

Yehudah said to his brothers, “What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?” (37:26)

Yehudah's idea for preventing Yosef's death comes across as preposterous. Once they had convened a *bais din*, court of law, and adjudicated Yosef's guilt, they had no more patience for counterclaims, especially one that asserted that no monetary gain would be achieved. Is this a reason to spare someone's life? Were they killing him for money – or because he was a *rodef*, pursuer, who was endangering the spiritual lives of each of them? *Horav Yerachmiel Chasid, Shlita*, quotes an explanation from **Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl**, that illuminates this query, teaching us a significant principle in *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty.

In his commentary to the words *v'chisinu es damo*, “And cover up his blood,” *Rashi* writes, *V'naalim es misaso*, “And conceal his death,” This teaches that Yehudah was addressing the surreptitious nature of eliminating Yosef. Yehudah was the *melech*, king, over the brothers. He symbolizes the attribute of *malchus*, monarchy. The *middah*, attribute, of *malchus* is the same as the *middah* of *achrayos*, responsibility. As the reigning leader of a country, a king must take responsibility for his subjects. He cannot hide behind the crown. The king must be definitive in his decisions, with the welfare of his nation remaining foremost on his mind.

An aspect of taking responsibility is owning up to one's actions and standing behind one's decisions. A king does not make covert decisions. He stands in front of his resolution. A king who condemns a subject does not hide and blame it on someone else.

This is what Yehudah was telling his brothers: “We made a decision. We must be proud of our decision, because we think it is the right thing to do. If we are going to conceal his death, this indicates that we are ashamed, that we do not really support our decision to kill Yosef.” One may not undertake an action if he is unprepared to stand behind it. According to *halachah*, Yosef was a *rodef*, but if the brothers felt that his execution as a *rodef* must be concealed, then the execution must be called off. It was not right.

Klal Yisrael are viewed as *bnei melachim*, sons of kings. We must take responsibility for our actions. We must also feel a sense of *achrayos* for our people, especially for those who are unable to fend for themselves. We are called *Yehudim* after Yehudah for a number of reasons. Included among them is the fact that when Yosef demanded Binyamin as a prisoner, it was Yehudah who stood up to him: *Ki avdecha arav es ha'naar me'im avi*; “For your servant took responsibility for the youth from my father” (*Bereishis* 44:32). Yehudah had taken responsibility. Therefore, he was the one who stood up to the Egyptian viceroy and demanded Binyamin's immediate release. To be a *Yehudi* means that one maintains a sense of responsibility. He stands up for what he believes and supports those who need his loyalty and encouragement – even if they are not among the community's popular elite.

The concept goes even deeper than this. The *Ponevezher Rav*, **Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl**, once asked *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita*, “Tell me, which *Shevet*, Tribe, devoted itself most to Torah?” “What is the question?” *Rav Galinsky* countered. “It is either *Shevet Levi* or *Shevet Yissachar*. These tribes produced the nation’s preeminent scholars.” “If so,” asked the *Rav*, “why did Yaakov *Avinu* send Yehudah to establish the first *yeshivah* in Egypt? Why not Levi or Yissachar?” “The truth of the matter is,” acknowledged *Rav Galinsky*, “that when it came to Torah dialectic, *lomdus*, an analytical study, Yehudah was called the *mechokek*, prince.” The *Rav* then quoted the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:3, which clearly states that Yaakov had designated Levi to be the *Rosh Yeshivah* at home. We revert back to our original question: “Why Yehudah?”

The *Ponevezher Rav* explained, “When Yosef demanded that Binyamin remain his prisoner, it was Yehudah who said, ‘This has gone far enough. I gave my father my word that Binyamin was returning. There is no room for negotiation concerning Binyamin’s safe return home.’ Yehudah was prepared to take on all of Egypt, because he had given his word to his father. How does one make such a guarantee? Did Yehudah know up front what would transpire in Egypt? Did he know for certain that he would be able to return Binyamin home? Clearly, he did not. Yet, he had taken responsibility for his younger brother. He had given his word. There was no longer any room for any form of discussion. An individual who is willing and prepared to obligate himself and guarantee results that, for the most part, are beyond his powers, such a person is worthy and suitable to open up a *yeshivah*!”

The *Rav* believed in what he said and was indeed the embodiment of that genre of *Rosh Yeshivah*. He built *Ponevez* without funds, assuming loans every step of the way. He borrowed and paid back – and then borrowed again! There had to be a *yeshivah*, and if this was the only way – then it would be the way the *yeshivah* would be built and maintained. He undertook a number of daring projects without the wherewithal. If he believed the project was a necessity for Torah development, he tackled it with a zest and vision that paralleled the strength of a much younger man. He succeeded beyond anyone’s dreams, because he felt it was his responsibility to rebuild Torah after the Holocaust.