

## **And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Yaakov's sons... each took his sword... and killed every male. (34:25)**

Shimon and Levi's punishment of the supportive cast of Shechem's violation of Dinah obviously does not sit well with those whose knowledge of *halachah* is limited. According to the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Melachim* 9), the people were held culpable because of their indifference to the crime which one of their own perpetrated. They should have judged him and carried out the appropriate punishment. Because they did not, they are viewed as co-conspirators, participants in the crime. The question that remains is: Why did Shimon and Levi carry out their deed after the men had carried out their circumcision? Why not punish them before they converted? *Ramban* explains that their *brisos milah* were invalid, because they circumcised themselves. Shimon and Levi had emphasized, *Im tiheyu kamonu*; "If you become like us" (Ibid 34:15). The *bris milah* had to be performed *halachically*, in the same manner that the *bris* of a Jew is carried out – with a *mohel*, ritual circumciser, performing the act. Thus, their conversions were null and void.

*Horav Yehudah Assad, zl*, offers an insightful explanation which is indicative of his penetrating analysis of the *pasuk*. *Chazal* (*Berachos* 60a) relate that upon entering a city, Hillel heard weeping. He declared, "I am certain that this weeping is not coming from my home." How did he know this? *Mahari Assad* explains that *tzaddikim*, righteous people, understand that, if they become victims of a *tzarah*, trouble, adversity, they accept it with love, knowing full well that it is a message from Hashem. Their lives are lives of equanimity, with life's peaks and valleys all coming from the same Source: Hashem. The Almighty has His reasons. This is all we know and accept. Hillel taught this verity to his household. Thus, he was certain that the weeping was not coming from his house.

The Torah emphasizes that the recently circumcised males of Shechem were in pain. This indicates that they were neither righteous nor committed, thereby invalidating their *geirus*, conversion. Thus, Shimon and Levi meted out their punishment on the charlatans who, due to their continued pagan attachment, deserved punishment for their indifference to the sin of their leader. This was their way of saying, "What you did is okay." Shimon and Levi took umbrage with their support.

Placing our full trust in Hashem is a fundamental aspect of our faith. By trusting in the Almighty, we gain a sense of comfort, peace and purpose. We are on a mission. We are not in this alone. Faith means surrendering control, trusting, believing that everything will ultimately work out, even if we do not see it at the moment. We can navigate life's challenges knowing that they are part of a Divine plan. With this idea in mind, we will realize that it is not the "stick" that strikes us, but the One Who is holding it. We no longer have reason to hate, because the one who has caused us to be angry is nothing more than the stick. Hashem is wielding that stick and guiding it. We should then ask ourselves the question which we often avoid asking: Why? Why does Hashem, the wielder of the stick, want us to feel the pain of the stick striking us?

The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* explains that the *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred, which was the precursor of – the catalyst for – Hashem's punishment of us with the destruction of the second *Bais Hamikdash*, and the ensuing exile which we are still experiencing, was really not *b'chinam*, unwarranted. In the mind of each individual, the hatred was warranted. Someone had either hurt him or damaged his property. Someone might have humiliated him, which, on the surface, is sufficient to render him an enemy. Nonetheless, the hatred was labeled unwarranted. One must consider and acknowledge the fact that absolutely nothing happens in a vacuum. No man can physically or emotionally harm his fellow on his own. He is nothing more than Hashem's agent, the Almighty's stick. If we would keep this in mind, hatred, anger, and revenge would not exist, because it is not the person who strikes us. Hashem is the One Who is pulling the strings and choreographing the players.

A while ago, this story appeared in *Peninim*. It is well-worth repeating. A believing Jew knows that everything that occurs is from Hashem. *Horav Michoel Dov Weismandel, zl*, was a unique individual – both in his brilliance as a Talmudic giant and in his love for the Jewish People. His intercession on behalf of his brothers and sisters during the Holocaust is legendary. He argued, cajoled, begged and, with brilliant acumen, devised plans for saving hundreds of thousands of Jews. He succeeded partially, but, for the most part, by members of the secular streams to whom diplomacy and maintaining good governmental relationships took precedence over Jewish lives thwarted his efforts. This is not the forum for discussion about culpability. Let it suffice that *Rav Weismandel* risked his life to help, but was hampered in achieving his goals. He wrote numerous letters accusing these men of indifference to the plight of their co-religionists. It all fell on deaf ears. Some were saved; most were not. When the opportunity to save one hundred thousand Jews was dashed due to indifference and insensitivity, he finally broke down. He would not believe how this could have happened, how brother could disdain brother, how the goal of statehood could be met by relinquishing the lives of thousands of Jews.

He visited the *Lubavitcher Rebbe, zl, Horav Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson*. As soon as he entered the room, he broke down in bitter, uncontrolled weeping. For one hour, he wept copious tears. The *Rebbe* remained silent as this holy man in front of him let forth his pent-up emotions. The anxiety and frustration, the shock and revulsion, at how these secular groups could cavalierly allow thousands to die a bitter and cruel death, because saving them did not coincide with their agenda, were too much to swallow. The *Rebbe* waited until *Rav Weismandel* finally took control of himself and calmed down. The *Rebbe* now spoke. “*Un ver hot dos altz ge'ton?*”; “And who did all this? (Who is responsible for everything that transpired, including your inability to sway the minds of the self-loathing secularists?) Do you think they are able to do, to achieve, anything without Hashem? Hashem did this. Why did you work so tirelessly and valiantly? For Hashem! He is well aware of your efforts. Yet, He overruled them because His decisions are good.” (We do not see through the haze, but we believe that, if the decision is from Hashem, it is inherently good.)