

WHO IS THE TRUE HERO?

By: Rabbi Yosef Vogel

VAYIGASH

Tammuz 09, 5773

Children love to hear stories. The reason for this is, for as a result of their purity and innocence, the story has a special power to transport them from their current surroundings to a new world full of excitement and adventure.

As we grow up and we become preoccupied with the "real" world we inhabit, the stories we heard as children tend to fade into our subconscious. However, there always a few stories - our "favourite" ones - that remain etched in our memories, having a profound impact on our psyche.

For me, the story that continues to capture my imagination, is the story of the great showdown between Judah and Joseph. For in addition to being my Bar Mitzvah parshah, and my name being Joseph and my friend with whom I shared my Bar Mitzvah, was called Judah, it happens to be one of the most dramatic stories ever told.

From the moment I first remember hearing the story, there has been one question that continues to capture my imagination. The question is: who is the true hero of the story?

One could make a very powerful argument in favour of both Joseph and Judah. Is it Joseph, who after being sold as a slave by his brothers, torn away from his family and father, living alone and having to fend for himself in a hostile environment, forgives his brothers wholeheartedly. Or is it Judah, who when faced with the choice of either letting his brother be taken as a slave or to sacrifice his own freedom in order to protect his brother, he chooses the latter.

The truth is that this question percolates throughout history and is the source of a tension that is played out by the descendents of Judah and Joseph. It also lies at the heart of one of the most prolific themes discussed in mysticism at great length. In fact, it is also played out on the micro level inside each and every one of us.

In simple words the question is, what lies at the core of what it means to be a Jew. Is it about the projection of oneself? Or is it about submitting oneself to a cause that is great then self? Is it about realising one's potential or is it about getting the job done. Is it about living in one's comfort zone and experiencing life to its fullest or is it about sacrificing ones position in order to save a Jewish life.

Joseph is a Tzadik (a righteous man), he has risen to great heights and has become viceroy of Egypt. He is the man who wields great power throughout the civilised world and will provide graciously for all his family. However it is Judah who is the true hero of this most dramatic story and the everlasting inspiration to the Jewish people through our history. It is Judah - who through a combination of humility and courage, steps up to the plate and is ready and prepared to sacrifice his life in order to save his brother - who defines what it means to be a Jew.

To be a Jew is not about what we do for ourselves but about how much we are willing to sacrifice ourselves in order to help another Jew

21st December

Sedra: VAYIGASH

Shabbat Begins: 15:38pm

Shabbat Ends: 4:48pm