

KOL MEVASSER

The Unexpected Leader

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I was once present when the great historian of Islam, Bernard Lewis, was asked to predict the course of events in the Middle East. He replied, "I'm a historian, so I only make predictions about the past. What is more, I am a *retired* historian, so even my past is *passé*." Predictions are impossible in the affairs of living, breathing human beings because we are free and there is no way of knowing in advance how an individual will react to the great challenges of his or her life.

If one thing has seemed clear throughout the last third of Genesis it is that Joseph will emerge as the archetypal leader. He is the central character of the story, and his dreams and the shifting circumstances of his fate, all point in that direction. Least likely as a candidate for leadership is Judah, the man who proposed selling Joseph as a slave (Gen. 37: 26-27), whom we next see separated from his brothers, living among the Canaanites, intermarried with them, losing two of his sons because of sin and having sexual relations with a woman he takes to be a prostitute. The chapter in which this is described begins with the phrase, "At that time Judah *went down* from among his brothers" (Gen. 38: 1). The commentators take this to mean moral decline.

Yet history turned out otherwise. Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, disappeared from the pages of history after the Assyrian conquest in 722 BCE, while it was

Judah's descendants, starting with David, who became kings. The tribe of Judah survived the Babylonian conquest, and it is Judah whose name we bear as a people. We are *Yehudim*, "Jews." This week's parsha explains why.

Already in last week's parsha we began to see Judah's leadership qualities. The family had reached deadlock. They desperately needed food, but they knew that the Egyptian viceroy had insisted that they bring their brother Benjamin with them, and Jacob refused to let this happen. He had lost one child (Joseph) of his beloved wife Rachel and he was not about to let the other, Benjamin, be taken on a hazardous journey. Reuben, in keeping with his unstable character, made an absurd suggestion: "Kill my two sons if I do not bring Benjamin back safely." It was Judah who with quiet authority – "I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him" – persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go with them.

Now in Egypt the nightmare scenario has unfolded. Benjamin has been found with the viceroy's silver cup in his possession. The official delivers his verdict. Benjamin is to be held as a slave. The other brothers can go free. At this point Judah steps forward and makes a speech that changes history. He speaks eloquently about their father's grief at the loss of one of Rachel's sons. If he loses the other he will die of grief. I, says Judah, personally guaranteed his safe return. He concludes:

(Continued on page 3)

KJ Schedule Parashat Vayigash

Erev Shabbat

Friday, December 6th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim	4:10 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting	4:25 pm
Minhah/Arbith	4:25 pm

Shabbat

Parashat Vayigash

Saturday, December 7th

Shaharit/Morning Prayer	8:30 am
Minha, Seudah Shlisheet, Arvit	4:00 pm
Motzei Shabbat / Havdallah	5:29 pm

Weekdays

Sunday, December 8th

Shaharit	7:30 am
KJ Kids Sunday School	10:00 am

Monday, to Friday, December 9th to 13th

Shaharit	6:30 am
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Fast of Asara b'Tevet

Erev Shabbat

Friday, December 13th

Fast Begins	5:30 am
Shaharit/Morning Prayer	6:30 am
Shir Hashirim	4:10 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting	4:26 pm
Minhah/Arbith	4:26 pm
Fast Ends	5:25 pm



David Kelly Youth Choir
 Rabbi Hagay Batzri, Director
 Next Meeting, January 12, 2014

Shabbat Kiddush

is sponsored
in honor of

Leoni's Bar Mitzvah

by

Raquel & Afshin Soleimany

Mazal Tov Leoni

on the occasion of your
Bar Mitzvah

Congratulations

to your parents, Raquel & Afshin Soleimany
to your siblings, Leila, Liam, and Liat
to your grandparents, Frida & Moises Farca
and Suzy & Kumars Soleimany

Seudah Shlisheet

is sponsored
in memory of
Baruch Iraj ben Yaacov, z"l

by

The Partiyeli Family

Iraqi Jewish Archives

JIMENA is collecting a database of the rightful owners of personal documents in the Archives. Owners of documents or heirs to these owners can demand that their original documents, and therefore the Archives, be kept where they are accessible to the Iraqi Jewish community in the diaspora. If you find a document of yours or of your family's or if you recognize a document belonging to someone you know, please contact JEMINA at sarahlevin@jimena.org or call 847-514-7015. Search the National Archives:

www.ija.archives.gov

Save the Date!

SEC Lunch & Learn

with Rabbi Daniel Bouskila
SEC Director

January 25, February 22, & March 29
following Shabbat Services
at Kahal Joseph Congregation

Refuah Shlemah

Vera Levi

Joseph Sharaf / Yossef ben Jamila
Maurice Ovadia / Moshe ben Noosha
Tilda Levy / Tilda bat Miriam
Pnina Herzbrun / Pnina bat Esther
Michael Herzbrun / Michael Baruch ben Sarah
Meir ben Farha
Rahel bat Marsel

Please renew each name listing every two weeks. If you would like to add a member name to the list call 310-474-0559 or e-mail dafna@kahaljoseph.org

In Memoriam

We remember these yahrzeit anniversaries for December 7th to 14th, 2013. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate tzedaka, and attend services the preceding Shabbat.

4 Tevet / Shabbat, December 7th
Seemah Meyer *Simha bat Azizah*

5 Tevet / Sunday, December 8th
Mida Judah *Masooda bat Dina*
Esther Sales *Esther HaMalka bat Rivka*
Elisha Samuel *Elisha ben Sassoon Shmuel*
Hacham Sasson

Mida Judah *Masooda bat Dina*

6 Tevet / Monday, December 9th
Raquel Emquies *Rahel bat Clare Levy*
Salem Kooby

7 Tevet / Tuesday, December 10th
Eliezer David Levy *Eliezer ben David HaLevy*

8 Tevet / Wednesday, December 11th
Abraham Khazzoom
Rabbi Elias Levi *Eliyahu Hayim ben Shlomo HaLevi*
Max Nathan *Mordechai ben Rafael Natan*
David Sassoon Solomon *David Sasson ben*
Shlomo Reuven

9 Tevet / Thursday, December 12th
Eddie Jacob Ezra *Yehezkel ben Yaacov Asoori*

10 Tevet / Friday, December 13th
Shalom Kamara *Shalom ben Menashe*
Hayim Baruch Mingail *Hayim Baruch ben Shalom*

Readings: Shabbat Vayigash

Torah: Genesis/Sefer Beresheet

Hertz edition pages 169 to 177

Haftara Melachim /Kings, pages 178 to 179

Shabbat Shalom

Wishing you a peaceful Shabbat

(Continued from page 1)

“Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father.” (Gen. 44: 33-34)

No sooner has he said these words than Joseph, overcome with emotion, reveals his identity and the whole elaborate drama reaches closure. What is happening here and how does it have a bearing on leadership?

The sages (Berakhot 34b) articulated a principle: “Where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.” The Talmud brings a proof-text from Isaiah: “Peace, peace, to those far and near” (Is. 57: 19) placing the far (the penitent sinner) before the near (the perfectly righteous). However, almost certainly the real source is here in the story of Joseph and Judah. Joseph is known to tradition as *ha-tzaddik*, the righteous.¹ Judah, as we will see, is a penitent. Joseph became “second to the king.” Judah, however, became the ancestor of kings. Hence, where penitents stand even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.

Judah is the first person in the Torah to achieve perfect repentance (*teshuvah gemurah*), defined by the sages as one who finds himself in a situation to repeat an earlier sin but who does not do so because he is now a changed person.² Many years before Judah was responsible for Joseph being sold as a slave:

Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not

lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. (Gen. 37: 26-27)

Now, faced with the prospect of leaving Benjamin as a slave, he says, “Let me stay as a slave and let my brother go free.” That is perfect repentance, and it is what allows Joseph to reveal his identity and forgive his brothers.

The Torah had already hinted at the change in Judah’s character. Having accused his daughter-in-law Tamar of becoming pregnant by a forbidden sexual relationship, he is confronted by her with evidence that he himself is the father of the child and immediately admits: “She is more righteous than I” (Gen. 38: 26). This is the first time in the Torah we see a character admit that he is wrong. If Judah was the first penitent, it was Tamar – mother of Perez from whom King David was descended – who was ultimately responsible.

Perhaps Judah’s future was already implicit in his name, for though the verb *le-hodot* from which it is derived means “to thank” (Leah called her fourth son Judah saying ““This time I will thank the LORD,” Gen. 29: 35), it is also related to the verb *le-hitvadot*, which means “to admit, to confess,” and confession is, according to Maimonides, the core of the command to repent.

Leaders make mistakes. That is an occupational hazard of the role. Managers follow the rules, but leaders find themselves in situations for which there are no rules. Do you declare a war in which people will die, or to you refrain from doing so at the risk of letting your enemy grow stronger with the result that more will die later? That was the dilemma faced by Cham-

berlain in 1939, and it was only some time later that it became clear that he was wrong and Churchill right.

But leaders are also human and they make mistakes that have nothing to do with leadership and everything to do with human weakness and temptation. The sexual conduct of John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton was less than perfect. Does this affect our judgment of them as leaders or not? Judaism suggests it should. The prophet Nathan was unsparing of King David when he sinned with another man’s wife.

What matters, suggests the Torah, is that you repent – you recognise and admit your wrong, and you change as a result. As Rav Soloveitchik pointed out, both Saul and David, Israel’s first two kings, sinned. Both were reprimanded by a prophet. Both said *chatati*, “I have sinned.” But their fates were radically different. Saul lost his throne, David did not. The reason, said the Rav, was that David confessed immediately. Saul prevaricated and made excuses before admitting his sin.

The stories of Judah and of his descendant David tell us that what mark a leader is not necessarily perfect righteousness. It is the ability to admit mistakes, to learn from them and grow from them. The Judah we see at the beginning of the story is not the man we see at the end, just as the Moses we see at the burning bush – stammering, hesitant – is not the mighty hero we see at the end, “his sight undimmed, his natural energy unabated.”

A leader is one who, though he may stumble and fall, arises more honest, humble and courageous than he was before.

Shabbat Shalom

KJ Kids Sunday School

Dafna Ezran-Young, Educational Director

Our philosophy at the Norma and Sam Dabby Jewish Education Center is to make Talmud Torah enjoyable and educational, maximizing learning through diverse, fun activities and a well-structured curricular program interspersed with holiday celebrations. We use games, crafts, art, music, drama, hands on demonstrations, prize raffles and more to encourage a positive attitude in our kids towards Judaism and Hebrew studies.

The activities and projects encourage foundational life skills and positive, Jewish character traits: helping one another, sharing knowledge & resources (generosity), working together (cooperation), being patient, teaching, being willing to learn and ask questions, tolerating differences in attitude and work styles, accepting momentary failure and trying again, etc. These skills set the tone for positive student interactions and support a healthy classroom environment.

Ultimately, we hope that along with knowledge of Hebrew, Jewish texts, prayers, and history our students take the lessons and values embodied in our holy literature, religion and culture out into the world and into their lives. If you would like to learn more about our program, I invite you to contact me at 310,502.8548 or at dafna@kahaljoseph.org.



At KJ Kids Sunday School we learn midot/ethical behavior, Hebrew, Jewish history, prayers, Torah, Shabbat & holiday customs, and we also enjoy fun activities. Above are Hanukkah good times at the Norma & Sam Dabby Talmud Torah, including our craft day at school and our booth at the Sisterhood's Children's Hanukkah Party.