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When is a Compromise Compromised?

Yoseph's brothers deliberately left him behind when they went to pasture their father's flock. Now, on seeing Yoseph, the brothers plotted to kill him. Perhaps, following Sferno, their younger brother, the tattler, was coming to report evil tidings about them to their father, Ya'akov. It was time for their hated brother to disappear from the scene.

Reuven interceded first by persuading his brothers to throw Yoseph into a pit so that they would not be guilty of murdering their brother directly. Perhaps, as the first-born, he would take responsibility and rescue his younger brother from the pit at a later stage.

But now, as the deed was about to be done, Yehuda steps in. Yehuda, in comparison with his brothers, was less hot-headed. As Tamar Weismann indicates in her description of Yehuda, the latent potential embodied in his name (thanksgiving, admittance, obligation) made him a natural leader over his brothers.

Yehuda declares: "What do we gain by killing our brother...Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites." And the brothers agree. And the rest is history. But history is not just a narrative; history is a lesson in morality. The Torah is not descriptive; it is prescriptive.

Harav Neventzal asks a sanguine question concerning Yehudah. All the parties involved in Yoseph's demise would later suffer, including Yaakov and his ailing father Yitzchak: They would suffer from anguish or guilt. The brothers and their

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father will go into exile; moreover, Yaakov, according to the sources, lost his powers of *Ruach Hakodesh*. But Yehuda will lose his wife and two sons? How so?

Yehudah should have come out of this sad event, the hero! For, after all, he kept Yoseph alive. But no! He is punished severely. And more so, following the Midrash, after seeing their father's grief, his brothers berate him saying: "Had you told us to restore Yoseph to our father, we would have done so – we follow your lead."

So, what happened? One explanation is that Yehuda wanted to profit from the sale of Yoseph. Although his motive for saving his younger brother was admirable, he had another agenda. Be that as it may, why was Yehuda's punishment so much greater than the others? After all, our sources tell us, if not for Reuven, Shimon and Levi would have killed their brother with their bare hands.

Rav Neventzal explains that Yehuda, the natural leader, made a compromise. He could have told his brothers, even urged them, to spare Yoseph. Yoseph had pleaded with them: he was not guilty of any wrongdoing. But no, Yehuda took the middle road on his own back; he did not make a compromise – a *Pesharah* – as would be required in a Beit Din. He did not ask both sides to acquiesce to the agreement; he only gained the brothers' consent, but not that of Yoseph.

In their anger, Shimon and Levi did what they thought was right and would have acted upon it. Yehuda, who presumably

upheld Yoseph's innocence, did not act upon his belief. He let his younger brother fade into oblivion rather than stand up for him and convince his brothers of his righteousness.

Yehuda (at this stage of his life) failed as a leader; he also failed to live by his principles. He started a Mitzva but ultimately betrayed Yoseph. Later in life, Yehuda would make amends and display leadership in all its glory. But for now, let us take note; let us be aware of what we stand for and live up to the values we hold so dear. ■

Shabbat Shalom!

Menachem Pessell

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