

# LEADERSHIP AND MASHIACH

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

*"Yehudah revealed the ability to do what had to be done in order to protect the development of his fledgling nation."*

The story of Yoseph and his brothers is the story of kings and would-be-kings, cowardice and courage. It is a story of trust and betrayal, love and hatred. It is a tale of opportunities had and opportunities lost. It is also the story of two great personalities, Reuven and Yehudah.

Reuven, the oldest of Yakov's sons, should have been the designated and future king of Israel. Instead, Yehudah, the fourth son, earned the recognition of his brothers and the future crown of the nation.

Why did Reuven lose the option of becoming king, and why did Yehudah gain the position?

On the verse, "because I know the intentions," (Yirmiyahu 29) The Medresh explains, "The Shevatim were occupied with the sale of Yoseph. Yoseph was immersed in his sackcloth and fasting. Reuven was immersed in his sackcloth and fasting. At the same time, Yehudah was busy getting married, and G-d busied Himself creating the light of Mashiach."

The Medresh juxtaposes the mournful reaction of Yakov's family to Yoseph's sale with the seemingly incongruous timing of Yehudah's marriage. Yet, the divine purpose of all these events is evidenced in G-d "creating the light of Mashiach."

The focus of this Medresh is Yehudah - who he was and why he would be king of Israel and the father of Mashiach. A good king must have a vision for the future betterment of his nation and devise a plan that will accomplish that goal. His reactions to the present must be tempered and directed by his vision, and he must be willing to sacrifice in the present in order to guarantee the future.

He must be able to sell his vision to his subjects and stand firm in the face of opposition and criticism. At times, he must be willing to be unpopular because others may be limited in their scope and understanding of his vision. He must be willing to assume full responsibility for his decisions and accept the consequences of his mistakes and the truth of his personal limitations. However, at all times, the king must remain focused on his vision and trust that G-d will pave the way - if his vision is proper for his nation.

Reuven, as Yakov's first born, should have been the king. However, three incidents exposed his

inappropriateness for that position.

1. He moved his father's bed from the tent of Billhah to the tent of Leah. On the one hand, he was sensitive to the honor of Leah. On the other hand, he disregarded the important honor due Yakov's position.
2. He recognized the need to save Yoseph from the brothers, but failed in his attempt to bring Yoseph back to Yakov.
3. His well intended, but inappropriate guarantee to Yakov of giving his own two sons in exchange for Binyamin's safety. (42:37)

In each of these instances, Reuven exhibited a developed sense of right and wrong, but was unable to devise strategies that would accomplish his goals. In each instance, he reacted to the immediate situation rather than assessing all pertinent factors necessary for the future of the family and nation.

Yehudah, on the other hand, during the sale of Yoseph, his marriage to Tamar, and his handling of Yakov in regards to Binyamin's safety, revealed the ability to do what had to be done in order to protect the development of his fledgling nation. Yehudah recognized and accepted the inherent limitations of being the fourth son and devised a strategy that saved Yoseph and ultimately created Mashiach.

Yehudah's actions revealed the necessary qualities of a good leader and king.

1. He had the ability to devise and implement a plan.
2. He recognized and accepted his own limitations.
3. He trusted G-d.
4. He willingly assumed responsibility for his decisions and acknowledged his mistakes and their consequences.
5. He remained focused on his vision for the future of his family and nation.

The circumstances of Yoseph's sale are clearly stated in the Torah.

1. Yakov sent Yoseph to check on his brothers.
2. Shimon and Levi plotted to kill Yoseph.
3. Reuven saved Yoseph from their plot and suggested putting him in a pit.
4. Yoseph was thrown into the pit and his multicolored coat was taken away.
5. Reuven left his brothers and returned to care for Yakov.
6. Yehudah suggested to his brothers that Yoseph be sold.

7. Yoseph was sold.

8. Reuven returned to his brothers and discovered that Yoseph had been sold. Reuven mourned the loss of Yoseph and his failure to save him.

9. The brothers, upon seeing Yakov's inconsolable sorrow, ostracized Yehudah.

10. Yehudah left Yakov's home and got married. The brothers understood that the formation of the Jewish people required 12 brothers. Nevertheless, they felt strongly enough about Yoseph to plot his removal and tamper with the required foundation of the future nation. In so doing, they revealed their belief in the righteousness of their cause and their trust in G-d that He would safeguard the future of the Bnai Yisroel.

Reuven and Yehudah were different than the other eight brothers. They were not willing to chance the killing of Yoseph and irrevocably altering the intended foundation of the nation. Reuven felt that by delaying Yoseph's death he could convince his brothers to return Yoseph to Yakov and let Yakov deal with their complaints. However, he lost sight of his own position as the eldest brother and future king. He should have forcefully stopped Shimon and Levi and returned Yoseph to Yakov. He attempted a compromise when strength, courage, and determination were called for.

Yehudah, on the other hand, realized that his position as a younger brother did not provide the needed advantage to successfully confront his brothers. Instead, he devised a plan that removed Yoseph from immediate danger but consigned him to G-d's care and protection. "Let G-d decide, not us, the future of the nation."

Following the sale of Yoseph, the brothers blamed Yehudah for Yakov's pain. It was as if they recognized Yehudah's natural claim on the leadership of the future nation and retroactively blamed him for not taking a stronger position with them.

Yehudah, on the other hand, could not afford to immerse himself in regret and self pity. As the king, he had to look to the future of his people. Recognizing that he had tampered with the essential foundation of the Jewish people, and not knowing what G-d had in store for Yoseph, Yehudah devised and implemented an alternate plan. Being that, "grandsons are considered as sons," Yehudah immediately sought to marry and have children. That way a replacement for Yoseph would be ready to complete the essential number of 12 sons. As we find with the two sons of Yoseph, Menashe and Ephrayim, Yehudah's logic was accurate.

With the incident with Tamar, Yehudah's ability to accept responsibility and admit his mistakes became apparent. Confronted with evidence that he was the cause of Tamar's pregnancy, Yehudah immediately acknowledged Tamar's righteousness and his own failure in relation to her.

The juxtaposition of the events surrounding the sale of Yoseph as detailed in the Medresah focuses on Yehudah as the future king. Yehudah was the one who ultimately saved Yoseph. Yehudah was the one who endured the blame for Yakov's pain. Yehudah was the one who accepted the

responsibility for forging a new path toward destiny while everyone else wallowed in sorrow and self-pity.

Therefore, Yehudah was the one whom G-d appointed to become the king of His Chosen people and progenitor of Mashiach.

Good Shabbos.

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