

TORAH THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

PARSHAS VAYECHI

Copied from AISH HATORAH

“Become a Leader”

“Reuven, you are my firstborn... Due to the hastiness like water, you cannot be foremost, since you disarranged your father's bed.” (Gen. 49:3-4)

In this week's parsha Yaakov rebukes his oldest son, Reuven: "Due to the hastiness with which you rushed to let out your anger [in the incident with Bilhah when you mounted your father's bed], you lost your right to the status of first-born. It was a hasty recklessness like that of fast-flowing waters which rush ahead and cause damage without a thought to the consequences."

It is difficult to understand this, for Reuven did not mean to sin; to the contrary, he thought he was acting righteously, defending his mother's honor. Furthermore, Reuven repented sincerely, and was held up as a model of sincere repentance. Why then was he punished so severely, losing his status as the first-born and leader?

Rav Moshe Feinstein was once being taken in a car by a student from his Yeshivah. As Reb Moshe entered the car the student closed the door on his fingers, yet Reb Moshe remained completely silent as if nothing had happened. When a bewildered onlooker asked him why he did not cry out, he answered that the student would have felt incredible embarrassment about having caused him pain, and therefore he controlled himself and kept quiet.

Reuven forfeited these privileges not because of his actions but because of what caused him to act the way he did - the attribute of impulsiveness. A leader cannot be impulsive. He must think through his decisions and consider their consequences. One first has to take responsibility for himself before he can take responsibility for others. To act without first thinking is a sign that one is not in control of himself and not fit to be a leader.(1)

NOTES

1. R' Eliyahu Lopian.