

Reuven heard, and he received him from their hand. (37:21)

Reuven had much to gain if Yosef were to be out of the picture. He was the firstborn. Yosef was a threat to his position, since he, too, was a firstborn. The *shevatim* rendered a *halachic* decision, finding Yosef guilty of being a *redifah*, a pursuer, who was bent on destroying them. Reuven attempted to dissuade them for one purpose: so that he could return later and release Yosef from the pit, thereby saving his life. *Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl*, observes the incredible level of *atzilus*, nobility, that was manifest by Reuven's actions. As far as the *shevatim* were concerned, either Yosef or Reuven would be the *bechor*, the aristocrat of the *shevatim*. Reuven was the only one who would benefit from Yosef's "displacement," since he had previously been considered to be the *bechor*, but, due to his impulsivity, he had lost that status to Yosef.

Nonetheless, Reuven took a position with regard to Yosef. He may no longer have been the *bechor*, which meant that the firstborn fringe benefits were no longer his. He did not care. As far as he was concerned, however, he was the *bechor* in assuming responsibility. He knew that a stand had to be taken, and, as the *bechor*, he should be the responsible party, the one to assume that stand. He may no longer have had firstborn rights, but he still retained firstborn responsibilities, which he could now execute. He could overrule his brothers.

All too often we spend most of our time seeking excuses to validate our lack of participation with regard to helping others. Reuven teaches us that small people avoid responsibility. A true leader does what must be done; he assumes responsibility, no matter the consequences.