



### A "And he sent..."

And the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dina, each with his sword..."

From this verse, we learn the source for the Bar Mitzvah custom:

The verse calls Simeon and Levi with the title "Ish" (man), because they were then thirteen years old. It is taught that at the age of thirteen, one becomes an "Ish" (man) and is obligated in all the commandments."

In the Torah, everything is completely precise, and it must be understood: How is it possible that such a fundamental concept in Judaism—the time when the **good inclination** enters a Jew, which marks the completion and the main point of the person's entry into the challenge of life, when the obligation to fulfill all the commandments begins—can be learned from the verse 'And the two sons of Jacob took... each with his sword,' which seemingly refers to **undesirable behavior**?

Indeed, it is also understood simply that in this act, where 'they killed every male,' Simeon and Levi did not violate any prohibition, G-d forbid, since the men of Shechem were liable to death for not bringing Shechem to trial for his actions or for their sins, which they had committed even before the incident with Dinah. However, despite this, we see that this act of Simeon and Levi did not find favor in the eyes of our father Jacob, to the point that he considered it as 'a weapon of violence,' as 'this craft of murder,' despite having a basis according to the law, had come to them from Esau.

This reference is also hinted at in the verse itself, 'And the two sons of Jacob took...' For it is already known that Simeon and Levi are the sons of Jacob, and there is no need to emphasize this. By highlighting this, the intention is to indicate that despite the fact that they were 'the sons of Jacob,' they behaved **'as if they were people who were not his sons, who did not consult him**

Thus, it seems that this verse expresses the opposite of praise, and yet the Torah specifically chose this matter and this verse to teach about the time when the obligation to fulfill the commandments begins, etc. From this, it is understood that in the act of 'And they took... each with his sword,' there is an immense virtue, as will be explained further in section B and J.

### B. Simeon and Levi acted out of zealous holiness

To understand this, it is necessary to first explain the words of the Midrash on the phrase "For in their anger they killed a man": "Is it possible that they killed only one man? But it is written, 'And they killed every male.' Rather, they were all as one before the Holy One, Blessed be He, like a single man. It seems one should ask: According to the explanation of the Midrash, the expression 'they killed a man' would only be fitting if the action of Simeon and Levi—'and they killed every male'—was in accordance with the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He. And since 'before the Holy One, Blessed be He, they are like one man,' they are considered as such even in relation to Simeon and Levi, who are carrying out the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and thereby receive strength from it. However, we see that our father Jacob rebuked them for 'in their anger they killed,' believing that this was an undesirable act, to the point that he expressed regarding the deed (as mentioned in section A) that **this is a trait that comes from Esau**. If so, how is it possible that regarding this act of 'killing,' the term 'man' is used, because 'before the Holy One, Blessed be He,' they are all considered 'as one man'?

And Jacob's reasoning can be explained in two ways:

A) Since the only natural way to carry out this punishment on the people of Shechem at that time was through an act that appeared to be "deception"—first convincing them to agree to circumcise themselves and promising them that "we will dwell with you and become one people," while in reality, there was no intention to fulfill this promise, as indeed the sons of Jacob acted—Jacob therefore believed that they should not be killed at all. This was in order to prevent a desecration of G-d's name (Chilul Hashem) that could result from this, similar to what we find regarding the



Gibeonites, where the Torah's original directive on how to treat them was altered in order to uphold a promise given to them, as breaking it would have caused a desecration of G-d's name.

**B)** On the contrary, Jacob believed that they indeed should have been killed, but not through "deception," which could lead to a desecration of G-d's name (Chilul Hashem). Rather, it should have been done openly, for before the Holy One, Blessed be He, they were considered "as one man," and there was no need to fear them.

However, despite his opinion, Jacob knew that Simeon and Levi—according to their inherent nature—were neither capable of nor obligated to consider the concern of "You have troubled me..." because the issue of "*Shall our sister be treated like a harlot?*" awakened in them an intense zeal (a sacred zeal, similar to that of Pinchas—"when he was zealous for My sake"—as Levi was a descendant of a zealot). Zeal penetrates to the depths of the soul, as it is said, "*Jealousy is as harsh as the grave,*" reaching the very essence of life, the very essence of the soul. And at the level of the soul's essence, there is no room for rational calculations.

And since Simeon and Levi, in their state of "*zealous for My sake,*" were in a condition beyond rational calculation, it was inevitable that their action would be carried out as "*And they took each his sword and killed every male.*"

In this way, it is understood that in their deed, the power of the Holy One, Blessed be He, was manifest. Therefore, it is said about them, "*they killed a man.*"

**C. Simeon and Levi were obligated to seek counsel out of respect for their father.**

It seems necessary to ask the following:

Since the incident with Dinah affected Simeon and Levi to the very core of their soul, leaving no room for rational considerations, as explained above, how is it possible to argue against them for "*not seeking counsel from him*"? After all, seeking practical advice is based specifically on rational thought and does not transcend intellect.

The explanation for this is that the verse hints at this argument with the words "*the two sons of Jacob*"—meaning that although they were *his sons*, nevertheless, "*Simeon and Levi conducted themselves like other men who were not his sons.*"

Indeed, it is impossible to demand from them that they should have consulted Jacob because he was wiser or more experienced, for **when it comes to something that affects the very essence of the soul, there is no room for seeking counsel.**

However, it was possible to expect that they should have sought his counsel *because they were his sons*—out of the obligation to honor their father. However, this still remains unclear:

If their action of "*not seeking counsel from him*" was a flaw in the mitzvah of honoring their father—a commandment that they were obligated to observe even before the giving of the Torah, as we see from the fact that the Torah needed to clarify that people should not say "**Abraham did not fulfill the commandment of honoring his father, as he left him in old age and went away.**" This obligation is so important that, even though Jacob did not transgress it, he was nevertheless punished for not fulfilling it in practice for twenty-two years.

If so, it would seem that the act of "*And they took... and killed every male*" was not in accordance with the Divine will. And thus, the question arises again: How is it possible that this act is described as "*they killed a man*"—implying that it was aligned with the will of G-d?

**D) Are Bnei Noach not obligated in honoring their parents?**

To understand this, we must first introduce another question: The Gemara states that in Marah, the Israelites were commanded regarding ten mitzvot: "*The seven mitzvot that the descendants of Noah had already accepted upon themselves, along with additional commandments—laws (dinim), Shabbat, and honoring one's father and mother.*"



From this, it is clear that Bnei Noach (the descendants of Noah) were **not** originally commanded to honor their parents. If so, why was Jacob punished for not fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring his father in practice? And why does the Torah need to emphasize regarding Abraham so that people should not say, *"He did not fulfill [the mitzvah of honoring his father]"*?

Regarding Cham, who was punished for *"disgracing his father,"* and regarding Laban, who is called *"wicked"* because he *"jumped to respond before his father,"* one could say that **although Bnei Noach are not commanded to honor their parents, they are still prohibited from disgracing their father.**

[It can be said that the source of this prohibition is the natural characteristic of ravens, as it is written: *"The eye that mocks a father... the ravens of the valley will pluck it out."*

After all, even *"if the Torah had not been given"* (G-d forbid), we would still be obligated to learn certain behaviors from animals, as they act in these ways naturally. Therefore, Bnei Noach must learn this from the ravens and be careful to avoid mocking or disgracing their parents.]

However, this does not apply to Abraham and Jacob, for in their case, G-d forbid, it was not a matter of *disgracing* their parents but merely a lack of *honoring* them.

Therefore, the question arises: Since they were still considered Bnei Noach, were they not obligated in honoring their father? Would they not be held accountable for failing to uphold it?

#### **E. The Sin of the People of Sodom: Failure to Perform Charity?**

A question arises about the sin and punishment of the people of Sodom: their main sin was their failure to give charity to those in need, as it is explicitly stated, *"This was the iniquity of Sodom... they did not hold up the hand of the poor and the needy."*

However, regarding the verse *"The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great,"* the Gemara explains: *"It was because of their cruelty"*—there was a girl in Sodom who provided food for the poor, and the people of Sodom placed her on a roof, smeared with honey, and left her there to be stung by bees until she died. Because of this sin, G-d punished them with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

But this is not in contradiction to the earlier statement that they were punished because they did not *"hold up the hand of the poor and the needy,"* because this sin of bloodshed in the *"affair of the girl"* ultimately stemmed from the fact that they did not do acts of kindness and charity.

In other words, their behavior, which involved not helping the poor and the needy, reached such extreme levels that when the girl did an act of charity, they tormented her until her unusual death. The extreme nature of their sin—failing to help the poor—led to this tragic outcome.

It would seem, therefore, that the obligation of charity applies to the descendants of Noah (Bnei Noach), because if it did not, **they would not have been punished**, especially with such a severe punishment as *"destruction,"* for failing to allow something to be done that they were not specifically commanded to do.

However, this raises the question: why is the matter of *"the hand of the poor and the needy was not upheld"* considered a sin, and particularly such a grave transgression that resulted in such a harsh punishment? After all, **the commandment of charity is not one of the Seven Noahide Laws** (the mitzvot for Bnei Noach).

#### **F Do the Children of Noah Have an Obligation for Charity?**

According to the simple interpretation, one might explain that the meaning of the verse *"For I have known him (a term of affection) in order that he may command his children and his household after him to do righteousness and justice"* refers to the special affection G-d has for Abraham **because he commands his children and household to do charity and justice.** This implies that although the children of Noah are not obligated to give charity, **Abraham was commanded to do so.**

However, the Gemara says that even the children of Noah (Bnei Noach) are required to *"do righteousness and justice,"* **including the commandment of charity.** This obligation applies not only



to the sons of Noah but also to the daughters of Noah, as the Gemara states, *"his sons to justice, his daughters to charity."*

And if so, this is difficult according to both approaches: According to the approach that the children of Noah are obligated in charity—why are only seven commandments of the children of Noah listed in section D and not eight commandments? And according to the approach that they are not obligated in charity—why is the behavior of the people of Sodom, who *"did not uphold the hand of the poor and the needy,"* considered a sin severe enough to warrant such a harsh punishment?

According to this, one could say, following the opinion of the **Ramban**, that the commandment of charity is not counted among the Noahide commandments because it is included in the commandment of "Dinin," as charity is also essential for the proper functioning of the world. Therefore, the people of Sodom were punished for *"not upholding the hand of the poor and the needy."*

However, it is still difficult according to the **Rambam**, who holds that the children of Noah are not obligated in charity—why were they punished for *"not upholding the hand of the poor and the needy,"* as mentioned earlier?

#### **G The Children of Noah Exist for the Sake of the World's Sustenance**

To understand this, we must first explain **the general difference** between the seven Noahide commandments and the commandments given to Israel—from the commandment of circumcision and onward, including the commandments given after the giving of the Torah:

The world, which of course includes humanity, was created *"for the sake of Israel and for the sake of the Torah."*

Since the existence of the children of Noah serves the purpose of Israel and the Torah, which are beyond the world itself, it follows that even the *"commandments"* that the children of Noah are obligated to observe were not given for their own sake, as were the commandments given to Israel. Rather, they were established *"for the sake of Israel and for the sake of the Torah."*

**In order to ensure that the world remains a proper environment for Israel and the Torah—**without negative influences, but rather as a refined and perfected world—the children of Noah are required to observe their commandments.

Both the commandments between man and his fellow—ensuring that the world functions with justice and integrity—and the commandments between man and G-d, such as the prohibitions against idolatry and blasphemy, serve **to prepare the world so that Israel can properly fulfill their mission of Torah and mitzvot.**

Through this, they elevate the refined world to a level beyond its natural state, transforming it into a world of Torah—a dwelling place for the Blessed Hashem.

And this is also the reason why when a Ben Noach transgresses one of their commandments is liable to death—since the entire existence of Bnei Noach is to ensure that the world is properly settled. Therefore, when they act contrary to this purpose by failing to uphold their commandments, the foundation for their existence in the world is nullified. And when the cause is nullified, so too is the effect.

According to this, it is understood why the people of Sodom deserved the death penalty even according to the Rambam:

Although Bnei Noach were not obligated in the mitzvah of charity, and failing to fulfill it would not be considered a sin for them, when the situation of *"they did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy"* reaches such an extreme—where they not only refrain from giving charity themselves but also prevent others from doing so, and even go so far as to sentence those who give charity to death—such behavior is certainly a grave sin.

This is because it is the complete opposite of settling the world properly (*yishuvo shel olam*).



Therefore, if *"their outcry has truly reached its limit,"* they indeed deserved the punishment of total destruction.

### **H The Nullification of Honoring One's Parents for the Sake of Settling the World**

According to all that was explained earlier, it is now possible to clarify and justify, at least according to the view of the Ramban, why the obligation of honoring one's parents also applies to Bnei Noach—because it is necessary for the proper settlement of the world (*yishuvo shel olam*).

In other words, **the mitzvah of honoring one's parents** in its complete form and as an independent commandment was given to Israel at *Marah*.

However, even before that, all of humanity was **obligated to honor their parents to the extent necessary for maintaining the proper order and stability of the world**.

And since honoring one's parents was not yet an independent commandment at that time but rather part of what was necessary for the proper settlement of the world, it is understood that Shimon and Levi did not sin by "not taking counsel" from their father.

On the contrary, precisely when an act of "disgrace was committed in Israel" enraged them to such an extent that, in their eyes, there was no place at all for seeking counsel, not even from their father—this was, in truth, behavior that contributed to the proper settlement of the world.

In other words: If the commandment of honoring one's parents had existed at that time as an independent mitzvah, then even when something affects the very essence of the soul, causing one to act without rational calculation and without limits, one would still be obligated to fulfill G-d's commandment—the mitzvah of honoring one's parents.

However, since there was no specific commandment of honoring one's parents at that time, but rather **a general obligation** to uphold it for the sake of the "settlement of the world," then in an exceptional case that touches the very essence of the soul—and precisely for the sake of the settlement of the world—on the contrary: the settlement of the world is upheld by the fact that they "did not take counsel from him," as explained above.

### **I At the beginning of spiritual work, self-sacrifice is necessary.**

According to all that has been explained above, the immense virtue of **"And they took... each his sword"** is understood: the matter of **"Shall our sister be treated like a harlot?"** affected them so deeply that they **"conducted themselves like other men who were not the sons"** (of Jacob). They were so completely immersed in this feeling that they saw no other possibility but to **"take each his sword..."**.

Therefore, we learn about the time when one becomes obligated in mitzvot, as mentioned earlier, specifically from this verse, because it serves as a lesson for every Bar Mitzvah—meaning for every Jew at the beginning of their spiritual journey.

When faced with a situation of **"Shall our sister be treated like a harlot?"**, which symbolically refers to any sin arising from **"following your heart and your eyes, which lead you astray"**, and which results, G-d forbid, in separation from the Holy One, Blessed be He—similar to a harlot who is **"forbidden to her husband"**, meaning to G-d—one must disregard all logical calculations and limitations, even those derived from the Torah itself. Instead, one must respond specifically with **self-sacrifice**.

And after the power of self-sacrifice has already been awakened, one should act in every action with reasoning and understanding, measuring and limiting according to the Torah. However, in order for the work based on reasoning and understanding to be proper, it is necessary, first and foremost, that as soon as one becomes an "individual" in the matter of self-sacrifice, which is beyond reasoning and understanding, they should begin with this.

### **Source**

Likutei Sichot Vayishlach p. 151-162



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