

FOf Levi he said, ‘Your tumim and your urim befit Your devout one.’ (33:8)

First, Moshe Rabbeinu stressed Levi’s position as the tribe from which the spiritual leadership, the Kohanim, of the nation emanated. Then, Moshe turned to the tribe as a whole, focusing on its bravery and steadfast loyalty in the desert. He then blessed the Leviim as the teachers of the nation. The commentators note the omission of Shimon from the blessings. This is due to the fact that Shimon was severely criticized by Yaakov Avinu for the tribe’s later participation in the worship and consequent moral deviation concerning the Baal Peor idol. The Sifri notes that at one time, Shimon and Levi had equal status in the eyes of their father, Yaakov. After their reaction to Shechem’s violation of their sister, Dinah, Yaakov was angry at them. Indeed, on his deathbed, he said, “Accursed is their rage for it is intense and their wrath for it is harsh” (Bereishis 49:7).

What ensued since that day, such that now Levi is extolled and Shimon is ignored? The Sifri compares this to two individuals who borrow from the king. After awhile, one repays the king his debt, while the other one not only does not repay his debt, but he even borrows again. Likewise, at Shechem, both Shimon and Levi acted in a manner that was censured. They lost it, and, therefore, Yaakov castigated them for their rage. Years later, in the wilderness, when Moshe Rabbeinu proclaimed, *Mi l’Hashem eilai*, “Whoever is for Hashem — to (join) me!” (Shemos 32:26), Levi came forward. Shimon did not. At that time, Levi reimbursed the “king” for his debt. Shimon did not. And again, years later in Moav, under the leadership of Zimri, Shimon’s tribe resorted to a complete moral breakdown. It was Pinchas, from the tribe of Levi, who saved the day. Shimon “borrowed” again, while Levi, so to speak, lent to the “king.”

We now understand what occurred, and how Levi corrected his problem, while Shimon magnified it. I think, however, there is a deeper meaning to Chazal than the aforementioned. In his *Haamek Davar*, the *Netziv*, zl, writes that when Shimon and Levi avenged their sister’s honor, they did so for disparate reasons. Levi sharply felt the insult and profanation of Hashem’s Name, the terrible slight to His honor. If people would lose respect for those who respect and serve Hashem, they would ultimately lose respect for Hashem Himself. Levi therefore acted for — and in the Name of — G-d. This is later demonstrated both when his tribe stepped forward in response to Moshe’s clarion call of *Mi l’Hashem eilai* and when Pinchas slew Zimri in order to put a stop to the plague that was decimating the nation.

Shimon also avenged his sister, but for a different reason: he had intense feelings of family loyalty. The honor of his family was defamed. He felt compelled to do something about it. Both Shimon and Levi demonstrated extreme loyalty, but the foci of their allegiances were discordant.

Later on, during the incident of Baal Peor, their loyalties were divergently expressed: Levi's led to elevating Hashem's honor; Shimon's led to disaster. In the confrontation between Zimri, the Nasi of the tribe of Shimon, and Pinchas, scion of the tribe of Levi, Pinchas avenged Hashem's honor, while the tribe of Shimon resorted to moral degradation and open rebellion.

All of this indicated that these two brothers were not the same — in any way. Levi acted with rage and wrath, but his true character was expressed in his total commitment to Hashem. *Mi l'Hashem eilai!* aptly defines Levi's essence. Shimon, on the other hand, did not just act with rage and wrath; his response was an expression of a basic flaw in his character. Rage and wrath are necessary traits at times, which one must employ when contending with a vicious enemy whose goal is to undermine and usurp the Name of Hashem. When it pits one brother against another, however, for personal reasons, it is far from being worthy of a blessing.