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Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

Collaboration and Conflict: David and Yoav

One of the personalities we have seen evolve both as an individual and in his relationship to David HaMelech is that of Yoav ben Zruyah, David's nephew and the general of his army. The Talmud teaches that if not for the merit of David's Torah learning, Yoav would not have been successful in battle, and if not for Yoav's military prowess, David would not have been free to engage in the study of Torah.¹ The symbiotic relationship between these two leaders was a key factor in the success of David's kingdom.

The relationship between David and Yoav was far more nuanced than this text may lead us to believe. Beyond the inherent tension of navigating a personal connection and a sense of national duty, there lay a critical difference in their two personalities that led to conflict.

As the general of David's army, Yoav displayed leadership, initiative and strength. His skill as a military tactician is perhaps most clearly evidenced by his capture of Yerushalayim from the heretofore undefeated Yevusim. Yoav's loyalty to David is demonstrated in two instances in which he followed David's direct orders despite his own misgivings - the death of Uriah HaChiti and the carrying out of the census. Further

proof of Yoav's concern for David is his role in bringing Avshalom back to Yerushalayim when he sensed David's prolonged anguish over his absence. Nevertheless, we see the relationship between the two begin to fray in the early days of David's kingship, when Yoav killed Avner ben Ner, the general of Shaul who had crowned Ish Boshet as a rival king to David. After a rift with Ish Boshet, Avner had approached David and proposed an alliance. When Yoav became aware of the impending deal between David and Avner, he enacted a subterfuge and killed an unsuspecting Avner. Although Yoav's overt reason for killing Avner was that he suspected him of being a spy, the Navi reveals to us that his underlying motive was that Avner had killed Yoav's brother, Asahel. David unequivocally criticized Yoav's behavior and disassociated himself from Yoav in this endeavor, but did not dismiss him as general of the army.

The breach between David and Yoav widened at the conclusion of Avshalom's rebellion. Despite David's impassioned plea that his army deal gently with Avshalom, and the refusal of all David's supporters to violate David's request, Yoav killed Avshalom, placing the dignity and security of the kingdom above any personal feelings for his cousin or his

1. Sanhedrin 49a, Rashi and Maharsha ad loc.

uncle. The relationship between David and Yoav suffered a further blow when Yoav killed Amasa, the former general of Avshalom's army whom David had appointed as chief of his own army, replacing Yoav, after Avshalom's defeat. This killing chillingly echoes that of Avner ben Ner, unfolding in a similar subterfuge and couched as a legitimate execution.

The final blow to the relationship between David and Yoav was sustained when in the last days of David's kingdom, Yoav allied himself with Adoniyahu, who staged a rebellion against his father and sought to prevent the dynasty from being handed down to Shlomo. Following the suppression of this final rebellion and the coronation of Shlomo, David in his last instructions to Shlomo commanded him to deal wisely with Yoav, and not allow him to live out his life and die peacefully, as he is guilty of unjustly killing two righteous men, Avner and Amasa. David's symbiotic relationship with Yoav as described above precluded him from punishing Yoav directly, but he instructed Shlomo not to tolerate Yoav's duplicity.

In the final analysis, Yoav is remembered both for his righteousness and his perfidy. The text records that Yoav was deserving of capital punishment for having taken the lives of Avner and Amasa, generals of the army of Israel, for which crime there could be no peace in the kingdom of Israel until justice was served. Yoav's downfall lay in allowing his militancy to extend beyond the limits of his professional life and became personal. In stark contrast, David was successfully able to harmonize between his military might and his deep spiritual sensitivity.

The complex character of Yoav and his nuanced relationship with David foreshadow a long and ongoing history of uncomfortable

alliances between leaders of Israel who balance their personal and national identities and ideologies. We pray that this balance be carefully and honestly calibrated as a preface to the establishment of a peaceful kingdom and the building of the Beit HaMikdash. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

In the **OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi series**, which just began its fourth cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the OU Women's Initiative to register for additional content.

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