

## **Jewish Leadership**

**Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

The sons of Yaakov are a fascinating group of our progenitors who can teach us a great deal about leadership. By the time we get to parshas Vayigash, both Yosef and Yehudah are powerful forces who are ready to butt heads if necessary. They have clearly distinguished themselves from the other brothers. If we examine our parsha carefully I think we can see the seeds of their leadership being sown.

In the midst of the narrative of Yosef being sold down to Mitzrayim we have the parsha of Yehuda and Tamar interjected into the story line. This seem an odd place to have the story, despite the fact that that they happened concurrently. The meforshim struggle with this question and draw numerous parallels between the story of Yosef and Potifar's wife as compared to the story of Yehudah and Tamar.

In addition to the other parallels there seems to be a parallel in the fact that these are two seminal experiences in the lives of these two brothers. How they deal with their respective situations is the barometer of leadership. The Rashbam mentions that in fact Yehudah is leaving the brother at this time specifically because of the sale of Yosef. Yehudah feels that he needs to distance himself from the other brothers for a time. He begins his family but then is faced with the consequences of his actions. When Tamar is being taken out to be killed she courageously keeps silent and sends Yehudah a message that only he will understand. Yehudah has a decision to make; will he risk tremendous embarrassment by making known what has occurred or will he keep silent at Tamar's expense. Yehudah makes the moral choice of character and utters the immortal words, '*tzidkah mimeni*' – 'she is more righteous than me.' Yehudah confesses to his mistake and in doing so makes the choice which allows him to continue on the path towards leadership and kingship amongst the brothers.

Yosef is the next to be removed from the collective of brothers. Here the Hand of Hashem is clearly present in the movement down to Egypt and his experiences there. Yosef rises to a respected position in Potifar's house but is immediately met with a moral test of his own. The wife of his employer tries to seduce him, and she almost succeeds. The Gemara (Sotah 36b) tells us that at the final moments before he succumbs Yosef is able to recall the visage of his father and is able to extricate himself from the situation. Yosef makes the difficult moral decision at his own expense; he will languish in prison for the next three years. He may not know it, but his trip to the jail is truly his stepping stone to his own leadership in Egypt and eventually in the Jewish people as well. The Midrash (Tanchuma Naso 28) relates that Yosef leads because he withstood this test, demonstrating a leader's need to withstand pressure and do what is right.

The Gemara (Sotah 7b) praises Yehudah for having the moral fortitude to admit to his sin. It goes so far as to suggest that this was in fact the impetus for Reuven's admission of inappropriately getting involved in the sleeping arrangements of his father (see T.B. Shabbos 55b).

Reuven separates himself from the group in a way that is not distinguished and while remaining part of the Jewish people, he loses his right to the benefits of bechor (see T.B. Bava Basra 123a). Instead, Yehudah becomes the progenitor for kinship and Yosef gets the double portion normally allotted to the bechor. It is Yosef, not Reuven, who has two tribes amongst Bnei Yisroel. The two who show an ability to do the right thing despite personal loss become the leaders amongst the brothers and implant this quality into their tribes for the future. In this day and age of scandals breaking left and right from those in leadership positions, it would do us immense good to remember these timeless lessons of what true Jewish leadership is all about.