

An Epic Confrontation and Peace Deal - Vayigash

From the dawn of history through to our very own times our experience has been that engagement too often leads to confrontation and subsequently violence.

Take the Bible with this week's portion (Vayigash) for some light reading! From Cain and Abel through Noah and his contemporaries, through Abraham and Nimrod, Jacob and Esau, powerful humans representing differing ideologies and values could not coexist. Which is probably understandable given that the G-dly and the earthly in their early pristine forms were virtually antithetical. Confrontation bred combustion.

Endemic in physical existence as we presently understand it is the subatomic parts which are held together by some extremely powerful force which explains why the upset of this balance releases fearful and often massively destructive energy in the world.

For humans to manifest such destructive forces is only a short step away. But humans were also endowed with something different and special. In fact the G-dly element was supposed to harmonise and complement all competing energies.

This is what human history is really all about with the establishment of Monotheism by Abraham who began the wonderful family of Isaac and Jacob. Indeed with the first Jewish family, it appeared that notwithstanding the wayward way of nations, G-d's purpose was appearing to take shape. It had taken some 2000 years but apparently G-d was patient!

But what was to come was as horrible as it was unexpected.



Now for the first time it was the Jewish family which was torn asunder and was on trial. Jacob, his four wives and all thirteen children were individually great Jews. Each and everyone, righteous, courageous and loyal to the values of their parents and family yet for all that and because their very devotion to their parents sense of justice and right and wrong, it brought attitudes of intolerance and which degenerated into envy which fuelled a sense of self righteousness which knew no bounds. The sale of their very own brother culminated in what was in one sense the most enduring scar on the psyche of the Jewish people.

But wait. The two major antagonists Joseph and Judah, probably the two greatest personalities of the family did find it within themselves to make up. Judah beseeches his then unknown brother Joseph to have pity. Lo and behold, Joseph responds with an embrace and reconciliation. Family feuds are known to go on for years and years. This could have been the same. But it was not.

In tracing the mystical sources of the conflict. The Kabbalists point to the divine energies which possessed both Joseph and Judah. The etymology of Joseph's name represents "increase" and 'assertiveness' which brought him to the second highest office in the land of Egypt. Judah's name finds its source in submission (to G-d) and therefore to man.

Society as a whole functions in this way. There are natural leaders. They are not despots but have qualities which allow them to assert and forward society's interests without allowing self interest and certainly self aggrandisement to distort their contribution. Equally however, there are the masses of people who are equally talented with sound instinctual intelligence and goodwill who will respect and follow leadership but only with genuine integrity.

These two great biblical figures represented the ultimate partnership where neither could achieve anything independently of the other.

If it was true in Egypt that Joseph's leadership had to be complemented by Judah's self abnegation, in Messianic times the roles would be reversed only because mankind would have fully matured and be able to fuse these two paradoxical energies.



It was Ezekiel the prophet who summed it up for all time. G-d instructed him to take two sticks, one for Judah and one for Joseph “Bring them together and they shall be one in your hand”

We are not there yet and there is more work to be done. Both sides need more humility. Both sides need more negotiation.

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