

## ***Not By the Sword***

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*Parshat Vay'hi*

The patriarch of the family, Jacob/Israel, is preparing to leave this life, and he calls his twelve sons to him, so that he might give them a final blessing. When he comes to Judah's blessing, we notice several interesting facts.

Judah, although not the eldest of Israel's sons, is granted the blessing of kingship. That's really no great surprise, for we remember how Judah took charge of the brothers' second journey to Mitzrayim, how he pledged to bring Benjamin back, how he was the one who had the courage to speak forthrightly to the Vizier of Mitzrayim (before he and the other brothers knew that the Vizier was Joseph). Judah has earned the kingship. Furthermore, Judah is the only one of the brothers who has experienced the death of a loved one – he has lost two sons – and so he is the only one of them who, we presume, has learned to face death and loss, and a ruler must understand how to face loss and death.

But, even though Judah is blessed with the scepter of kingship, his blessing is not first, as we would expect for the king. Still, even that is understandable. Before Jacob can grant the kingship to Judah, he must first take it from his first-born, Reuben. Then he speaks to his "wild men" sons, Simeon and Levi, who were responsible for the slaughter of Hamor under the guise of requiring Hamor's men to be circumcised; "they have killed men in anger." He

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castigates them severely, and that, as much as his taking the kingship from Reuben, is a message to Judah, a message which is reflected in another curious fact about Judah's blessing, which we shall examine briefly.

First, however, we note that Judah's blessing occupies five verses. Of all the brothers, only Joseph's blessing is as long, and Joseph, as we know, is a special case. He was his father's favorite, and he was the one who, by bringing the family to Mitzrayim, saved their lives. Judah's blessing is the longest (except for Joseph's), reflecting Judah's response to Joseph (Genesis 44:18-34), the longest single speech in Genesis. As Judah spoke at great length, so Jacob's blessing of Judah is lengthy.

Finally – and this is the “curious fact” that we have already noticed – as we analyze Judah's blessing, we find within it twenty-one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The missing letter is Zayin, and Zayin is shaped like a sword, and the word *zayin* means “sword.” Judah is granted the kingship, but he is not given the sword. He must exercise true kingly leadership, without the aid of weapons. He must lead the family – and, later, the nation – by example, not by force; would that modern-day rulers had the wisdom so to lead!

To the awareness that leadership, to be most effective, must be by example and not by the sword, may we and all humanity soon be led.

Shabbat Shalom.