

ROYAL CONFLICT

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Yoseph, power baron and master manipulator had met his match, Yehudah, the acknowledged leader among the brothers and the king to be had had enough. Enough of Yoseph's accusations! Enough of Yoseph's conspiracies! Enough of Yoseph's inconsistencies! It was time to bring the questions and confusion to a head.

It was time for a confrontation between assumed royalty and real royalty. It was time for Egypt to experience the power of Yehudah's prodigious strength, fearless courage, and unshakable belief. It was time for Egypt to see a true king.

At the end of last week's Parsha, Yoseph's manipulations came to a head. With Binyamin as the fall guy, the brothers found themselves in a difficult and compromised position. Binyamin had been caught with the goods! Binyamin had been framed as a thief and ingrate. Binyamin and Kllal Yisroel were in mortal danger.

The brothers rent their garments and threw themselves on Yoseph's mercy. Yehudah, as their representative, took the lead. When first accused, Yehudah's response was righteously indignant. His retort to Yoseph's officer echoed his own father's indignation in response to Lavan's accusation of thievery. "How dare you accuse us of stealing your precious chalice! We are the great-grandchildren of Avraham. Avraham, whose camels were immediately recognized because they were always muzzled, lest they graze in someone else's fields. Avraham, who divorced his beloved nephew from the family because he did not respect the property of others. Avraham who paid an outrageously inflated price for a burial plot for Sarah that by rights he could have claimed as his own. How dare you accuse us of the one quality that had always set us apart from all other people! The one by whom you find the chalice shall die and the rest of us will be your slaves!"

Had Yehudah lost his mind? Why did he offer death for the one and enslavement for all the others? More so, it was not legal. A thief does not get the death penalty. The extended family of a thief is not punished for his crimes with enslavement. Clearly, Yehudah was speaking with impassioned exaggeration because he knew with certainty that none of his brothers could have ever stolen.

The brothers were in shock. On the one hand, they knew with absolute certainty that Binyamin had not stolen the chalice. On the other hand, the evidence had been found in his saddlebag! More so, the monies that had been returned to the brothers after their first purchase of grain (52:27) was evident as soon as the bags were opened. However, this time, the chalice was found buried inside

the bag of grain. It was as if someone had attempted to hide it! Either Binyamin was being framed, and if so, why? On the other hand, could it possibly be that Binyamin had stolen the chalice? Could Binyamin have been imitating his own mother Rachel when she had stolen Lavan's Terafim - idols and hid them in the cushions upon which she had been sitting? Could Binyamin, the youngest of the brothers have mistakenly attempted to protect the "family" by stealing the Egyptian Viceroy's divining tool?

Binyamin, like the rest of the brothers, had to have wondered how Yoseph knew so much about them. Yoseph knew that they did not eat the sciatic nerve - the Gid Hanashe. Yoseph knew the birth order of the brothers as well as which brother had been born to which of Yakov's four wives. How did he know so much? It must have been the result of divination and "magic". Maybe Binyamin thought that now that the eleven brothers were again together he could protect them from the schizophrenic viceroy by taking his crystal ball. The questions and doubts clashed with their desire to deny Binyamin's guilt.

Let me add another consideration unique to Yehudah. Remembering the incident with Rachel stealing the Terafim, Rashi (31:32) referenced the Medresh that explained the devastating effect of Yakov's "curse". Yakov's decree was fulfilled. Rachel had stolen the Terafim and then died while giving birth to Binyamin. What if Binyamin had imitated his mother? Could Yehudah's impassioned response to the accusation result in Binyamin's death? Immediately, the brothers rent their garments and began to do Teshuva. They needed G-d's protection and intervention.

In retrospect, we see that there are many differences between Yakov's decree against Rachel and Yehudah's suggested punishment of Binyamin. First, Binyamin did not steal the chalice whereas Rachel had stolen the Terafim. Secondly, Yakov spoke definitively about the thief's death but never suggested that it would be Lavan's decision. On the other had, Yehudah placed the ultimate decision in the hands of Yoseph, not G-d. Yoseph would have to decide what punishment to give. Nevertheless, Yehudah and the brothers did not know the truth. Immediately they turned to G-d.

By the time they returned to Egypt and Yoseph's home, Binyamin had reassured his brothers that he had not taken the chalice. Therefore, Yehudah realized that it was time to find out the truth. It was time for a confrontation.

Once Yehudah was convinced that Yoseph was perpetrating a conspiracy against Binyamin and the family, he allowed his mind to dwell on the inconsistencies and questions. What were Yoseph's motives and goals? What were G-d's reasons for allowing the entire episode to have occurred?

The brothers had been raised under the influence of the Covenant Between the Halves. Twenty-two years earlier they had sold their brother into slavery because their interpretation of the meaning and sequence of the prophecy differed from Yoseph and Yakov's interpretation. Now, facing the insidious intrigues of the Egyptian Viceroy, Yehudah and the brothers understood that Yakov and Yoseph had been right and all that had transpired was intended to begin the second stage of the

covenant and force them into slavery. It would not be the first or last time that G-d would manipulate the hatred of our enemies to further his intentions for the children of Israel.

In their minds, Yoseph was another pawn in G-d's plans for their own personal destiny. Nevertheless, Yehudah, as king, would not accept the inevitability of slavery for his people until he had stripped away every semblance of logic and reason from Yoseph's contrived accusations. Once Yehudah had accepted the possibility that this was the beginning of their slavery, he was free to confront Yoseph, king to king. If Yoseph was to be the ruler whom G-d intended to enslave the children of Yakov, he would have to meet certain criteria. The brothers had been raised to believe in their mission as Avraham's heirs. Their purpose was to continue Avraham's legacy of teaching the world to believe and trust in G-d. This could only be accomplished by a nation. No one individual or group of individuals could ever teach an entire world, however, a nation could! Therefore, they realized that the stage of slavery was intended to allow the family of Yakov to grow and develop into the nation of Israel. However, in order for that to happen, the hosting nation would have to be benevolent and encouraging, rather than evil and selfish. The hosting nation would have to have a core sense of judiciousness and morality rather than an illogical drive to negate and destroy.

Yehudah's confrontation with Yoseph was intended to ascertain if Yoseph was worthy of being the ruler who would enslave the sons of Yakov. Yehudah decided to play along with Yoseph's contrived accusations. Approach Yoseph as if Benyamin was guilty and see how fair, compassionate and judicious he really was. Clearly, the whole chalice incident had been a setup, so, if Yoseph would ignore Yehudah's plea for clemency and compromise, then Yoseph was none other than another Lavan and Eisav intent on destroying the Bnai Yisroel. If that would be the case, Yehudah would fight for his and his brother's safe return to Canaan and Yakov. However, if Yoseph relented and either forgave Binyamin's contrived transgression or took Yakov's pain into consideration and accepted Yehudah in exchange for Binyamin, then there was more to Yoseph that deserved further investigation. Then, it was possible that Yoseph was the intended ruler who would help guide the family of Yakov into their next stage of destiny.

It is interesting to note that Rav Eliyahu Ki Tov in his Sefer Haparshios, concludes that only one of Yakov's own sons could have ever enslaved the other brothers. No one else would have had the love, compassion, and commitment to ensure the growth of the family into a nation.

Tenth of Tevet This coming Sunday, December 19, will be the Fast of the 10th of Tevet. This is the second fast-day commemorating the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. The fast begins about 72 minutes before sunrise and concludes 45 minutes after sunset.

Eating and drinking are prohibited, but should there be the need for an exemption due to illness or health related conditions contact your local Rabbi for possible consideration. Except for Yom Kippur which is Biblical, the other five fast-days are Rabbinically mandated. The Rabbi's imposed the fast on all adults, both male and female. Contrary to popular thought, women are equally obligated to fast.

The Rest of the Story

Five tragic events occurred during the month of Tevet.

1. 1st of Tevet: In the year 3319 - 442 b.c.e., Yichoniah and the great scholars and prophets were exiled to Bavel.
2. 8th of Tevet: In the year 3515 -- 246 b.c.e., the Torah, as per the demand of Talmi, was translated into Greek (Septuagint) by 72 different Torah Scholars. His intention was to find inconsistencies that would undermine the power of the Rabbinic tradition. Instead, every one of the 72 translated the Torah in the exact same manner. The translation was completed on the 8th of Tevet and Chazal compared it to the day on which the Golden Calf was worshipped.
3. 9th of Tevet: In the year 3448 - 313 b.c.e., the great Ezra Hasofer died.
4. 10th of Tevet: In the year 3336 - 425 b.c.e., Nevuchadnetzar began the 2 and ½ year siege against Yerushalayim that ended in the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash.
5. 23rd of Tevet: In the year 5257 - 1497 c.e., the Jews of Portugal were expelled. Among those expelled was Rav Avraham Zacuto who had been consulted on astronomy and navigation by the explorer Vasco da Gama before a trip to India. Rav Yitzchak Karo, Uncle of Rav Yoseph Karo, was also among the refugees.

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