

## A Second Chance to Make a First Impression

Vayigash - Rav Benjy Myers

The family was making its way to a new land. The patriarch's heart was heavy with worry, and yet with all the troubles afflicting him he still had the wherewithal to do the following, And he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to show the way before him to Goshen (Bereishit 46:28).

The Hebrew להורות, "to show", used in this verse is unusual. We would have expected the Torah to use the word להראות from the root ה.א.ה meaning "to see". The word להורות comes from the same root as הורה – "parent", מורה – "teacher" and הריון – "pregnancy". Rashi (1040-1105, France) comments that in this context, להורות means to establish houses of study. Judah was to be the founder of the first Jewish school system in the Diaspora. Why, however, did Jacob specifically send Judah?

Before being sent on this mission, we meet Judah three times in three different roles: brother and trafficker, father and judge, son and savior.

### **Brother and trafficker (Bereishit 37):**

Jacob sent Joseph to inquire as to the wellbeing of his brothers. Upon seeing him come, the brothers discuss what they should do with their hated sibling. Although the original thought was to kill him, Reuben saves Joseph from that fate. Judah, however, is quick to see an opportunity. A caravan of merchants is coming up to where they were, a Judah tells the others: "What do we gain if we kill our brother...let us sell him to the Ishmaelites" (Bereishit 37:25-26). Not only would the brothers be rid of the trouble-maker, they would gain something from it as well.

### **Father and judge (Bereshit 38):**

After seeing his first two sons die while married to Tamar, Judah is reluctant to hand over his third son, Sheilah, for the levirate marriage. Tamar sees this reluctance, and conspires to



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retrieve what is rightfully hers. She tricks Judah into thinking she is a harlot, and when it is discovered that she is pregnant as a result, Judah condemns her to death. Just prior to her execution, Tamar brings out Judah's staff, cloak and signet ring that he gave her as a deposit and says: "I am with child with whoever these belong to" (Bereishit 38:25). Judah realized his mistake and hastily retracted his order of execution.

### **Son and savior (Bereishit 44):**

The brothers are standing accused of being thieves after Joseph's all-powerful goblet goes missing. Their bags are searched, the goblet is found in Benjamin's sack. Joseph informs the brothers that they may leave, but Benjamin is to remain behind as a slave. It is here that Judah makes his courageous stand against the apparent tyrant. Full of anguish and genuine concern for his father's wellbeing, Judah lays one of the greatest historical guilt-trips on Joseph that eventually leads to the emotional reunion of father and son.

Judah learned. He learned from his past mistakes. He learned not to be so quick to judge, and that an accusation, as in the case of Tamar, is not automatically proof of guilt. He learned to take into account the feelings of others and to stand up vigorously for his father's emotional and physical health and safety. He also learned directly from his father. The only reason that Jacob allowed Benjamin to be taken to Egypt was because of Judah. Judah swore to his father: "I will guarantee him; from my hand you can demand him" (Gen. 43:9). With this oath Judah reminds Jacob of a similar comment made by Jacob himself to Laban, after Jacob defends himself against the possibility that any of the wealth and goods he had accrued while staying with Laban where gained dishonorably, or that he was negligent in his care of Laban's flock: "I have not brought home to you anything torn [by other animals]; I would suffer its loss; from my hand you would demand it, what was stolen by day and what was stolen at night" (Gen. 31:39). Immediately upon hearing his own words being used, Jacob rescinds his fierce objection to letting Benjamin go.



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Education is a process. Judah developed from a decision maker who did not take into account other people's feelings and did not examine the evidence closely, to a passionate advocate of exactly that. It is for this reason that Judah is the one specifically sent to establish houses of study, for who better to try and learn from than one who has undergone the learning process himself?



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