

"And (there) were delivered out of the thousands of (Bnei) Yisrael, a thousand of every tribe, armed for war." (31:5)

Rashi notes the word "they were delivered." This seems to indicate that *Bnei Yisrael* were reluctant to wage war with Midyan, to the extent that Moshe literally was compelled to force them.

Rashi explains that this episode demonstrates the love that *Bnei Yisrael* have for their leadership. Before Moshe's impending demise was announced, *Bnei Yisrael* wanted to stone him. When they heard that his death was contingent upon their battle with Midyan, they refused to go to battle until they were delivered against their will.

The *Steipler Rav z.l.* questioned *Bnei Yisrael's* apparent change in attitude towards Moshe. One moment they wanted to stone Moshe. The next moment, when they heard that his death depended upon their battle with Midyan, they refused to go to war. He cites the *Brisker Rav z.l.* who asserts that in each individual there exists two forces which play a role in his personality: the latent one and the active one. He explains this with the following parable.

A person has a son who, although he loves him very much, alas has given him no *nachas*. Indeed, many a day goes by that the son is actually the source of much grief to his father. In contrast, this person has a disciple who is a *rebbe's* dream, who brings him abundant joy. He obviously showers this student with love and esteem, at times far more than he gives his son. In routine times, one would even speculate that the student is more beloved by the teacher than the teacher's own son! This all seems to change in time of danger. If, for instance, fire were to break out, the father would unquestionably save his son first, before he would attempt to rescue his student. This is a father's natural tendency.

There is a story concerning *Rav Yisrael Salanter z.l.*, who was walking down the street accompanied by his son and his student. Suddenly, a wild dog came running towards them. Instinctively, *Rav Yisrael* reached out to protect his son. After the dog had run away, *Rav Yisrael* commented remorsefully, "Had I been a good *rebbe* I would not have reached to protect my son before by student. A *rebbe* must view his students as if they were his own children!"

In any event, the *Brisker Rav* explains that a father has latent feelings towards his son, which under normal circumstances may not be expressed. They exist, however, and surface when necessary. It is a sad situation, if it takes a near-tragedy to stimulate this buried fatherly love.

With this insight, the *Steipler* explains *Bnei Yisrael's* ambivalent attitude towards Moshe. Had they not exhibited a readiness to "stone" Moshe, we might assume that their regard for him was purely superficial. Their regard for Moshe was tested when they were confronted with the decision to battle Midyan. Cognizant that their leader's death was contingent upon their decision, they revealed their covert feelings of love and esteem towards him. They refused to go to war if the battle would endanger him.