

Water-like impetuosity—you cannot be foremost because you mounted your father’s bed, then you desecrated Him who ascended my couch. (49:4)

Reuven had it all—and lost it—due to an impetuous move on his part. Make no mistake: *Reuven* did not mean to sin. Indeed, he thought he was acting virtuously to defend his mother's honor. He even repented after he was informed of his own imprudence. Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that he acted impulsively. A king, a leader, a *Kohen*, must act with deliberation and circumspection. Thus, the birthright that had been *Reuven's* was transferred to Yosef, the monarchy to *Yehudah*, and the *Kehunah*/Priesthood to *Levi*. A leader does not have the luxury of acting in haste. Yaakov *Avinu* employed the metaphor of water to denote the failing of impetuosity. *Rashi* explains, “The haste and confusion with which you hurried to show your anger is similar to these waters, which hurry in their flow.” *HoRav Simcha Wasserman, zl*, supplements this idea by explaining why the simile of water is used to describe *Reuven's* shortcoming and why he lost his leadership role.

Water has no shape or form. It assumes the shape of the container in which it is placed. Water cannot stand alone. It must be housed within a vessel whose form it adopts. This is unlike a solid, which stands alone, maintaining its shape without the support of a container. Yaakov hinted to *Reuven* that his personality had a commonality with water. He could not achieve leadership, because a leader must be authoritative, decisive, and strong. A leader who displays strength inspires confidence in his followers. Being shifty and acting with uncertainty undermine authority and trust. A king who wavers in his decision-making comes across as being unsure, creates instability. He must have the courage to adhere to his decision, even when it is unpopular. A *Torah* leader's decisions must be grounded in his understanding of the *Torah*, and he must never hesitate to render difficult decisions when he has decided that they are correct. Last, the leader must be able to connect with his followers on both a personal and communal level. A leader's authority is the result of carrying the weight of responsibility with wisdom, humility, and a powerful connection to the *Torah*. The people must see in their leader the embodiment of *Torah* ideals, values, and personality. Last, I think I may add that the community should look up to him- not because they have to but, rather, because they want to.