, *Rashi* explains that allowing Shimon and Levi to be together could have been dangerous. As the ones who slew the entire city of Shechem, he feared that their companionship could lead to a lethal conspiracy against him. In any event, Yosef felt he had reason to fear Shimon. In his inimitable manner, **Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl**, draws on his encyclopedic knowledge to weave a historical tapestry concerning Shimon and none other than the holy *Tanna*, Rabbi Shimon *bar* Yochai, author of the *Zohar Hakadosh*.

Veritably, Hashem's *hanhagah*, manner of dealing, with a *tzaddik* of the caliber of Rabbi Shimon *bar* Yochai is one of great ambiguity and incredulity. While we are not able to understand, it is not even our place to question it. *Rav* Heyman feels that some form of elucidation may be suggested and could very well be illuminating and inspirational. The first question concerning Rabbi Shimon is about the need for him and his son to be hidden for twelve years in a cave; and then, after they came out, he had to return for another year.

Rav Heyman quotes the *Midrash Mishlei* that states: "The execution of the Ten Holy Martyrs, the *Tannaim* who were brutally murdered by the Roman government, was in direct punishment for the sin of selling Yosef. Indeed, the effects of this sin prevail in every generation." We have just quoted *Rashi* who teaches that Shimon was the driving force behind the *mechiras Yosef*, sale of Yosef. Thus, Shimon's descendants have a greater responsibility to "repay" the debt of *mechiras Yosef*. They – the collective family – more than anyone else, carry the greatest onus of guilt for this familial tragedy, in which brother sold brother.

Indeed, we find a parallel in Pinchas' slaying of Zimri, the Prince of Shimon. Pinchas was chosen to lead the Jewish People in their battle against Midyan. In one of his explanations, *Rashi* says that Pinchas' mother was a descendant of Yosef – who had originally been sold to the *Midyanim*. This was payback time; therefore, he was the general of the army. *Rav* Heyman adds that, if Pinchas had led the battle against Midyan because of revenge, he likewise had killed Zimri out of a sense of revenge stemming from righteous indignation. Yosef, who had been sold through the efforts of Shimon, maintained his elevated level of moral purity and did not fall prey to cohabiting with Potifar's wife – a pagan; yet, Zimri, scion of Shimon, publicly sinned with the pagan Kosbi!

Alternatively, since in every generation, the sin of *mechiras Yosef* comes to the fore and "someone" must answer for it, who better than Zimri, descendant of Shimon, primary motivator of *mechiras Yosef*?

Interestingly, the first two *Tannaim* to be murdered were Rabbi Yishmael *Kohen Gadol*, who could be held responsible for the sin of selling Yosef to the “*Yishmaelim*,” followed by Rabbi Shimon *ben Gamliel*, namesake of Shimon, who stood at the helm of the sale.

The *Rav* now suggests that perhaps Rabbi Shimon *bar Yochai* was in some way paying for Yosef’s twelve-year incarceration in the Egyptian prison – the result of Shimon’s advocating the sale of Yosef. Add the one year that he spent in the home of Potifar, we have thirteen years during which Yosef suffered imprisonment. Hashem chose this great *tzaddik* and his son to be their generation’s representatives in repairing the sin of *mechiras Yosef*.