

Shimon and Levi are brothers; their weaponry is a stolen trade...Cursed is their wrath for it is intense and their age for it is harsh. (49:5,6)

The greatest blessing a parent (or anyone, for that matter) can confer upon a child is to tell him the truth about himself. If the subject of the blessing suffers from a shortcoming, his/her parent should note it and advise him/her about how to address the issues arising from this failing. Some parents and mentors shy away from relating the truth for fear of a negative reaction. This alone is proof that something is very wrong and should be addressed. Yaakov *Avinu* showed us the way, as he admonished his sons while he blessed them. After all, what value can a blessing have that ignores the negative character traits of the individual whom he is blessing?

Yaakov addressed each son individually, except when he spoke to Shimon and Levi, the two brothers who in the course of avenging their sister, Dinah, destroyed the captors and their entire city. *Rashi* observes that Yaakov did not curse them; rather, he cursed their failing. *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, relates that *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, was once asked if it was permissible to disdain and even dislike a Jew who is unobservant. The *Mashgiach* replied that for most people, such behavior is prohibited, because the average person has difficulty distinguishing between the person (he dislikes) and the negative character traits which provide the reason for the animus. Hence, rather than hating the traits, he ends up hating the person, which is not permissible. Only a great person can make the distinction in order to hate the traits, while continuing to love the person who falls prey to his negative traits.

Rav Yeruchem was wont to embellish this thought. A person who is plagued by bad *middos*, deficient character traits, can be compared to a closet filled with pearls and diamonds in which a rotten apple is wedged in its center. Certainly no one who is in possession of his faculties would consider disposing of the millions of dollars worth of jewels just because a rotten apple is in the closet. Get rid of the apple! Keep the diamonds! Likewise, every individual has an intrinsically high value. Negative character traits should not be ignored, and, indeed, should be dealt with. They, however, do not diminish the positive value of the person.

If we internalize this concept, making it a part of our outlook on people, our whole attitude is apt to change. We are used to viewing a person's value through the lens of his character deficiencies. Thus, if he is imperfect, our attitude towards him is likewise. We must look at the person, while simultaneously regarding his negative traits as qualities which we must address. It takes an astute educator, a loving parent, an individual endowed with common sense, to ignore the moldy apple in the middle of a closet of diamonds. In other words, it takes effort on the part of the judge of character – a commodity which is in serious deficiency.