

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

'AND JUDAH APPROACHED HIM' ("VAYI-GASH") (GEN. 44:18): Judah had the "right approach;" his decisive confrontation with the ruler of Egypt (not yet recognized as his brother Joseph) starts with the term "approach" (*gisha*), which occurs in Scriptures in relation to three tactics: prayer, war, peace -- three ways of dealing with crisis.

Prayer is first in this three-directional approach; it implies hope and trust; recognition of human limitation and divine providence. It does not, however, replace human initiative and resolve. Then, there is preparedness for war; without readiness to fight, there can be no peace. Peace, however, is the ultimate goal. Judah approached his crisis with faith, firmness and flexibility. With skill he applied the proper three-directional "*gisha*" -- the right approach.

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE RIGHT APPROACH is the key to success. Describing Judah's decisive confrontation with the ruler of Egypt (without yet recognizing him as his brother Joseph), demanding that the ruler end his unreasonable treatment of his brothers and father, Torah tells of Judah's approach (Genesis 44:18): "Then Judah approached him . . ." The Hebrew "vayigash" means "he approached." According to rabbinic insight, this term "gisha" occurs in Scriptures with regard to three different forms of action: prayer, war, peace. Approaching a crisis, one must be ready to deal with it, and solve it, through any one or all three ways.

Prayer implies hope and trust; acknowledgement of human limitation and divine providence. The second element is battle; one must be prepared to fight, for without the readiness for war, there can never be peace. The third and ultimate element is peace. The goal in any approach to any crisis must remain conciliation. Judah approached Joseph with firmness, but not without flexibility. He had the right "gisha"—the proper approach.

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**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

A LIVING, GROWING TREE is the imagery employed by the prophet (Ezekiel 37:15-28) to portray the inherent unity and dynamics of the Jewish people. A tree develops into various branches, but they all stem and derive their vitality and vigor from the same roots. Sprouting forth into different directions, a tree is one entity, one organism. So is the people. Yosef and Yehuda represent the two parts of the ancient divided kingdoms of Israel. The Northern (Yosef, or Ephraim) was conquered and exiled from the Land in 722 B.C.E. by the Assyrians; the Southern (Yehuda) in 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonians. Ezekiel envisions their ultimate return to the Land, their unification into one nation, under one rule (of Davidic dynasty), in adherence to God's Torah. Each separate segment of the people is compared to and symbolized by an "etz" – meaning both a stick and a tree. Severed and cut-off, each is a dying-drying stick. Joined together and planted as one, they all become a living, growing tree.

— ***Thought of the Week*** —

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

“TODAH” in Hebrew has two related meanings: to thank and to confess. Both are a way of man’s acknowledgement – either of the other’s goodness or of his own guilt. The name of Judah (Yehuda) is associated with the term “todah” ( Gen. 30:35; 49:8 and 38:28). Judah’s sense of “todah” – of expressing gratitude and admitting responsibility – is the secret of his leadership.

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***Thought of the Week***

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY are themes of concern for Joseph and his brothers. The brothers openly admit their guilt, they feel responsible. But in order to assuage their agony, Joseph, on his part, smooths the shocking revelation of his identity with tender words of appeasement (Gen. 45:4-8): "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt. Now be not sorry nor angry with yourselves for having sold me hither, for in order to preserve life, God sent me ahead of you – to insure your survival on the land and save your lives in a great deliverance. Now it was not you who sent me here but God." In this kind approach to his frightened brothers, aiming to ease their shame and embarrassment, Joseph nonetheless is careful with his words: he was "sold" by his brothers, but "sent" by God. God's inscrutable design does not override man's moral responsibility nor justify his atrocities. No wrong is rendered right just because it fits a providential scheme. The theological argument is never used by the brothers. Nor is it used by Joseph as an excuse for evil, but rather as a reason for goodwill. In a latter encounter, Joseph sums it up (50:20): "As for you, you meant evil against me. God meant it for good." Man stands responsible even as God remains the ruler.

*THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: In the opening scene, Judah, like a "lion's whelp" (Gen. 49:9), arises to deliver his brother, Benjamin, in a courageous and enchanting oration before the Egyptian throne. Judah displays genuine concern for, and self-sacrificing devotion to, his father and his brothers. The keynote of the speech, which is the clue to Judah's heroic behavior, is conveyed by the Hebrew word "arav," meaning guaranteed. Judah pledged his father, Jacob: "I myself will be surety" for Benjamin ("e'ervenu"). This sense of brotherhood, commitment and loyalty is a basic Jewish trait. The idea of Jewish solidarity also is expressed in the monumental Talmudic statement using Judah's phrase: "All Jews are responsible ("arevim") one for another" (Sanhedrin 27b).*

**by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

## Thought of the Week

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THE REUNION BETWEEN FATHER AND SON, the heart-broken Jacob and his lost-and-found Joseph, is intriguingly veiled in a cryptic verse (Gen. 46:29): "Joseph harnessed his chariot, rode up to meet his father Israel (Jacob), to Goshen, and appeared before him; he threw himself on his shoulders, and wept on his shoulders, further more." In this touching embrace, who was the active person ("he") — Joseph or his father? Rashi insists it was Joseph. Joseph, who bridled his horses in his hurry to get to his father, unbridled his emotions when he finally reached him. Then, in abandonment and with abundance, Joseph clung to his father in a long and tearful embrace, uninterrupted even by a kiss. And Jacob? Utterly elated, totally absorbed in ecstasy and rapture, fully savoring the marvel and bliss of this climactic reunion, stunned and motionless, Jacob had no hug, no kiss, for his son. At this moment, according to an amazing midrash (post-talmudic), Jacob was busy reciting the Shema; nothing less would have prevented him from cleaving to his son. Thus, on a symbolic level, Jacob's two devotional moments — reuniting with his son and reaffirming God's unity — were fused into one. While Joseph was expressing his love for his father, Jacob was expressing his love for his Father. Ramban, however, refuses to believe Jacob could have remained passive and self-contained. Jacob was the one ("he") who threw himself on his son's shoulders, weeping on them "further more" (as he wept even before seeing him). So reasons Ramban: "Who is with more tears to shed, the old father who finds his son alive, after grave despair and sorrow, or his son — youthful and ruling?"

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE ETERNAL TEMPLE—the only one enduring and indestructible—is made not of wood and stone but of spirit and fervor, not on a particular site but within the hearts of the people everywhere. This is the genuine “mikdash” (sanctuary) which makes its appearance through a life of dignity and sanctity. The temporal-material temple is but a faint model of the transcendental-inner temple we are called upon to constantly construct and carry within ourselves, elevating mundane living on earth to an ongoing sanctuary of God. This is the quintessence of the Hebrew synonym for sanctuary, mishkan: the indwelling presence of God (from “shechinah”). This is the meaning of Ezekiel’s prophecy, declaiming the words of God on His people Israel (37:26-28):

A covenant of peace with them I will establish,  
An everlasting covenant with them it shall be;  
Their dignity I will enhance,  
And My Mikdash I will set within them forever!

My Mishkan will dwell over them;  
I will be their God and they My people,  
And the nations shall know that I, the Lord, sanctify  
Israel,  
By setting My Mikdash within them forever.

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## Thought of the Week

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By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

(In memory of my colleague, Dr. Israel Margalith)

THE IDEA OF "SANCTUARY" is expressed in Biblical Hebrew by two synonyms: One is "mikdash", namely a place of sanctity and distinction, the other is "Mishkan", referring to the presence or "dwelling place" of God. Playing on these two terms, prophet Ezekiel (37:27-28) teaches that the true sanctuary is not a structure on a specific site—a building subject to decay; the true "sanctuary" is the consecrated and elevated way of life of the people. The real "mikdash" is within the people's hearts; the real "mishkan" is reflected in their lives.

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## **Thought of the Week**

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**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

THE TRUE TEMPLE OF GOD is not a building but a human experience. This idea underlies Prophet Ezekiel's assertion (37:27-28) that the Divine Presence (Mishkan) is manifest and sustained by the people's proper way of life; it is not confined within a structure in space, nor subject to the decay of time. The Divine Sanctuary (Mikdash) is comprised of and expressed by the sanctity of the people's life. The pure, broken, aspiring, compassionate, and loving heart of a single person enshrines and radiates divinity; it is the true temple of God.

### **Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE deals with allurements, temptation and resistance. Joseph, successful and attractive, is sexually lured by his master's wife. He refuses. He does not offend her by outright rejection, but tries to reason with her. He appeals to her sense of propriety (Gen. 39:8-9): "Think of my master. Having me around, he knows nothing of what is going on in this home. Everything he has entrusted to me. He is no more authority in this home than I am. Nothing has he spared from me. Except yourself. It is because you are his wife. How can I do this awesomely wicked thing!? Then I will fail my God." Emphasizing his own great authority and his master's helplessness is not effective psychology, if his purpose is to deter her from pursuing him. In fact, she is not discouraged at all and continues to entrap him. One day, when no one except Potiphar's wife was home, "Joseph came in to perform his job." This may be taken as a euphemism: He came to yield to her consistent command, to do the job she wants him to do. But finally he resisted his temptation. "His father's image appeared to him" (Midrash). When a person lives for the moment he tends to surrender to the urge of immediate gratification; he acts like an animal. When a person considers himself in terms of his past and future, linked to a noble heritage, he learns to act like a prince.

### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE PEOPLE'S ROLE IN MAINTAINING *GALUT* (exile) or redemption is illustrated in the way the Israelites settled in Egypt. Egypt was, in the words of God to Abra(ha)m, "a land not their own" (Gen. 15:13). Initially the Israelites intended to reside there as visiting aliens. So they told Pharaoh (47:4), "We came to sojourn in this land." Later, however, they changed their minds. They acquired real estate in the region of Goshen and settled there as permanent residents (Genesis 47:27).

The Israelites' decision was a tragic one: They refused to leave their host land and return to their own, freely and openly. Had they exercised initiative to leave their *galut* (exile) in Egypt and return to the Promised Land while they were still free to do so, their oppression and enslavement in Egypt would have been avoided. Tragically, they did not. Thus, they had to be delivered forcefully by God's "mighty hand." So claims Rabbi Ephraim Shlomo ben Aaron of Luntshits (1550-1619) in his Torah commentary (*Keli Yakar*).

## Thought of the Week

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

IN A LAND NOT THEIR OWN, in Egypt, the Israelites initially intended to reside as visiting aliens (Gen.15:13). So they told Pharaoh (47:4), “We came to *sojourn* in this land.” Later, however, they changed their minds. They acquired real estate in the region of Goshen, and settled there as permanent residents (Gen.47:27).

This, according to *Keli Yakar*, was tragic: They refused to leave their host land and return to their own, freely and openly. Thus they ended up as oppressed and confined slaves in a hostile land. Later, they had to be delivered forcefully, by God’s “mighty hand.”

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### Thought of the Week

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By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

*... "I TOLD YOU SO!": Agonized by the treatment they received in Egypt, Joseph's brothers expressed deep remorse for the way they treated him: "Alas! we are to be blamed for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish; he pleaded with us; yet, we would not listen....Therefore we are now in this trouble!" (Gen. 42:21). Reuben, however, displayed a different trait. To the brothers' self accusation, he responded with a sense of self-righteousness: "Didn't I tell you so? 'Do not mistreat the child!' -but you would not listen!" (22). As recorded, what Reuben told his brothers was to throw the child into a pit. And they listened. Reuben's attitude stands in contrast to Judah's, who found in himself the graciousness and courage to admit his faults (38:26). A true leader does not cover up his failures, nor escape responsibility by blaming others and exonerating himself. He admits his wrongs and amends his ways. Judah accepted responsibility for his brother; thus, he was chosen to represent them before the ruler (44:18).*

## **THOUGHT OF THE WEEK**

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / JANUARY 5, 2001

**By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

*Vayigash*

A gentle, quiet voice penetrates the king's palace: Describing how the news of the reunion between Joseph and his brothers reached the royal court, Torah says: "The voice (*ha-kol*) was heard in Pharaoh's palace" (Genesis 45:16).

According to Jewish mysticism (*Zohar* 102a), this verse teaches us the art of prayer. The "silent voice" (*kol-kal*) in worship, the mild, calm, and unassuming expression is more efficacious than shouting. "Words of the wise in gentleness are better heard than the shouting of a ruler among fools" (*Kohelet* 9:17). Serenity is essential in prayer. So is "heart-

intention" (*kavanah*). For in its quintessential sense, prayer is not "labor of the lips" but "worship of the heart" (*Hazon Ish*).

The biblical Hannah, mother of prophet Samuel, illustrates the art of prayer. Hannah – the dejected, barren woman, the "other wife" of Elkana, "bitter in emotion" and "heavy in mood" – prayed for a child at the Shiloh temple. She was "speaking to her heart; only her lips were moving, yet her voice could not be heard" (I Samuel 1:13). The biblical idiom "speaking to her heart" means that she was praying silently (*be-lahash*). Thus, Hannah became the model of the silent yet most effective voice of devotion.

## **THOUGHT OF THE WEEK**

64 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / DECEMBER 21, 2001

**By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

**SILENT VOICE:** The art of prayer is illustrated by Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel: Dejected, this barren woman — “bitter in emotion” and “heavy in mood” — prayed for a child at the Shiloh temple. She was “speaking to her heart; only her lips were moving, yet her voice could not be heard” (I Sam. 1:13). The biblical idiom “speaking to her heart” means that she was praying silently (*be-lahash*).

Describing how news of the reunion between Joseph and his brothers reached the royal court, Torah says: “The voice was heard

in Pharaoh’s palace” (Gen. 45:16). The Hebrew for voice (*kol*) sounds like “slight” (*kal*; faint).

According to *kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism; Zohar 102a), this teaches us that the “silent voice” (“kol kal”) can be more vividly heard and more forcefully penetrating. So, too, in worship: The quiet and unassuming expression is heard more than any noisy shouting. Prayer, in its quintessential sense is “*avoda she-ba-lev*” — labor of the heart, not of the mouth. Hannah is the model of the silent yet effective voice of devotion.

## **THOUGHT OF THE WEEK**

### **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

**SILENT VOICE:** The art of prayer is illustrated by Hannah, mother of prophet Samuel: This barren woman – “bitter in emotion” and “heavy in mood” – prayed for a child at the Shiloh temple. She was “speaking to her heart; only her lips were moving, yet her voice could be heard” (I Sam. 1:13). The biblical idiom “speaking to her heart” means that she was praying silently (*be-lahash*).

Describing how news of the reunion between Joseph and his brothers reached the royal court,

Torah says: “The voice was heard in Pharaoh’s palace” (Gen. 45:16). The Hebrew for voice (*kol*) sounds like “slight” (*kal*, faint). According to *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism; Zohar 102a), this teaches us that the “silent voice” (*kol kal*) can be more soundly heard and more forcefully penetrating than the spoken word. So in worship: The quiet and unassuming expression is heard more than any noisy shouting. Prayer, in its quintessential sense and pristine form, is *avodah she-ba-lev* (labor of the heart, not of the mouth). Hannah is the model of the silent yet effective voice of devotion.

## Thought of the Week

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**THE POWER OF THE SILENT VOICE:** The news of the reunion between Joseph and his brothers reached the royal court; in Torah's style (Gen. 45:16): "The voice was heard in Pharaoh's palace." From the Zohar (102a): The Hebrew term for voice, "*kol*" (spelled in this verse without the vowel *vav*), sounds like "*kal*" (unheavy). This teaches us that the small, "light voice" ("*kol kal*") can be more penetrating and more forcefully heard. So in worship: The quiet and unassuming expression is heard more than noisy shouts. Prayer is "*avoda she-ba-lev*" — labor of the heart, not of the mouth. It is the silent voice of devotion.

**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

*THE UNITY OF ISRAEL: The reunion of the family of Jacob (Israel) is the theme of the sidra; the unity of the people of Israel is the theme of the prophetic reading. The Aggada tells that at the very moment of reunion, the patriarch Israei recited the "shema." Israel's declaration of One God ("Hashem Ehad") has its counterpart in God's proclamation of One People ("Goy Ehad"). The people affirms the unity of God; God affirms the unity of the people. (Berachot 6a) Judaism's religious message assumes meaning through its historical experience as a unified people.*

**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

*...ARVUT (solidarity) is demonstrated by Judah (Gen. 44:18-34). The keynote of Judah's speech before the Egyptian throne, which is the clue to his heroic behavior, is conveyed by the Hebrew "arav" which denotes accountability and responsibility. To assure his father of Benjamin's return, Judah jeopardized himself (43:9): "I myself will be 'arev' (responsible) for him". The idea of Jewish solidarity--arvut--is expressed by the Rabbis in a monumental statement (Sanhedrin 27b) which indicatively uses Judah's phrase: "All Jews are 'arevim' (responsible) for one another". This expresses the sense of brotherhood, commitment and loyalty as a basic Jewish trait. "Arvut"--Judah's symbol of leadership--became Judaism's mark of distinction.*

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### **Thought of the Week**

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**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

ISRAEL'S GROWTH is illustrated in Ezekiel's prophecy (sixth century BCE) by the symbolism of two tree-branches held into one (37:15-20). As these cut off branches are being replanted and incorporated into one growing tree ("etz" is used for both), so shall the two branches of the divided kingdom of Israel, the Northern (Ephraim, exiled to Assyria, 722 BCE) and the Southern (Judah, exiled to Babylon, 586 BCE) – then both still in exile – be restored on their land, merged into one mighty and prosperous people, flourishing in peace, governed by a righteous ruler and following the Divine laws (21-25): "I shall assemble them from all around, bring them to their own soil, mold them into a single nation within the land, upon the hills of Israel, and one king be ruler of them all. Let them no more be two nations, no more divided into separate kingdoms, never again.....They shall settle on the land which I have given to My worshiper Jacob – on which your ancestors were settled, they and their children and their children's children – forever." The two tree-branches make a dramatic point: Although severed, each from its stem and both from each other, as long as they retain some sparks of vitality, they still may be revived, grow and sprout, strike deep roots and strive towards new heights.

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## Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

VAYIGASH

December 21, 1990

**THE UNITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE** is the theme of Ezekiel's allegoric vision of the Two Trees (37:15-28). These trees, one representing the Southern kingdom (Judah), and the other the Northern kingdom (Ephraim) -- both called Israel -- will cling to each other and merge into one. Thus, the divided parts of the people, all tribes of Israel, will emerge in the future as one united people ruled by one government, one Torah, One God. This dramatic illustration of unity uses the imagery of two growing trees intermingled and grafted into one: The two trees interact in union, and produce flowers and fruits as one. Yet, each tree retains its own roots and identity.

The lesson: Unity implies cooperation and mutual responsibility, not conformity. The ideal oneness of the people ought not to suppress the uniqueness and freedoms of any one group or person. Typically, Ezekiel, who envisions complete unity of the people, also deals in his other prophecies with the role of the individual and his ultimate responsibility. Without respect for the individual, there can be no unity among the people.

## THOUGHT OF WEEK

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Friday, January 1, 1993

### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

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The lesson: Unity implies cooperation and mutual responsibility, not conformity. The ideal oneness of the people ought not to suppress the uniqueness and freedoms of any one group or person. Typically, Ezekiel, who envisions complete unity of the people, also deals in his other prophecies with the role of the individual and his ultimate responsibility. Without respect for the individual, there can be no unity among the people.

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**NATIONAL UNITY AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY:** The envisioned unification of the Jewish people is dramatized by Ezekiel's image of the "Two Trees," representing the two divided kingdoms of Israel: the Southern (Judah) and the Northern (Ephraim). Grafted by the prophet, the two trees grow into one. So will Israel merge into one people, ruled by one king and One God (37:15-28).

This floral imagery yields a lesson: The two trees produce their flowers and fruits as one, yet each retains its own roots and identity. Unity implies cooperation, not conformity. The people's "oneness" must not suppress the uniqueness of any group or person. Ezekiel, who envisions national unity, is also the prophet of individual responsibility (18:1-32). Without regard for the individual, there can be no true unity.

### Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

UNITY, THE PEOPLE'S AND GOD'S: The reunion of the family of Israel (Jacob and Joseph) in Egypt is the theme of the Torah reading; the unity of the people of Israel (the two kingdoms) in the land is the theme of the Prophetic reading (Ezekiel 37:15-28). In their intriguing legend, our Sages add a third dimension, the unity of God: At the very moment of reunion between Jacob and Joseph, say the Sages, the Patriarch was reciting the *Shema*. The people's declaration of One God (*Hashem Ehad*) is the counterpart of God's election of One People (*Goy Ehad*). A reciprocal bond: Israel affirms God's Oneness; God sustains Israel's unity. Israel's message of One God assumes its true meaning through its enduring experience as One People.

## Thought of the Week

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE UNITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE is envisioned by Ezekiel's imagery of the Two Trees (37:15-28); Both trees, one representing the Southern Kingdom, Judah, and the other the Northern Kingdom, Ephraim (both called Israel), will join together and merge into one. The divided parts and tribes of the people will emerge in the future as one united people-- ruled by one law and One God.

In this imagery, the two growing trees intermingled and grafted together, and produce flowers and fruits as one. Yet, each tree retains its own roots and identity. Unity implies cooperation and mutual responsibility, not conformity. The ideal "oneness" of the people must not suppress the uniqueness and freedoms of any one group or person. Without respect for the individual, there can be no unity.