

He sent Yehudah ahead of him... to prepare ahead of him in Goshen. (46:28)

Yaakov *Avinu* sent Yehudah *l'horos lefanav Goshnah*, which *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 95:3) interpret to be Yehudah's mission to set the foundation for a *makom Torah*, a *yeshivah* where everyone could study. From the very beginning, our Patriarch set forth his priorities for his children to know and incorporate into their lives. Torah is our number one priority. While not every Jewish community has a *yeshivah gedolah*, they all have a *shul* set aside for prayer and study. Without Torah, we are unable to serve Hashem and live properly as observant Jews. Judaism is a religion – not a culture – a religion whose blueprint for life is the Torah. Before the first Jewish family set foot on Egyptian soil, a house of Torah study had to be established.

The question that perplexes the commentators is why Yaakov sent Yehudah on that mission, rather than Yissachar, the son who symbolizes Torah study at its apex. Should Yissachar not have been first choice for *Rosh Yeshivah*? Each one explains in his own inimitable way. Perhaps we may suggest that the criteria for *Rosh Yeshivah* must go beyond erudition. A *Rosh Yeshivah* is not just a Torah mentor, but he is also a guide for life. As such, he must understand what a potential student is going through. Students hail from various backgrounds, family situations, both economic and physical/religious. Some come from simple homes, while others are scions of illustrious lineage. Some students are passionate about learning, while others may be bogged down by their backgrounds and the challenges that result from them. In order to understand fully the adversities which a student may confront – or may have confronted, it is almost necessary to himself having endured challenge. No one is perfect, as no one has a completely perfect life. We all have challenges and each one of us deals with it on his/her level. A Torah mentor/leader must understand this – and the best way to understand is that the student/parents who sit before you are going through a lot – as you once did. This will heighten the level of sensitivity on the part of the leader.

Yehudah lost his first wife, buried two sons, was involved in the selling of Yosef, although he attempted to halt it, but sadly did not follow through. He then experienced the incident with Tamar, during which he demonstrated superhuman character and confessed to his guilt – and let the chips fall where they may. He faced the music and emerged a leader. He would be the perfect *Rosh Yeshivah* to found the first *yeshivah* (Shem and Ever was different). Yehudah's leadership presents the paradigm for all ensuing leaders to emulate.

In support of this exposition, I cite *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, who observes that the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* 5:4 teaches, *B'asarah nisyonos nishnasah Avraham Avinu*, "Our Patriarch Avraham endured (successfully) ten trials. In the previous *Mishnah* we learn, *Asarah doros mi'Noach ad Avraham*; "Ten generations elapsed between Noach and Avraham." Noticeably, in the *Mishnah*, Avraham is not referred to as *Avinu*. *Rav Chaim* explains that Avraham earned the title *Avinu* only after he passed the ten *nisyonos*. Adversity elevates and concretizes one's worthiness.

Yehudah's sensitivity to what Tamar had endured and why she acted out of character showed his true colors. Yes, he was the family "monarch," the lion who was the leader of the *Shevatim*, but he was also a human being, and, as such, he needed to relate and understand the mindset of those with whom he came in contact. He understood what they were dealing with, because he, too, had much on his plate.

Two terms are often misleading: dignity and ego. They are not interchangeable. One who assuages his overactive and demanding ego has no dignity. These are two aspects of human behavior and self-perception. Dignity refers to the quality of being worthy of respect and honor, often associated with maintaining one's principles, self-respect and integrity in various situations. Ego, on the other hand, is the sense of self-importance (often delusional) and the need to validate one's identity through external recognition. One who has ego issues will invariably do anything to highlight his self-importance. A dignified person cares more about the truth than impressing and receiving accolades from others. Yehudah maintained his dignity by relinquishing his ego.

A *Rosh Yeshivah* (or any leader, for that matter) must maintain his dignity at all times. Relinquishing ego in order to understand and reach out to someone who requires an extra dose of understanding or compassion, however, only enhances one's *shtoltz*, dignity. In "There's more to the Story," Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates an inspiring story concerning *Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl*, *Rosh Yeshivas* Be'er Yaakov, a brilliant *gaon* whose *shiurim*, lectures, are a staple in many *yeshivos*. He exemplified refinement, humility and unstinting, unwavering commitment to Torah principles. At one point, the *yeshivah* was in dire need of an infusion of funds, a situation which compelled him to fundraise. The address for the greatest philanthropist at the time was England, home to Sir Isaac Wolfson. Getting an appointment with him was not simple. When a person reaches the capstone of financial success, everyone wants a piece of the action. The *Rosh Yeshivah* walked into a *shul* and immediately sat in the back. Being that he was a well-known *gadol*, it came as no surprise that someone recognized him. It just so happened that this was Sir Isaac's *shul* of choice, which, as usual, he had attended that day. When he was informed that one of the *gedolei Rosh Yeshivah* was also in attendance, he went over (after *davening*) to greet him. *Rav* Moshe Shmuel was reciting *Aleinu*, which is the closing prayer of the three daily *tefillos*. Its distinction cannot be overstated. Authored by Yehoshua, after which Yericho's walls came tumbling down, it is the premier *tefillah* which, unfortunately, due to its placement at the end of *davening*, is not accorded its proper regard. The *Rosh Yeshivah* recited every word slowly, clearly, meticulously. Meanwhile, Sir Isaac stood there waiting respectfully. *Rav* Moshe Shmuel's assistant, who was in charge of the *yeshivah's* finance, was climbing the walls. This is the reason for which they came to England. This is the man who they were vying to meet – and the *Rosh Yeshivah* was ignoring him.

Finally, he finished *Aleinu*, and Sir Isaac approached reverently. He said, "*Rebbe*, I am used to people fawning all over me. You are the first person who stood his ground and let me wait while you finished *Aleinu*. I will give you a generous donation, and I promise that you will no longer have to come to England to see me. I will support your *yeshivah's* needs to the fullest extent. The *Rosh*

Yeshivah refused to compromise on his *avodas hakodesh*. This represents dignity in *mitzvah* observance. Hashem supersedes everything.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* presented another side of his persona, however, in which we see that he did, in fact, act differently. (I do not use the word “compromise,” but rather, “embellish.”) One of the students in the *yeshivah* was struggling with emotional issues. He was always on the lookout for opportunities to make him feel good and lift his spirits. Someone suggested to *Rav Moshe Shmuel* that this student would be heartened if he could do something for the *Rosh Yeshivah* – such as bringing him his coat. Clearly, one who serves a *Rosh Yeshivah* must possess much more than a modicum of *seichel*, common sense – an area in which this student was sorely deficient. Obviously, his emotional challenges were taken into consideration. Thus, if he thought the time had come for the *Rosh Yeshivah* to put on his coat, it made no difference if he was in middle of *davening*. One morning, as the *Rosh Yeshivah* was reciting *Aleinu*, this student came over with his coat. Although he had not yet concluded the prayer, he smiled and said, “Thank you,” and put on his coat. He understood; he cared; he was sensitive, because he had no ego. He recited *Aleinu* again – wearing his coat.