

# JEWISH RENEWAL AND RESILIENCE

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The apparent hero and victor in the epic narrative of the saga of Yosef and his brothers that reaches its culmination in this week's parsha is certainly Yosef. His dreams and ambitions are fulfilled. His brothers and father have bowed down before him as the prophecy of his dreams indicated. He takes no further revenge against his brothers. He houses them and Yaakov in security and prosperity in the land of Goshen and is assiduous in caring for all of their needs.

He certainly emerges from the entire bewildering and tragic events as a heroic and noble figure, still the beloved son of his father and the heir to the double portion birthright of the first-born. Yet, in terms of the long range view of Jewish history, Yosef is not the vehicle of Jewish survival.

His kingdom of the northern ten tribes of Israel is relatively short-lived and riddled with wicked kings and widespread idolatrous practice. The kingdom of Yosef is never restored and the remnants of the northern ten tribes are eventually absorbed into the kingdom and tribe of Judah.

Yosef's triumph is seen in Jewish history as being legitimate but essentially temporary. It is his brother Yehudah who emerges as the ultimate hero and guarantor of Jewish survival and as the true head of Yaakov's family. The Jewish people are called upon his name and it is through his descendants that legitimate royalty comes to Israel.

The future salvation of Israel and the messianic vision of full and complete redemption and a better world for all are assigned to the family and descendants of Yehudah. He is the ultimate and victor in the debate between Yosef and himself that this week's parsha highlights.

The obvious question that presents itself is why this should be. After all it is Yosef who is the righteous one, the one who resisted physical temptation and who persevered in his loyalty to the ideals of the patriarchs of Israel under the most trying and difficult of circumstances.

Yehuda on the other hand can be superficially judged and found wanting in his behavior regarding Tamar and in his leadership role in the sale of his brother as a slave. So why, in historical terms, is he the hero and savior of Israel while Yosef is not?

Though God's will, so to speak, in all of these matters remains hidden and inscrutable to us mere mortals, a glimmer of understanding can come to us from the words of Yaakov that will appear in next week's parsha. Yaakov blesses Yehudah for his ability to rise from error and tragedy and continue forward. It is Yehudah's resilience that marks his character and behavior.

He redeems himself from the error of his treatment of Yosef by his unconditional and self-sacrificing defense of Binyamin. He admits his error in condemning Tamar and their children become the bearers of Jewish royalty. The secret of Jewish survival lies in Jewish renewal and resilience. It is the one national trait that outweighs all other factors in Jewish history. It certainly is the one most in demand in our current Jewish world today as well.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)