



Judah - the Mesiras Nefesh Jew

What is it about Judah that was so attractive?

Why Wasn't Joseph Chosen?

These days, the legacy of Ariel Sharon, the previous Prime Minister of Israel, is undergoing a new evaluation.

In general, his deeds seem to contradict each other. On one hand, he was the "father" of the settlement movement in Israel, but in his later years in government he returned territories in which he himself had encouraged settlement.

But interestingly, after learning this week's Parsha, I realized that there is a common denominator to his actions.

In the Parsha we learn that Jacob loved Joseph more than his brothers. We read about Joseph's adventures and trials: he was sold into slavery in Egypt; tested by Potiphar's wife; he sat in jail; assists the chief butler and baker, fellow prisoners. Through all these events he never loses his faith in Hashem. When he is finally released and elevated to the position of Viceroy to Pharaoh, a position of glory, he doesn't forget where he came from and remains a true Jew. In fact, in the midst of the idolatry and moral corruption of Egypt, he raises his two children, Menashe and Ephraim, to be Jews who are faithful to Hashem and His people.

Finally, his greatest test is when his brothers arrive in Egypt, and not only does he not take revenge on them, but on the contrary, he is merciful to them and even comforts them by telling them that what they did was good. Joseph even hugs and kisses them.

How can we comprehend such behavior? How is it possible for anyone to be totally compassionate; never feeling any anger or bearing a grudge against someone who has wronged you? Joseph, the Tzaddik, reached the highest spiritual peak possible for a human being.

Considering all of this, it is a surprise that when Jacob blesses his sons before his death, in Parshat VaYechi, he blesses Judah with kingship. He says that the kingship of the house of David will come from Judah, “the stick of authority will never leave Judah...(Rashi comments: from King David and onwards) until the coming of Shiloh (Rashi comments: King Moshiach that his is the kingship)”.

Jacob intended Joseph to be his heir, as we see that Jacob taught Joseph the secrets which he learned from Shem and Ever, and gave him the striped coat. In addition, Joseph actually did become a ruler. So, when it comes to the moment of truth just before Jacob’s death, why does Jacob choose Judah instead of Joseph? What did Jacob find in Judah that was more suitable for kingship than in Joseph?

What is truly eternal?

At the end of the Parasha as Jacob is preparing to go down to Egypt, we read, “He sent Judah ahead of him, to Joseph, to direct him to Goshen.” Jacob sent Judah to build a yeshiva in Goshen, so that there would already be a yeshiva when he would arrive there.

Why didn’t Jacob ask Joseph to establish the yeshiva? Judah didn’t know anyone in Egypt, the language, mentality or the dress code. He had to find a middleman to help him locate a suitable building and arrange a contract to rent the building. Due to his unfamiliarity with Egyptian matters this resulted in many delays. And all this instead of giving it over to Joseph who, as the governor of Egypt, could have cut through all the red tape and built them an entire city!

Jacob, in his wisdom, understood that the descent into Egypt was the beginning of the exile of the Jewish people, and that in exile the government is not always in favor of the Jews. Jacob wanted to pave the way towards a pure Judaism which was not dependent on the kindness of the king or ruler; therefore he did not want to use Joseph. Joseph was the head of the government, but what would happen when the government would change? In order to establish such a yeshiva Jacob sent Judah.

Self-Sacrifice

But still, in what way was Judah superior to Joseph?

In the beginning of the Parasha we read that Joseph wanted only Binyamin to stay enslaved to him, and let his brothers return home. When Joseph said this, all the other brothers were silent, moved aside, and only Judah rose against the ruler and spoke harshly to him. He

offered himself as a slave instead of his brother and his brothers go home free – this was true self sacrifice!

Judah was a 'self-sacrificing Jew'; he went against the tide and the whole world. Such a man could lay the foundations of the Jewish people in exile. Joseph worked in the establishment and spread Judaism from within it. Judah, on the other hand, did not have any considerations besides the need to save a Jewish child. **This** was the sort of founder needed for the first Jewish institution in exile.

This is indeed the attribute that we find in the descendants of Judah. We are familiar with the story of how the Jewish people stood on the edge of the Red Sea with the Egyptians behind them and how they panicked. They complained to Moshe and G-d said to Moshe, "speak to the children of Israel and they will travel", but the sea refused to split, and then a 'self sacrifice Jew' jumped into the sea and before he drowned, the sea split. Who was this Jew? It was Nachson the son of Aminadav of the tribe of Judah. Only a member of the tribe of Judah had the strength for self sacrifice. This quality came from his grandfather Judah!

We also see this quality later in the battle between Goliath and 'little David.' David was young and inexperienced in battle, but he couldn't stand the thought that Goliath was cursing G-d. His fight against Goliath was not based in reason. His strength came from Judah. The King Moshiach comes from the tribe of Judah and in order to bring Moshiach there has to be self sacrifice.

The name Ariel is also connected to Judah, as we find Judah is compared to a lion in the blessings of Jacob. In Ariel Sharon we saw this same attribute of going against the tide, against anyone who disagreed with him. He always swam against the tide and acted according to his belief.

The people of Israel are called Am Yehudi – after Judah, because everyone Jew today has inherited his ability to swim against the tide. We would be wise to pass this on as an inheritance to our children.