



## Parashat Vayigash

The last third of Sefer Bereshit is practically dominated by the unbroken narrative of Joseph and his brothers, clearly depicting Joseph as the hero. Joseph had always stood out from the rest of his brothers. He is seen as a child, most beloved by his father, then as an adolescent dreamer, despised by his brothers, sold as a slave, then as a prisoner, and eventually becoming the second most powerful figure of what is known to be the greatest empire of the world at the time. The entire narrative revolves around Joseph and his impact upon others.

It almost seems as if Joseph will follow in the footsteps of Isaac and Jacob as the most prominent of the brothers to pass on the Jewish legacy and the word of Hashem. But history doesn't seem to turn out that way. After all, it was not Joseph but Judah who presented his identity onto the nation of Israel, Judah whom the line of kingship derives from, the greatest being David Hamelech, and eventually mashiach. So why Judah and not Joseph? What made Judah so special that it led us to be presented as Yehudim today?

At the beginning of the Joseph story, we find that it was Judah's idea to sell Joseph as a slave:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל-אֶחָיו מִה-בְּצַע כִּי נִהְרַג אֶת-אָחִינוּ וְכִסִּינוּ אֶת-דָּמּוֹ: לָכֵן וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ לַיִּשְׁמָעֵאלִים וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-תְּהֵי-בָּו כִּי-אָחִינוּ בְּשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶחָיו: (בראשית לז:כז-כח)

"Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh.' His brothers agreed." (Bereshit 37:26-27)

Rashi and the Ibn Ezra explain that Judah decided to sell Joseph in order to make a profit, having no regard or care for actually saving Joseph from the murder they would almost commit. He calls Joseph "his own flesh and blood," whilst proceeding to sell him to a life of slavery. At this point, it seems as if Judah would be the last person that would be destined for greatness.

However, it seems as if Judah, more than anyone else in the Torah, grows. The start of this week's parasha, Parashat Vayigash, is the turning point in Judah's change in character. Judah was now prepared to suffer the fate that he had previously subjected Joseph to, a life of slavery, in place of Benjamin:

וְעַתָּה יֵשְׁבֵנָּא עִבְדְךָ תַּחַת הַנְּעָר עִבְדֵי לַאֲדֹנָי וְהַנְּעָר יָעַל עִם-אֶחָיו: (בראשית מד:לג)

“Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers.” (Bereshit 44:33)

This is the point that leads Joseph to reveal his identity. Here, Joseph put Judah to the test, to see if he had changed, and Judah passed. Judah is the first *baal teshuva* in the Torah. He was able to recognize his previous mistakes, feel remorse for his actions, and proceed to change his ways. But what exactly led Judah to change in his ways and prompt him to stand up for Binyamin? It was his interaction with Tamar<sup>1</sup>.

As Judah’s daughter-in-law, Judah believes Tamar has killed two of his sons, and subjugates her so that she is unable to remarry. However, she ultimately tricks Judah into impregnating her and therefore secures her place in the family. By the end, Judah acknowledges his mistakes in the matter, as stated, “צְדָקָה מְנִי” — “she is more in the right than I.”

This, I believe, is why we as a nation today carry the name of Judah as our own. Joseph is consistently known as *hatzaddik*, where throughout his entire life was seen to be and to do good, and it is our job to strive to be as good as Joseph was. But Joseph only became “mishneh le-melech,” second to the king, while Judah became the father of Israel’s king. Judah was one who was capable of growth and change, and it is our duty, as Yehudim, to continue to strive for that change.

Growing up in the Yeshivah of Flatbush community has helped Sarah Greenberg foster a deep passion for learning and leadership, as well as instilled within her strong family and religious values that she will uphold for a lifetime. Sarah played on the girls’ varsity basketball team and served on Flatbush High School’s Senior Council, where she organized the seniors’ activities throughout the past year. She devoted hours of her time throughout the year to helping others, including organizing programs such as the biannual blood drive and Yachad programs for the whole school. Her love for learning and desire to grow in her Judaic knowledge stemmed from her favorite class– Inquiry Bet Midrash. Different from the regular classroom environment, this class enabled her to question the basis of the texts, probing the things that were always accepted as true and analyzing them to eventually come up with her own conclusions. Sarah hopes to continue to learn and to strengthen her religious values at Midreshet Moriah next year and through the Allegra Franco program.

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<sup>1</sup> בראשית פרק לח