

Parshas Vayechi

Shmuz by Rabbi Yehoshua Fromowitz

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In the blessings of Yaakov to his sons (Parshas Vayechi, perek 49, posuk 5), Yaakov calls Shimon and Levi brothers. Rashi explains that Yaakov called Shimon and Levi brothers because they acted together in the plan to kill Shechem and in the plan to kill Yosef. Who said that they acted together to kill Yosef? Rashi cites the posuk earlier of וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו... וְעַתָּה (and one man said to his brother... let's go kill Yosef now) and explains that this must be Shimon talking to Levi. It couldn't have been Reuven or Yehuda because they wanted to save Yosef. It couldn't have been the maidservants' sons because they didn't hate Yosef so much, and it couldn't have been that Yissochar or Zevulun because they wouldn't have talked before their older brothers. So it must've been Shimon talking to Levi.

The Sifsei Chachamim asks on Rashi: why didn't Rashi say the reason for the maidservants' sons is that they wouldn't have spoken before their older brothers like he says about Yissochar and Zevulun? He answers that the maidservants' sons had a special claim against Yosef that would've enabled them to talk before their brothers. Yosef had reported to Yaakov that Leah's sons called the maidservants' sons "servants." So since Yosef called them "servants" they had a special reason to talk before their older brothers because they had a unique claim their brothers didn't have!

Rabbi Fromowitz asked: what special claim did the maidservants' sons have that enabled them to go before their brothers and say "לכו ונהרגו" (let's go kill him)? It must've been a claim that warrants killing Yosef. We know that the brothers wanted to kill Yosef because they thought he was a murderer, and was trying to stop them from getting the brachos. Clearly calling the maidservants' sons servants may have influenced Yaakov to not give them the brachos. But how!? Yosef was actually *protesting* the fact that the other brothers called them servants! And Yaakov knew the facts, that these were the sons of his maidservant wives! What was Yosef changing by referring to them as "servants" in this context?! How could Yosef's words have swayed Yaakov to possibly not give the maidservants' sons the brachos?

The answer is that words have unbelievable power! These few words from Yosef, *protesting* the fact that the other brothers called them servants, but still referring to them as "servants," could've lowered their stature in Yaakov's eyes to the point where he may have not given them the brachos anymore!! Wow! Words are powerful!

