

"A QUALIFICATION FOR JEWISH LEADERSHIP"

Our Sidra begins with the words *וַיִּגַּשׁ יוֹסֵף אֶל יְהוּדָה*, "and Judah drew near to (Joseph)," whom Judah recognized only as the powerful viceroy of all Egypt. We reach, here, the point of highest tension in the entire drama of Joseph and his brothers.

If I be permitted the play on words, *גַּשׁ* can be read not only as coming from the words *גָּשַׁן*, "he drew near," but also *גַּשְׁתָּהוּ*, collision. For what we are reading about is not only an encounter between Joseph and Judah, but a confrontation; not only a meeting, but a challenge. And the nature of this *גַּשְׁתָּהוּ* or contest is nothing less than the future leadership of the Children of Israel.

Joseph was by all means the favorite of Father Jacob. It is Joseph to whom Jacob had given the "coat of many colors," the symbol of leadership. Judah was the chosen of the brothers. He was their spokesman and their chief. Which of the two would inherit the mantle of Jacob and become the leader of the tribes, and the progenitor of the future dynasty of Judah and ultimately of the Messiah?

The answer, as all of us know, is: Judah. Jacob continued to shower his personal love upon Joseph, but he was forced to concede sovereignty or *מַלְכוּת* to another brother, to Judah.

Why is that so? After all, consider the differences between these two personalities. Joseph is handsome, charismatic, a natural leader, seized by powerful ambitions, an accomplished linguist, a man of moral self-control, a diplomat, an economist, a man brimming with diverse talents -- a born winner.

Judah, contrariwise, strikes us as dull. In considering his personality, I am often lead to think of the mentality of an amoral, tired, and jaded upper-middle-aged businessman. He bumbles his way through life. He sees all of existence through the eyes of a ledger, and everything is evaluated in terms of profit and loss. When the brothers want to kill Joseph, his response is

אולי יצאנו כֹּהֵן לָנוּ, it will bring in more for us if we sell him rather than kill him. The moral issues were of no concern; all that counted was the practicality of profits. Later on, he approaches Tamar, his daughter-in-law whom he had wronged, and who is now disguised as a harlot. In his dealings with her he reveals a frighteningly cold and calculating attitude: there is a haggle for price, he decides to give a down-payment, and later, when other of his interests are threatened, he decides to forfeit the pledge and take his loss in order to protect these other interests.

Apparently he had no ambitions other than those engendered by his natural and financial appetites. No control, no diplomacy, no dazzle, no leadership. A born loser.

The problem is a fascinating one. How, considering these differences, did the leadership of Israel go to Judah rather than to Joseph? I have suggested a number of solutions in the past. Perhaps next Shabbat again we shall introduce another line of reasoning. For now, permit me to present one fact which may help explain, if not solve, our problem.

Judah, for all our criticism of him, is big enough to admit that he was small. He confesses a mistake. He can experience guilt and confront it creatively. After the incident with Tamar, he does not offer any tortured rationalizations to vindicate himself. He says simply and forthrightly: *יָנֹכְחָהּ*, she was right and I was wrong. The weary, amoral, perfunctory Judah is transformed into a self-critical man of moral courage. He concedes guilt, is willing to suffer through it, and offers to make reparations. He knows that he is guilty with regard to Joseph, and together with his brothers he says *יָנֹכְחָהּ אִמְרֵנוּ שָׂדֵה*, "indeed, we are guilty." Even more than his brothers, he is the one who is willing to lay down his life and risk all for Benjamin, the only surviving full brother of Joseph, as we read in the beginning of today's Sidra. Pushed to the limits of the endurance of his conscience, he rises to a new stature and achieves a moral greatness that is irrefrangible and pellucid.

Joseph, for all our eternal admiration for him, shows no signs of remorse. He is, it is true, *יָדָבָר וְשֹׁמֵר*, Joseph the Righteous -- but not completely. And at the end of his life, he still is a *יָדָבָר*, but he does not seem to have transcended his previous state. He fails to acknowledge the human faults which he did manifest. In his youth, he was possessed of over-ambitious schemes, so that one might say that he had developed an egocentric cosmology: the entire world, sun and moon and stars, all seemed to revolve around him. Later in life, we find no sign of contrition for these youthful extravagancies. For all the years that he was a success in Egypt, he failed to contact his grieving father. The problem often bothers those who study the Torah. Yet we nowhere find, from the time that he reveals himself to his brothers until the end of the story, that Joseph experienced any remorse for his breach of compassion for his bereaved father. Later, he is to move around entire populations almost Stalinistically, yet there is no shred of evidence that he felt sympathy for those who were dealt with so brutally.

For all of these there is no expression of guilt, no confession, no *יָנֹכְחָהּ*, no *יָנֹכְחָהּ אִמְרֵנוּ שָׂדֵה*. Joseph is

generous -- yes. He is brilliant -- yes. He is forgiving -- yes. But is he self-critical? Guilt-acknowledging? No.

And only a man who has failed and sinned miserably, and then confessed and suffered through his guilt and offered to compensate for it; only a man of '13' (confession), can become a leader of Israel. So it is that Joseph remained a ^{מלך}, a king for the ^{עמים}, the nations, Egypt. But Judah attains to ^{מלך} of Israel!

Note the play on words when Jacob, in the death-bed scene, bestows the gift of sovereignty on Judah: ^{וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָמַר אֶל יְהוּדָה}, "Judah, your brothers will recognize you (as their leader)." The word ^{יִשְׂרָאֵל}, they will recognize you, is etymologically related to the word ^{13'}, confession. Only a man who can, like Judah, confess his guilt, is one who can be acknowledged as a leader.

* * * * *

This element of '13' has become a very real and significant fact in the context of our times for the future of world Jewry and the State of Israel.

I have just returned this week from Geneva where, for a second time, I engaged in a "consultation" with the World Council of Churches, the world Protestant group, on the theme of how to achieve "world community." Our problem was how non-governmental groups, religious and ideological, can cooperate throughout the world toward making our world one of peace and the alleviation of suffering. But there was a hidden agenda that was of interest to us as well: the undercurrent of anti-Israel, anti-Zionist, anti-Judaic, and -- in some respects, in some churches, and with some individuals -- anti-Semitic sentiment.

It must be said that for many sensitive Western Protestants from Europe and from America, there was a feeling of '13', an experience of remorse and an acknowledgment of guilt towards the Jewish people. And they have acted upon it. They realized what had happened at the Holocaust, and in a reaction of atonement they helped found the State of Israel in 1948 and have remained pro-Israel for some time afterwards.

But now a significant change is taking place, and that is: the ascendancy of the Third World, those under-developed but highly self-righteous countries of Asia and Africa. Rightly or wrongly -- and I think it is wrongly for their own interests -- the world Protestant movement has decided to throw in its lot

with the Afro-Asian nations. There are practical reasons for this. The best chance for Christianity to make new converts seems to be in Africa. They are losing out elsewhere. By extrapolating their statistics, they estimate that by the year 2,000 only 15% of the world population will be Christian. And they are not accustomed to being a minority religion. Hence, the leadership of the World Council of Churches is perceptibly going over to Afro-Asians, to Black and to Yellows.

What does that mean to us Jews? It indicates that the considerable influence of the Protestant world, an influence which is felt in the chancelleries of many governments and the United Nations, is shifting toward the Third World, and will support those policies.

In Western Protestantism, the inherent and inherited virus of anti-Semitism that has become a part of Christianity, has been somewhat blunted since World War II by the guilt experienced by many Christians as a result of the Holocaust. The horror and the devastation made them suddenly aware of the consequences of the theological anti-Semitism that had come to them through Christianity. But the Afro-Asians experience no such guilt. They do not feel responsible for Germany's gas chambers. Hence, they are left only with the Christian tradition, to which many of them are new-comers, and there is nothing to neutralize their infection by the anti-Jewish bias of that tradition. In addition to this, they view the State of Israel as an imperialist outpost. And there is no 'if', no guilt, to modify that hostility.

No wonder that, at this recent consultation in Geneva, a sophisticated Black leader from Cameroon presented a paper which culminated in questioning whether Jews in the Diaspora are guilty of double-loyalty because of their sentiment concerning the State of Israel. When I asked him why this should be a problem to him, since I was not aware of any great Jewish community in the Cameroons, I received no answer. Another delegate, and I am not permitted to identify him or his origin, demanded of Jews to do *teshuvah* and express 'if' or confession for the guilt of -- having participated in the creation of the State of Israel!

It is for this reason that, despite my aversion to theological dialogue, that I am convinced that such encounters with other groups on social and economic and political questions are of the utmost significance because they enhance mutual education. My visits to Geneva were not done with the expectation of astounding positive results. *mitzvah*, with the help of God, we shall perhaps have succeeded in averting the dangers of negative consequences of Israel and for world Jewry.

* * * * *

But let us return to ourselves. Judah was named יהודה by his mother Leah (לֵאָה), because of her gratitude to the Lord. Then, וַיִּגַּד אֵלָיו יְהוָה, from today's Sidra we learn of Judah rising to the quality of יָדוּן, the acknowledgment of guilt. Finally, in next week's sidra Jacob gives him sovereignty in the words אֵלָּה יִצְחָק אָמַר, recognition of his leadership. All three - gratitude, confession, and recognition -- are implicit in the name יהודה, or in the Hebrew word דָּוָה .

So, let us learn anew every day and every morning:
 דָּוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, we are grateful to Thee, Θ living and eternal King; we are also self-critical and guilty before Thee; and we hope to be worthy of acknowledgment and recognition by Thee and by all men. רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ, great is Thy faithfulness and trustworthiness.