

The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah, nor a scholar from among his descendants until Shiloh arrives. (49:10)

Chazal teach that Yaakov *Avinu* was about to reveal the *keitz*, End of Days, the coming of *Melech Ha'Moshiach*, and an end to all of our *tzaros*, troubles. When he saw the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, depart from him, he understood that now was not the time for such a revelation. While he did not reveal the “when,” he did allude to the “who” as a descendant of the *shevet*, tribe, of Yehudah. Dovid *HaMelech*, a direct descendant of Yehudah, would be the progenitor from whom Moshiach would descend. Indeed, every leader of the monarch level was a descendant of David *HaMelech*.

Furthermore, *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 98:6) comment concerning the *pasuk*, *Yehudah, atah yoduchaachecha*; “Yehudah, you, your brothers shall acknowledge” (*ibid* 49:8). All the brothers/the tribes and their descendants, the Jewish People, will be called by Yehudah’s name. One does not say, ‘I am a Reuveni, or a Shmoni’; rather he says, ‘I am a Yehudi.’” Yehudah was singled out, not only as the monarch/leader of the brothers, the one from whom *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* will descend, but also as the one whose name symbolizes the Jewish People. We are *Yehudim*! The obvious question is why. The commentators offer a number of homiletic reasons, but we will focus on a practical reason.

Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger observes that Yehudah is the focus of a number of *halachic* queries which do not appear to come into play concerning the other brothers. For example: *Daas Zekeinim M'Baalei Tosfos* teach that, when Yehudah gave Tamar the *chosemes*, signet ring, it was for the purpose of *Kiddushin*, marriage. They ask concerning the efficacy of the *Kiddushin*, since there were no *eidim*, witnesses, to attest and to verify the *Kiddushin*. They explain that someone of Yehudah’s stature probably traveled with two people – a friend and a scholar. Another question which requires clarification is the purpose of the ring, which was to be collateral. They explain that he gave her the ring wholeheartedly, but stipulated that, when he brought the goat that he promised, he expected her to return the ring. The *sefer*, *Mekorei HaMinhagim* (which traces the sources and origins of various customs), asserts that the three items which Yehudah gave Tamar represent the first *chupah*: *chosamcha*, your signet ring alludes to the ring the *chosson* gives the *kallah*; *pesilcha*, your wrap suggests the actual *chupah* canopy, which covers the *chosson* and *kallah* like a garment; and *matcha*, your staff, infers the pillars of the *chupah*. Apparently, *Chazal* have concerns regarding Yehudah’s actions, which beg the question: What about the brothers? Yosef married Osnas in Egypt. He was the only Jew in the country. Where could he have obtained witnesses?

Last, when Yehudah was born, Leah declared, *Ha'pa'am odeh es Hashem*; “Now, I will thank Hashem.” (The name Yehudah is derived from *odeh*, to give thanks.) Why is it that only regarding Yehudah did she offer her gratitude to Hashem? What about her five other sons? The *Zohar Hakodesh* explains the uniqueness of Yehudah’s name (*Lech Lecha* 89:2). The five letters – *yud*,

kay, vov, kay are Hasahem's Name, and the letter *daled* -- stands for David *HaMelech* who descended from Yehudah. As such, the Jewish nation was imbued with Hashem's Name and the name of David from whom *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* will emerge from its very nascency. This is why Yaakov prophesied that *Shevet Yehudah*, through David *HaMelech*, will be our king in the End of Days. With this, he gave hope to every Jew who has ever lived. He knows the name *Yehudi* is a derivative of Yehudah whose monarchy and leadership is fully imbued by Hashem.

Thus, we do not call ourselves Reuvenim/Shimonim, because their names do not capture the essence of a Jew – a *Yehudi* – who represents Hashem. Thus, Leah said, *Odeh l'Hashem* when she gave birth to Yehudah. Giving birth to him was different than giving birth to his brothers. He represented our nation's past and future. [It is unfortunate that some have exchanged *Yehudi* for *Israel/Yisrael*, and *Shabbos Kodesh* has become the end of the week. At one time, these terms represented our singularity and indicated our unique connection with Hashem.]

During the days of *Purim*, the Jewish People came to be known as *Yehudim*. Indeed, *Megillas Esther* refers to Mordechai, who actually descended from the tribe of Binyamin, as *Ish Yehudi*. *Chazal* teach that anyone who rejects idolatry is given the name *Yehudi*. To be a *Yehudi* is to live with a fierce sense of pride, to the point that he stands alone in proclamation, "I am a Jew! I am different! I will not bow."

The story is told of a Jew in the concentration camp who was caught secretly practicing *mitzvos*. He was threatened with execution unless he publicly renounced Judaism. He stood resolute, defiant and firm declaring, *Ich bin a Yehudi*; "I am a Jew (and proud of it)." He was calm and relaxed as if the result of his declaration did not bother him. To be a *Yehudi* is to be fiercely proud of one's heritage and connection with Hashem. Throughout our history, *Yehudim* have stood unflinching, prepared to give up their lives for their beliefs.

As I have often mentioned, to live as a *Yehudi* is to sanctify Hashem's Name in our daily life and endeavor. Mordechai *HaTzadik* was called *ish Yehudi* (despite being from the tribe of Binyamin) because, in his every endeavor, one saw his Jewishness. Sadly, we have co-religionists who make every attempt to conceal their Jewishness or to redefine what the term means. We are, *Baruch Hashem*, to be counted among those who carry this banner with pride and honor.