



THE INSPIRATION OF LEADERSHIP

ONE OF THE MOST WIDELY KNOWN JEWISH SONGS IS THE SIMPLE CHILDREN’S chant “David, Melech Yisrael”, declaring that “David, King of Israel lives and is alive”¹. What does this ancient Jewish concept of Kingship actually mean? Does it have any relevance to our modern, democratic and pluralistic way of seeing the world?

Our Sedra² begins with a dramatic moment in which Judah steps forward to protect his half-brother Benjamin. Joseph, disguised as the Egyptian Viceroy, has declared that Benjamin must stay with him as a captive. Judah responds that he promised his father that he will be a pledge for Benjamin and is responsible for him. So instead of taking Benjamin as a captive, he, Judah should remain behind in Egypt while the other brothers, including Benjamin, return to their father Jacob.

The idea that each Jew is a pledge for every other Jew is a central Jewish teaching³. In spiritual terms, we cannot separate from each other. If one person is doing wrong, this concerns everyone else. We are pledges for each other – *arevim* – and we are even intermingled with each other – *me-uravim*⁴.

The Jewish people can be seen as the different limbs of a single body. However, there are three ways this might be understood.

From the point of view of any one limb, meaning any one person,

he or she is first and foremost an individual, but can see that they are adding something to the community and ultimately to the people as a whole. For example, if you go to the synagogue on Shabbat, you are helping create a positive atmosphere for the “community”.

A second way of seeing things is that each of us, as an individual, both benefits from the input of everyone else and also in some sense contributes to the well-being of everyone else. The head, for example, needs the feet to carry it to where it can see and speak. This is a slightly more spiritual step. You feel that you gain from association with others in the community, beyond your particular qualities as an individual.

A third way of seeing oneself is as totally identified with every other limb, without distinction. The entire body is seen as one, and the individual limb feels totally identified with that body, including all the other individual parts. Your over-riding concern is not for your own personal safety or wellbeing, but for that of the community and the people as a whole.

This third perspective is that of genuine leadership. There is a spiritual inner “spark” at the heart of every individual Jew. For the leader or King, that spark is paramount. It is through the inner focus on the radiance of that spark that the Jewish King feels his own being to be none other than the being of his people. Through this he helps the entire people to feel that they are *one*.

This is the quality shown by Judah in the Sedra, who is determined to give himself up for the benefit of Benjamin, the other brothers and his father. It is the mark of Kingship, and hence later (in next week’s Sedra) his father Jacob blesses him with the words “the sceptre shall not depart from Judah”⁵. Thus King David, a line of kings and leaders after him, and eventually the Messiah, are all descended from Judah.

Inspired by the leadership of Judah and David, each individual is able to feel at least a hint of a sense of identity and responsibility for every other Jew and for the entire Jewish people. Within us, in some sense, King David lives and is alive...⁶

1. Rosh Hashana 25a. 2. Genesis 44:18-47:27. 3. Talmud Shavuot 39a, Sanhedrin 27b. 4. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s *Likkutei Torah, Beha’alotcha*, 33c. 5. Genesis 49:10. 6. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.30, p.215-220.

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SEDRA VAYIGASH

JUST LIKE JOSEPH

Miriam was feeling very nervous. She knew that in two days she was going to have a big test, covering everything they were supposed to have revised during the winter vacation. For some reason, she could not stop worrying about it.

She was so nervous that she didn't even realise that she was sitting in a lesson where the teacher was talking about what was going to be on the test. If she would actually listen to what he was saying she might hear about at least *some* of the material. But she was too worried to notice.

"...And this teaches us a very important lesson..." her teacher, Mr Cohen, was saying. "...The fact that Joseph sent old wine..." Little snippets of the lesson were floating through her head but her mind wasn't working.

On the way home from school she decided to tell her best friend about her nervousness and see if maybe she could calm her down.

"Well the funny thing is" her friend Roberta said, "in the lesson today Mr Cohen was just talking about something very like this. It was part of his revision lesson for the test".

"It was a *revision* lesson?" asked Miriam. "I didn't even realise! Oh no! I heard little bits but I couldn't follow what he was saying. I was so nervous and worried I couldn't think".

“I’ll tell you one of the things, anyway” said Roberta. “You know that over the holidays we had to learn this week’s Torah portion with different commentaries. So he told us that it talks about how Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers and sent with them a present of a flask of old wine to his father Jacob.”

“I remember Mr Cohen saying something about that,” said Miriam. “He said this teaches us something, but I can’t remember what. I’ll do terribly in that horrible test!”

“Wait a minute,” said Roberta, patiently. “It teaches us to have a positive attitude, and always to expect the best, and never to give up hope!”

“How so?” asked Miriam.

“Because all the time Joseph was in Egypt, as a slave and as a prisoner and then as Viceroy, he never drank wine. He felt he would only drink wine when he rejoined his family. In last week’s Sedra he does in fact drink wine with his brothers, and it is the first time he did so for many years. So we can ask, how is it that he had *old* wine stored away?”

“You know, what,” exclaimed Miriam, “I can suddenly remember. We first learnt it weeks ago in class. Joseph never gave up hope that he would be reunited with his family, so he had some old, fine wine stored away. He felt confident that he would eventually drink it with his brothers and even with his father. In the same way, we should always have a positive and optimistic attitude!”

“Very good!” said Roberta. “I can see you’re going to do very well in the test after all. Keep up your positive attitude, and you’ll remember everything we learnt!”

“Well,” said Miriam, “a bit of revision tonight will also help. But I’ll certainly try to be positive about it...”

“...Just like Joseph!” the two girls said, laughing together.

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