

# ROYALTY AND REDEMPTION

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

In last week's Parsha we were introduced to Yehudah. Yehudah, progenitor of royalty and redemption, was presented as a tortured soul struggling to understand his place within the evolving nation. As the fourth son he did not assume that the leadership position would be his. He would first have to suffer trial and tribulation before accepting his ordained destiny as king.

Yehudah was divinely gifted with a judicial sense of fairness and humility. He knew that his brother's approach to Yoseph was wrong. There may have been cause to be concerned about Yoseph, his dreams, and assumed ambitions; however, they had no right to be the judges and jury of their own brother. Their concerns and fears about Yoseph were much too personal. The Brothers could not be objective and impartial in their deliberations about Yoseph.

The Medresh tells us that when the Brothers went to "Dosan" (37:17) they went to judge Yoseph. They assembled as a court and judged him guilty and deserving of capitol punishment. The Piyut (liturgy) on Yom Kippur associates the deaths of the Ten Martyrs as punishment for Yoseph being sold into slavery. While relating the story of the Ten Martyrs, the Piyut describes the Ten Martyrs as the only one's worthy of sitting in judgment of the 10 sons of Yakov.

"He (the Roman governor) commanded, 'Judge this case... What is the law if a man kidnapped a brother and sold him?' They (the Ten Martyrs) answered, 'The kidnapper is to die.' Said he, 'What of your ancestors who sold their brother? Now you must accept the heavenly judgment upon yourselves for since your forefathers' times there have been none like you. Were they alive (at the time when the Second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of Sinas Chinum - purposeless hatred) I would have prosecuted them before you, so you must bear the sin of your ancestors.'"

Clearly, the Sages believed that the Brothers were wrong for selling Yoseph into slavery. However, although they were wrong for selling Yoseph, G-d nevertheless smiled upon them and made their wrong into something right. G-d took their purposeless hatred and constructed from it the means of redemption.

Possibly, this is the meaning of the Talmudic statement that Mashiach will come in one of two ways. Either the world will do Teshuva and the Redeemer will come, or, things will get so bad that He will have no other choice but to send the Mashiach. In other words, the Sinas Chinum - purposeless hatred will be converted into the mechanism of redemption.

Hoping that G-d's judicial benevolence will convert our evil into a good is fundamental to our belief in G-d's goodness. As we say in the Lecha Dodi, "The end result was G-d's original intention." This belief - Emunah was intrinsic to Yehudah's strategic thinking. He was willing to take a chance. He was willing to risk lives in order to save them. He willingly sold Yoseph to the Yishmiaylim in order to save him from the clutches of the Brothers. He willingly risked living away from the spiritual and emotional support of his family and chanced the negative influences of the Canaanite society in order to begin his family and move beyond the loss of Yoseph. However, although Yehudah's approach was fundamentally sound, his strategy was fatally flawed.

It is true that we must trust G-d and His benevolent control over time and circumstance. It is true that we must believe that in the end all will turn out good. It is true that we must be willing to take risks, even to the extent of putting our lives in danger in order to facilitate redemption. However, our belief in G-d must first start with ourselves. We must be willing to risk our own lives and spiritual safety before risking the lives and souls of others.

Yehudah risked Yoseph's safety, not his own, when he suggested selling him to the Yishmiaylim. His strategy was to consign Yoseph into the care of G-d and let Him take care of the future. In the end all would be right, all would be as G-d intended. However, Yehudah should have first risked his own safety by directly confronting his brother's decision to kill Yoseph before risking Yoseph's life.

Yehudah risked the lives of his future children when he moved away from the insular protection of Yakov's household. Yehudah may have had the right to risk his own spirituality by living among the Canaanites but he had no right to risk the education of his future children. As we know, he risked it and the gamble failed. Yet, Hashem did not forsake Yehudah. In the end, all turned out good. In the end he married Tamar and began the process for eventual redemption and salvation. In the end, Yehudah's approach proved to be fundamentally sound, although his strategy was fatally flawed.

In last week's Rabbi's Notebook I contrasted Yehudah willingly assuming risks with Yoseph being put at risk. In Yehudah's case, although in the end it turned out to be good, there were painful and tragic consequences that others besides Yehudah had to endure. The ultimate success came on the shoulders of failure. G-d did not protect the process as much as He guided the outcome.

On the other hand, Yoseph did not choose to be put at risk. He was sold into slavery against his will. He would have never chosen to be alone within the pagan and immoral Egyptian society. However, he had no choice. He had to survive regardless of the difficulties. Therefore, his trials and tribulations remained individual. He endured the loneliness and pain, because he had no other choice. However, G-d helped him and protected him so that in the end he successfully did the seemingly impossible. He raised two sons worthy of being counted among the sons of Israel. G-d protected the process the same way that He guided the outcome.

In this week's Parsha Yehudah's story becomes secondary to Yoseph's tale. However, Yehudah's story is no less significant. With a little insight into the Parsha, we can trace Yehudah's evolution into

the progenitor of royalty and redemption.

There are two instances in Parshas Miketz where Yehudah takes center stage. Following the return of the Brothers from Mitzrayim, Yakov expressed his reluctance at sending Binyamin to Egypt. However, when the food ran out he was forced to send the Brothers back to Mitzrayim. Yehudah was the one who took the lead in reminding Yakov of the condition of their return. "We were sternly warned, 'Do not see my face unless your brother (Binyamin) is with you.'" (43:3) Yakov reiterated his concerns and Yehudah told his father that he would take full responsibility for Binyamin's safety. Rashi (43:9) references the Medresh that explains Yehudah's guarantee to Yakov. "If Binyamin is not returned safely, I will have sinned in this world and in the World To Come." On the basis of Yehudah's assurance, Yakov sent Binyamin to Mitzrayim.

At the end of the Parsha, after Yoseph had successfully framed Binyamin by placing the golden goblet in his saddlebags, Yehudah stepped forward. It was Yehudah that confronted the accusation on behalf of all the brothers and the Pasuk refers to them as, "And Yehudah and the Brothers returned to Yoseph's palace." (44:14) Yehudah is clearly identified as leader of the family.

Why was Yehudah silent during their first visit to Egypt? The entire problem started at the beginning of the first trip when Yoseph first accused them. Yehudah was conspicuously silent. If he was their leader and eventual king, why didn't he speak out?

The story of Yehudah is not the tale of a leader and king; it is the tale of how Yehudah became the leader and king. Like all G-d given potential, leadership qualities must be nurtured. The potential evolves into character through trial, success, and failure. From the moment that Yehudah suggested that the Brother's sell Yoseph rather than kill him, Yehudah entered the arena of his potential. His intuition and judicial sense were correct, however his decisions and strategies were still raw.

Following his exile from the family and the incident with Tamar, Yehudah learned two basic lessons.

1. He needed the family and their support. He was not intended to stand alone in the face of the outside world. As king he stood on the shoulders of his nation. As king, he needed the protective environment of Eretz Yisroel.
2. If necessary, he was personally prepared to risk everything on behalf of the family / nation. His life as king was to serve the nation. Without them he was nothing. Therefore, he was prepared to risk everything, including his portion in the World To Come. However, as the leader his strategies had to succeed; he could no longer afford for them to fail.

The first trip to Mitzrayim was filled with surprises. Yehudah, as the potential leader did not see where his intervention would make a difference. He chose instead to remain silent and see what would happen. He elected to trust G-d and see what He had in mind. Yehudah was absolutely correct. After being in prison for three days the situation had drastically changed. From one brother returning to Canaan to fetch Binyamin and the rest staying behind as hostages, one brother would

stay behind as a hostage and the rest would return to fetch Binyamin. (See Rabbi's Notebook, Miketz 1999) Besides, Yehudah needed to be in Eretz Yisroel before he could make a decision affecting the future of the family. His strength was directly linked to the land, and he did not trust himself away from Eretz Yisroel.

Yehudah's first opportunity to take action as leader took place when the food ran out. Yakov's reluctance to send Binyamin was endangering the family and something had to be done. Yehudah stepped forward and confronted Yakov. However, Yehudah was well prepared. Upon their return from their first trip Reuven had attempted (42:37) to negotiate with Yakov regarding Binyamin's going to Mitzrayim. However, Reuven failed because the need wasn't great enough, Yakov was not ready to deal, and Reuven was not offering sufficient security. Yehudah on the other hand, waited patiently until the family's need for food would force the issue to a head. He then played his hand and offered Yakov the ultimate security - himself. He put himself on the line in the manner of true royalty and leadership.

The second scene, after Binyamin was accused of stealing Yoseph's goblet, further proved Yehudah's metamorphosis into kingship. The family was under attack and he was on the line! At first the family responded without identifying Yehudah as the leader. However, once "discovering" the goblet had substantiated the accusation, it was Yehudah who took the lead. Upon returning to Yoseph's palace Yehudah was finally ready to act as a king. Yehudah was ready to risk everything for the sake of his nation. Yehudah was ready to be the progenitor of royalty and redemption.

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