

(*Bereishis 37:19*). Now, this phrase – “*Va’yomru ish el achiv*” – translates literally as: “The man said to his companion.” And, indeed, the Targum Yonasan learns that the plot was conceived by two people, which he identifies as Shimon and Levi.

R’ Yehonasan Eibshutz sees this development as reinforcing his approach to the episode. For interestingly enough, these were the tribes in the time of Yeravam who defied his directives. That is, they remained loyal to the Beis Hamikdash, visiting it during the pilgrimage festivals. (Levi simply defied him, travelling from all areas of the Land to enter Yerushalayim. A significant section of the Tribe of Shimon actually resided in the portion of Yehudah, and thus they were able to travel unhindered to the Beis Hamikdash.) In any event, as these tribes were the principal opponents of Yeravam and his nefarious policies, it was their progenitors who took the lead role in the attempt to thwart his evil from sprouting in the first place.

Example of Yishmael

Given the rationale outlined above, the question then arises as to why they didn’t go through with their plan. After all, the calculation seems to be rooted in real and legitimate concerns; why, then, did they not take the drastic steps they had discussed?

We can gain insight into this matter from what ultimately did transpire. As the Torah relates further, it was Yehudah who effectively spared Yosef’s life: **וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל־אָחָיו מִהַבְצֵעַ כִּי נִהְרַג אֶת־אָחֵינוּ... לָכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ לְיִשְׁמָעֵאֵלִים וְנִדְנוּ אֶל־תְּהִיבוֹ... וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִרְהַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף לְיִשְׁמָעֵאֵלִים... – “And Yehudah said to his brothers: ‘What profit shall there be if we would kill our brother... Let us go and sell him to the Yishmaelites, rather than sending our hand against him... And Yosef was lifted from the pit, and they sold Yosef to the Yishmaelites...’” (*Ibid.* v. 26-28).**

R’ Yehonasan perceives this development as the key to understanding the brothers’ final decision to reverse course and (at least) refrain from execution. The significant factor here is the involvement of Yishmael. Yishmael himself was featured in a much earlier narrative, in which he and his mother had been banished to wander in the desert. When Hagar and Yishmael were faced with the danger of death from starvation and thirst, the angel appeared to Hagar to reassure her that Hashem had taken pity on her son: **אֶל־תִּירָאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶל־קוֹלִי: הִנֵּנִי בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם** – “Do not fear; for G-d has heard the voice of the lad **in that where he is**” (*Ibid.* 21:17). Commenting on this curious phrase, Rashi reveals the Celestial deliberations that took place regarding Yishmael’s fate. Some of the Heavenly Host argued against the salvation of Yishmael, given the great harm his nation would eventually inflict upon Yisrael. However, Hashem deemed that Yishmael deserved to be saved in spite of what the future held. At the current moment Yishmael was free of guilt; as such, Hashem declared, he was to be judged “*ba’asher hu sham*” – in accordance with the way he was right then. And based on the present, he deserved to be spared.

This was Yehudah’s true intent. In pointing to the Yishmaelites, he was invoking the eternal principal of “*ba’asher hu sham*,” reminding the brothers that Yosef’s ultimate judgment must be based on his present actions and not on the potential tragedies of the future.

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