

"Water-like impetuosity you cannot be foremost." (49:4)

Was Reuven a sinner or not? On one hand, *Chazal* say that Reuven was punished for moving his father's bed into his mother Leah's tent. On the other hand, we are taught that whoever claims that Reuven sinned is mistaken. Indeed, Yaakov seems to be denouncing Reuven's impulsiveness, while still including him among the tribes. *Horav Arye Levine, zl*, says that although one may perform a grave sin, that single sin does not render him a sinner by nature. He is, rather, a person who lost control of himself. *Horav Levine* stated this in the context of one of his famous visits to the Ramle Prison.

As the warden accompanied *Horav Levine* through the prison, he noted a cell in which sat a prisoner who had murdered his neighbor on *Erev Yom Kippur* over a dispute about garbage cans! The fact that by nature the murderer was a quiet and gentle man made this crime seem even more bizarre.

In his inimitable manner, *Horav Levine* asked to speak to the prisoner. After a few minutes of conversation, the prisoner became noticeably uneasy, exclaiming, "Why are you doing this, *Rebbe*? Why are you spending your valuable time talking to a lowly murderer? Do you know what I did? I lost control of myself, and I killed a man. Had one of the bystanders just grabbed me and knocked some sense into my head, he might have prevented this terrible tragedy. Now, see what has happened. How can I ever repent my sin? How can I ever atone the murder of an innocent man?" Immediately following the outburst, the prisoner began to sob uncontrollably.

Seeing this pathetic scene, *Horav Levine* spoke encouragingly to the prisoner. "You are not a murderer by nature. You are a human being whose anger has taken control of him. Your 'sin' was your lack of self-control. While you remain in prison to expiate your sin, work on your emotions. Learn to stabilize your anger, so that when you become free you will be able to enter society as a decent, normal human being."

This is what Yaakov was saying to Reuven. You acted impetuously. You had no intent to harm. However, your rash behavior caused you to lose your *bechorah*. You are not a sinner by nature, but your nature caused you to sin. Remember your error, so that it will not recur.