

The connection between the events of Yosef and Yehuda

How is it that Yehuda can be so callous towards his brother in פרשת וישב but in פרשת מקץ and פרשת ויגש he volunteers to protect Binyamin and even puts his life on the line to protect him?

All the generations mentioned from the beginning of ספר בראשית were characterized by some sort of family dysfunction. The Torah compares the children of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, where each had a child that acted properly while also having another child who acted reprehensibly. Many of them lived in or around the land that what would be called Canaan. We can glean from the breadcrumbs dropped by the Torah in the stories told in Genesis that the behavior of the local residents was reprehensible. Consider the 5 towns that were destroyed for their wickedness. The story of Deena's abduction and rape at the hands of Shechem and the callous reaction of the local populace points to a morally bankrupt society that looked the other way when a young girl was brutally attacked. From the Torah we can deduce that their intra-family relationships were fractured and strife ridden as well. Competition and disdain for siblings seemed to part of the culture as well.

Jacob's children grew up in this conflicted environment. They had just spent their formative years exposed to Laban, the master of deceit. Upon their return to Canaan they were exposed to Esau and Shechem. One of the core tenets Abraham insisted on was ensuring that his children not marry among the local population. Rebecca states this explicitly when she complains to Isaac about the moral shortcomings of the local women and insists that Jacob seek a wife with proper lineage and character traits in the house of Laban.

After Joseph's sale, Jacob was misled to believe that Joseph indeed was dead, and all his sons and daughters arose to console him. Rashi offers 2 opinions as to the identity of his daughters. The first is that a twin daughter was born with each son and the sons married them. The second opinion this is a reference to local Canaanite women married by the sons, as it is common for one to refer to his daughter in law as a daughter.

According to the second interpretation, how is it possible that Jacob's sons would violate the principle established by Abraham against marrying local Canaanite women? When the Torah admonishes us against marrying idolatrous spouses, it says that we should be wary lest they lead our children astray from Gd's path and towards acceptance of idolatry. The impact of the Canaanite spouse on the Jew or

on his or her children is subtle, yet insidious. Over time the wrong influences, especially from a spouse or parent, can have a degenerative effect on the other spouse or a child's moral compass.

Immediately after Joseph's sale, the Torah describes that Judah separated from his brothers. It is unclear when exactly these events occurred in the chronology of the stories related in the Torah. According to many opinions, this occurred immediately after the sale. Others say that it must have happened prior to the sale, in order to allow sufficient time for Judah to marry and father 3 children, two of whom would have to grow to be old enough to marry Tamar. As Joseph disappeared for 22 years and Judah was presumably 5 to 6 years older, the time frame seems to lead to a conclusion that these events straddle the sale of Joseph.

Judah married a Canaanite woman and had 3 children with her. While commentaries go to great lengths to explain that she was not really a Canaanite, the simple reading of the verses would indicate otherwise. Judah's 2 older sons demonstrate a wicked attitude consistent with the local Canaanite population. Rashi comments on the verse that Lemech took 2 wives, Adah and Tzilah, that the practice of the time was to marry one woman for reproductive purposes and a second for pleasure. The pleasure wife would be prevented from pregnancy and childbirth, lest her beauty be marred.

Er, Judah's first born, demonstrated this character trait when he sought to ensure that Tamar would not become pregnant lest her beauty become marred. This was a Canaanite trait that was abhorrent to Hashem and he was taken prematurely. Onen is then instructed to marry his brother's wife in order to perpetuate his brother's name. Onen realizes that the offspring would not be his, and acts to prevent the perpetuation of his brother's legacy. The internecine hatred, a characteristic of the Canaanite population, rubbed off on Judah's children. Since Er was the firstborn, he presumably was entitled to a position of greater respect within the family. Any child that would become Er's heir would be a threat to the new found prominence and position Onen attained with the death of his older sibling. These considerations led him to act in a way that ultimately caused him, to be taken prematurely as well.

Judah should have taught his children to behave better. Having the son of Jacob as a father and role model should have given them better insight into and a shield against the local abhorrent customs. Judah recognizes that even if she waits to marry Shailah, the result would be the same for he too was the child of a Canaanite woman and was exposed to the local Canaanite practices and environment. At the end of the episode, Judah is presented a choice. He can acknowledge his role in

Tamar's pregnancy and take responsibility for it. Or he could remain quiet, in the mode of the local Canaanite population, and simply let her die to cover his culpability. Judah says צדקה ממני, she is more righteous than me in that she acted appropriately all along while I failed multiple times with her and with my family. It is only the offspring of both Judah and Tamar that could be considered for the monarchy and the house of David.

How does this manifest regarding the story of Joseph? Having been exposed to the vices and selfish attitudes of the local population, Judah finds it easy to ridicule and ignore the pleas of his brother Joseph. After all, Joseph, with his dreams and close relationship with Jacob, is a potential rival for leadership of the clan, a role claimed by Judah. He acted callously towards Joseph, just like a Canaanite would if faced with a similar situation and opportunity. He remained silent when he should have stepped forward to acknowledge the dysfunctional relationship he and the other brothers had with Joseph. He was willing to forego Joseph's legacy, as one of the 12 tribes, in order to ensure that his own place would be more secure and exalted. He ignored Joseph's pleas upon being cast into the pit and coldly justified the sale of his brother into servitude. His callous actions confirmed that he had been subverted by the local Canaanite population, exactly as the Torah would predict and admonish against.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were indeed wise to reject the local women as potential wives, as their nature and nurture completely contradicted everything the patriarchs stood for. The Canaanites possessed none of the character traits required to perpetuate the covenant established between Gd and Abraham. It is only after the episode of Tamar that Judah realizes how far he has fallen and he acts to salvage himself morally. He admits that he was wrong and needed to mend his ways, to demonstrate that he was a son of Jacob, one of the tribes of Israel whose great destiny awaited him, and not simply another jealous Canaanite. Recognition of sin and contrition are the building blocks of repentance. He is now ready to reassess his role as Joseph's brother and son of Jacob so they can assume their proper places in Jewish destiny. The healing process that requires an ultimate rapprochement between Joseph and the rest of his brothers can now be set in motion.

Copyright 2018 by Rabbi Josh Rapps. Permission to reprint and distribute, with this notice, is hereby granted. Reproduction for distribution via electronic or print media is prohibited without the author's permission.