

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

The **Yalkut Shimoni** shares an intriguing *Midrash* with us. Yosef sought to incarcerate his brothers. He sent a message to Pharaoh, “I need seventy of your strongest men to apprehend a group of foreigners.” When the soldiers arrived, Yosef told them to take chains and place them on his brothers. Shimon stood in front, while the rest of his brothers stood back at a distance. As they closed in on Shimon, he gave a loud scream, the sound of which shattered the teeth of all seventy men. Observing the debacle, Yosef turned to his son, Menasheh, who was standing by his side, and said, “You, take the chains and place it on his (Shimon’s) neck.” Menasheh approached Shimon, subdued him, and placed the chains on his neck, effectively taking him prisoner. Shimon declared, “This blow is from my father’s house,” indicating that only someone connected to the family of the Patriarch had the ability to overpower him.

An incredible story, but is its focus to teach us that only someone from Yaakov *Avinu*’s home had the physical strength to subdue Shimon? Is this a lesson concerning who was stronger – Shimon or Menasheh? The **Pardes Yosef** offers an all-too-realistic homiletic rendering of this *Midrash*. *Klal Yisrael* is compared to a sheep among seventy wolves, an analogy that has, over time, proven itself true. We are not winning the popularity contest in the world. No one is for the Jewish People. We are tolerated, accepted by some, envied by others, but there is no one out there that is really on our side. No nation in the world, other than one engaged in pursuing its own self-interest, has our back. We have only Hashem upon Whom to rely, and we can live with it, because that is how the Almighty wants it. The less we have to do with them, the stronger is our spiritual health.

From a practical perspective, all seventy soldiers/nations of the world want to put the chains on Shimon/us. Shimon, however, is not interested in being subdued by them, so he screams out in prayer, as we do to the Almighty, entreating Him for help. The hands of Eisav are rendered powerless, when the *kol*, voice, is the *kol Yaakov*, the voice of Yaakov, in prayer, since prayer is what we do best, because it is our function and vocation. Eisav cannot subdue a *Klal Yisrael* that is committed to Hashem. His power is only when we remain spiritually docile, assimilated, and far-removed from the “Yaakov” we are supposed to represent.

We can deal with the external enemy; it is the internal antagonist whom we have little success in overpowering. When *sonei Yisrael* emerge from within our own ranks, then our lot is very bitter. Shimon realized that he could best the Egyptian soldiers with one scream, but when he saw a member of his own family strike him, it had a sobering effect on him. This “one” would be different. This one will not go away so fast. Such an adversary requires a much different game plan for success. When the enemies are from within – be they secularists with their cowardly liberal agenda; a member of our own camp who seeks to make a statement and garner personal recognition; or even a member of our own community, our own *shul*, whose insecure and low self-esteem provoke him to pour out virulent diatribe against anybody he can, for this is the only way he

can promote himself and his agenda – such a disputant is a most difficult opponent.

Horav Reuven Abitbul, Shlita, quotes a sobering *Midrash* that is worth publicizing. When Hashem created steel, the trees began to shake with anxiety. After all, an ax/saw blade has the power to take down the strongest/tallest tree. So the (creation of) steel asked the trees, “Why are you afraid? As long as you do not put any wood into the eye of the axe-handle, the blade cannot function.” In other words, the trees are in danger from the steel only if their own wood participates in their destruction. *Am Yisrael*, our nation, can stand up and survive the onslaught of the nations of the world. We will triumph over them. It is when our own people are bent on destroying us that we come up against a most difficult adversary. In such a war – nobody wins.