



The Conservative Kehila in Zichron Ya'acov

Dear Friends,

For the past few weeks tectonic plates have been rubbing and colliding, causing the earth that our Jewish feet stand on to tremble. This week the clash between them reaches its climax, but then it fades, at least for now.

These two “plates” are Yoseph and Yehuda - one, the son of the beloved but tragic wife, Rachel, and the other the son of the first and... last wife, Leah.

Yehuda is the brother who threw Yoseph into the pit. He is the one who suggested selling him to the caravan of merchants descending to Egypt. Years later, it was Yehuda who pressured his father, who had never ceased mourning for Yoseph, to allow Binyamin, Rachel's last remaining son, to join his brothers on their journey to Egypt in their second search of food. The ruler in Egypt (Yoseph), who accused them of being spies, warned them not to return to Egypt without their youngest brother. Yaakov would not hear of it. But when the famine in Canaan became unbearable, it was Yehuda who promised his father that he would be responsible for Binyamin's safe return, no matter what! Finally, Yehuda is taking responsibility.

Yoseph, who has decided to put his brothers to a test, continues to torment them on their second visit as well, and plants the royal cup in Binyamin's sack in order to see what his brothers will do when he is arrested.

The brothers pass the test with flying colors. Not only do they not abandon Binyamin, they return with him to Egypt, literally and figuratively returning (t'shuva, in Hebrew).

Then, in one of the most dramatic moments in the entire Torah, Yehuda approaches (hence “vayigash”) the ruler, and begs for the life of Binyamin. When Yehuda offers himself in place of Binyamin, Yoseph breaks down and weeps. Our father, Yehuda said, will not withstand the loss of the remaining son of his beloved wife Rachel.

Yehuda consented to pay the price for his deeds. His Tshuva is complete!

Yoseph is righteous. He seeks no revenge! After years of pain and humiliation, Yoseph's dreams come true and his brothers bow down to him. They are now entirely dependent on his mercy. He has survived their abuse, his spirit never wavered and he has risen to greatness.

This is the victory of justice and righteousness over bullying!

But this victory is short-lived. Even though he is one of the younger of the brothers Yoseph, is destined to die first. And despite the bright future which awaits the offspring of both giants - Yehuda and Yoseph - it is Yehuda who will come to prevail in the long run. Yoseph will bear two of the biggest and most powerful and important tribes in the kingdom of Israel, Menashe and Ephraim. Yehuda will sire only one, but his is the only tribe that will survive - and survive to this very day. The tribe of Judah will withstand the test of time and of history, whereas Yoseph will not last long, although he will be remembered forever as the handsome, righteous dreamer.

The rivalry between them will finally be resolved at the end of days, with the arrival of Mashiach Ben Yoseph, who will begin the process of redemption. He is destined to die in a great battle, at which point Mashiach Ben David, a descendent of Judah, will appear. And so it will be Yehuda who will bring the long-anticipated world peace.

The seeds of that world peace are sown in this week's parasha!

What, then, is the difference between these two giants? What enables Yoseph to win this round, but bestows eternity and world peace on Yehuda?

Yoseph, as we said, is righteous. Yehuda is not. He is full of vice: he throws Yoseph into the pit, sells him into slavery - an act whose punishment is death! - and then lies to his father, causing him to think that Yoseph was devoured by a wild beast. He violates his promise to his daughter-in-law, Tamar, to give her his youngest son in marriage. He then sleeps with her himself (although unknowingly). Yoseph is the exact opposite: he does not know how to lie! He is completely loyal to his principles and to the truth. He obeys his father, even when his love for Yoseph causes him to be isolated and hated by his brothers. He is loyal to his Egyptian master, and when his master's wife begs him to lay with her, he refuses adamantly. Even when, as a result, she falsely accuses him of rape and he is sent to prison, he remains faithful and loyal. The only time he lies is when he tries to hide his identity from his brothers, but not for long. He breaks down and weeps.

So why is it that the righteous one dies first, and in the long run does not survive the test of time?

King Solomon, the wisest of men, was one of the great descendents of Yehuda. He will later state (in Kohelet 7: 16), "**Don't overdo righteousness....**" And a few verses later (20) he adds "**For there is not one righteous man on earth who does what is best and does not err.**"

My father always taught me "don't be right, be smart". Shlomo (Solomon) was smart, as was his great, great grandfather, Yehuda. The speech Yehuda gives in our parasha is a brilliant one. One of the best in the Tanakh.

Yoseph understands the secrets of dreams, but Yehuda understands the secrets of life. In life people make mistakes! Sometimes terrible mistakes! But life is not meant for angels; it is meant for human beings. Human beings who are willing to live life fully make mistakes. There are no shortcuts. The only question is, how do we repair our mistakes? How do we bring about healing?

Like Yoseph, King Saul - of the tribe of Binyamin, Yoseph's younger brother - was "very righteous" and he too did not survive very long. He had pity on Agag the Amalekite, and for that he was dethroned and died tragically on the Gilboa Mountain.

David, on the other hand - Yehuda's descendent - knew how to truly live. He did many hair-raising, unacceptable things! But as someone who knew how to live, he also knew how to repair the damage, to do t'shuva, and to return to the flow of life.

Life does not tolerate excessive righteousness. It requires us to live and to err! He who does not live does not err, and he who does not err does not live.

As always, the invitation this Shabbat is not to choose sides - between Yoseph's path and that of Yehuda - righteousness or humanity. The invitation, rather, is to acquaint ourselves with all parts - all the "brothers" - for they are all within us. Sometimes one is more dominant, sometimes the other. As king Solomon said, "**there is a time for everything under heaven.**"

But there is a warning here too: indeed, be careful of excessive righteousness - it wins but it is not eternal. And there is praise here for our fragile, breakable humanity...

And also praise of knowing how to mend that which we have broken, and heal that which we have hurt.

It's the Judaic secret for longevity. It carries the seeds of world peace.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha