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Judah said: Let Me Remain as Your Slave, but Let the Boy Return to My Father

44: 18-34

Judah said: Let me remain as your slave, but let the boy return to my father DIG: How do Judah's actions here compare with what he said and did when Joseph was sold into slavery (37:26-28)? How great a sacrifice is he willing to make? For whose sake, primarily? His own? Benjamin's? Isra'el's? Why do you think so? What does this tell you about how Judah has matured spiritually?

REFLECT: Where is ADONAI calling you, like Judah, to do something honorable or courageous? Where, like Yosef, have you given your brothers or sisters in Christ the chance to prove themselves or be reconciled? When has this chance to forgive been offered to you? What did you do with the chance? With whom do you still hold out hope for reconciliation? What hope does this story give you?

Parashah 11: vaYigash (He approached) 44:18-47:27
(see my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People include Judah, Joseph, the brothers, Jacob, Pharaoh, and the sons.

The Scenes include Goshen, Egypt, Canaan, Beersheba, and the district of Rameses.

The Main Events include Judah offering to take Benjamin's place, Joseph revealing his identity, the brothers returning to Jacob, God reassuring Jacob on his trip to Egypt, sons listed, Pharaoh giving the family the best land in Goshen, the famine continuing with the Egyptians selling Joseph their livestock, their land, and themselves, being indebted to Pharaoh.

We now come to the dramatic climax of the story of Joseph. Without question, this account is, perhaps, one of the most exciting, intense, and beautifully constructed narratives in all of the Scriptures, if not in all literature. In this last and greatest episode, Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers; is reunited with his father, Jacob; and provides a

temporary home for **his** family **in Egypt** to save them from the terrible **famine** that was devastating the western Near East.

There are so many deep emotions ready to surface in this dramatic conclusion of **Joseph's** story. First, we need to think of **Jacob**. **He** was quit aged, having told **Pharaoh** in **47:9** that **he** was **one hundred and thirty years old**. Yet, **he** had spent many of **his** latter years in sorrowful grief over the loss of **his** favorite **son, Joseph**. Even though **he** had **eleven** other **sons**, **he** could still not be comforted from what **he** thought of as the death of **Joseph**. **He** was in great need of being united with **his** dear **son**.

Then there were **the eleven brothers** of **Joseph**. How did **they** feel about what happened? This is something **Joseph** has been sitting on the edge of **his** throne to know! This is the main reason **he** devised the tests that **he** carried out on **them**. **He** wanted to find out how **they** felt about **his** departure and to see if there was any repentance or remorse.

Finally, there was **Joseph**. What was **he** feeling? Already before this parashah, we have had significant glimpses into **his** emotions. When **his** brothers first approached **him** during **their** initial trip to **Egypt**, we are told when **Joseph** overheard **them** discussing what **they** did to **him**, "**He turned away from them and wept (42:24)**. Again on the second visit, after **he** saw **Benjamin** for the first time since coming to **Egypt**, "**Joseph hurried out, because his feelings toward his brother we so strong that he wanted to cry; he went into his bedroom and there he wept (43:30)**. Finally, for the third time, **Joseph** burst into **tears** when **he** revealed **himself** to **his** **brothers**, and then a fourth time when **he** was reunited with **his** **father**.

As we begin this portion, just the mention of **their** **father** stirred **Joseph's** heart because **he** realized what would happen to **him** if **his** **sons** returned without **Benjamin**. **Yosef** could tell that **his** **brothers** would rather not go back at all than to see **their** **father** die from grief. So **Judah** spoke up again, this time asking to exchange **his** life for the life of **his** **younger** **brother**. **His** speech is the longest and perhaps the most moving in **Genesis**.

Then **Judah**, as spokesman for **the** **brothers**, **went up to Joseph** and speaking very respectfully, said: **Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself (44:18)**. Then **he** reviewed selected portions of the conversations **he** had had earlier with **Yosef** and **his** **father**. Understandably, **Judah** only recalls those things that will be helpful in gaining **Benjamin's** release.

My **lord** asked **his** **servants**, "**Do you have a father or a brother?**" **And we answered,**

“We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is the only one of his mother’s sons left, and his father loves him (44:19-20).

Then you said to your servants, “Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.” And we said to my lord, “The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die. But you told your servants, “Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again” (44:22-23).

When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said. Then our father said, “Go back and buy a little more food.” But we said, “We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.” Your servant my father said to us, “You know that my wife bore me two sons. **Rachael was the only woman I really wanted for a wife, and so it was as though I only had two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, “He has surely been torn to pieces.” And I have not seen him since. Actually, Isra’el had been deceived, and **Joseph** can see that now. **He** believes that **Yosef** had been **torn to pieces** and was dead. Previous statements about **him** had been somewhat vague. **If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery (44:24-29).** As a result, **Judah** was not only pleading for the life of **Benjamin**, but also for the life of **his father**.**

So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy’s life (the Hebrew literally reads *his soul is knit with the boy’s soul*), sees that the boy isn’t there, he will die. The relationship between Jonathan and David is also pictured this way in **First Samuel 18:1. Your servant will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. Judah** knew that **he** would be responsible for causing the death of **his father**. **Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, “If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life” (44:30-32).** At last, **Judah** came to the climax of **his** appeal.



Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers (42:33). It was **Judah's** suggestion that **Yosef** was sold into **slavery**, but now **he** was willing to become a **slave** as a substitute for **Benjamin**. **He** was indeed a changed man. **The Ruach ha-Kodesh** was at work, testing, training and transforming **him**.⁶⁸² Long ago **he** was jealous of **Joseph's** special relationship with **his father**, but now, **he** had no jealousy of **Benjamin's** special relationship with **Isra'el**.

I would have loved to be there with **Joseph** and to see **his** face after hearing **Judah's** words. You see the important part of this encounter between **Joseph** and **Judah** teaches us that people can change. It teaches us that just because a person made some big mistakes it does not mean that he doesn't have a conscience. It teaches us that in every one who walks on two legs, and can talk and think and imagine, there is the bad inclination and also there is a good inclination. The challenge that we all have is the same challenge that **Judah** had It is the challenge to own up to our mistakes and evil deeds and reverse the evil as much as possible by doing good, owning up to our mistakes and evil inclinations and doing good. Yes, **Judah** does it, and **he** now volunteers information about **Jacob**, **his father**, and **Joseph's father**. This information will melt **Joseph's** heart and force **him** to repent too and confess what **he** has been hiding from **his eleven brothers**.

Judah and all the **brothers** knew that **Benjamin** did not steal the silver bowl, but **he** could not argue against the evidence. Therefore, the only thing **he** could do was to bear **his** punishment for **him**. **He** would claim the sack in which the cup had been found as **his** own, and **Benjamin** would take **Judah's**. Therefore, **he** said to the prime minister of Egypt: **How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come upon my father (44:34)**. Earlier, **Judah** had promised **his father** that **he** would be surety for **Benjamin (43:9)**. Little did **he** know how literal **his**

promise would become.

It was indeed an unselfish action on **Judah's** part to offer **himself** in **his brother's** place. As **Yeshua** stated: **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)**. And indeed, that is what **King Jesus** has done for you and me. Although **He** was sinless, **He** came to the earth to be our substitute, and **whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)**. Although we deserve death for our sins, **He** went to the cross instead. Is this not a **King** worthy of following? Have you made a decision to follow **the Kosher King** this day?⁶⁸³

Therefore, the children of **Isra'el**, especially **Judah**, had clearly changed and passed **Joseph's** last test. Rather than see **Benjamin** go into **slavery**, **they** all would have been willing to take **his** place. This transformation of **the brothers**, represented in **Judah**, was every bit as miraculous as the rise of **Yosef** to prime minister of Egypt and when we next see **Joseph**, we will see that **he** has changed as dramatically as **his brothers**.