

"And it came to pass at that time and Yehudah went down from his brothers." (38:1)

Rashi comments: This is to teach us that his brothers lowered him from his exalted rank, when they saw their father's grief. They said "You said to sell him. Had you said to return him, we would have listened to you."

Sforno comments in even stronger terms by claiming that the tragic loss of Yehuda's two sons was a punishment for not insisting that Yosef be saved. The accusation being leveled at Yehudah and the resulting punishments seem overly severe. Surely had Yehudah felt that his brothers would accept his words, he would have asserted himself and demanded that Yosef be returned home. Leadership requires enormous responsibility. A leader must express his feelings whether they are popular or not, not simply to support what is popular, but to make what is unpopular popular. One should not concern himself with the success or failure of his statements, but rather state that which is true and just.