

# Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

## VAYCHI

*The scepter of majesty shall not leave Yehuda (49:10).*

Parashat Vaychi recounts the individualized messages and b'rachot that every son received from Ya'akov, the patriarchal father. Each had a different nature and potential. It was Ya'akov Avinu's capacity in delivering a few well-chosen words to every individual that was designed to help them, and their descendants, to maximize their gifts and personalities. Some would achieve through business (Z'vulun), others through farming the land (Asher), others in military prowess (Gad), and others in more sedate, scholarly activities (Yissachar, following Rashi). And there were some that abruptly needed to change their outlook and ways of thinking (Reuven, Shimon, Levi).

Others, including Yehuda, needed encouragement to develop existing positive personality traits further. Abarbanel points out that though Yehuda was not the firstborn son, he was the one that had demonstrated the unique qualities for MALCHUT, royalty. He was able to acknowledge where he had gone wrong (as in the story of Yehuda and Tamar), he had the courage of conviction to stand up

against his brothers (as in the rescue of Yosef from the pit), as well the persuasive powers to convince his father Ya'akov to let Binyamin go down to Egypt, and to emotionally appeal to Yosef to such a degree that he (Yosef) finally revealed who he really was. His power was impressive, held in reserve ("he crouches, lies down, as a lion"), and in control ("who can awake him?").

The Maharal puts forward the idea that "the scepter of majesty shall not leave Yehuda" would not apply to every generation, but only when there would be a MALCHUT, a legally and spiritually constituted monarchy. Thus the Shoftim and Shaul Ha-Melech (from the tribe of Binyamin) would be a temporary phenomena. It was the House of David, descended from Yehuda that was to establish itself: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (Sh'muel Bet 7:16). The Maharal explains that Ya'akov's b'racha for MALCHUT was only to apply from David HaMelech until the Churban Bayit Rishon, and will only resume in Messianic times, provided that Ya'akov Avinu's original b'racha remains in force.

However, the Rashbam follows the P'SHUTO SHEL MIKRA, the plain meaning of the text, which he claim limits the full power of the House of David until the kingdom was divided

after the death of Shlomo HaMelech following his son Rechavam wrongly ignoring the advice of the learned and experienced in favour of his juvenile associates; possibly only to be resumed in messianic times. The Rashbam thus interprets "The scepter of majesty shall not leave Yehuda... until Shiloh arrives" - Shiloh referring to Shechem in the district of Shiloh, the place where the kingdom was to be divided. From thereon it would be much weaker, as ten tribes would be out of the scope of Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash, the tribe of Yehuda being the only one remaining (with Binyamin and Levi). The Chatam Sofer goes further, connecting Shiloh to the prophet Achiya HaShiloni, Achiya of Shiloh who demonstrated that the kingdom of Shlomo HaMelech inherited by his son Rechavam would be shattered, the main share going to Yeravam ben Nevat - 'to him people will gather'.

In contrast, the Kitvei Ramad Vali (R. Moshe David Vali, student of the Ramchal) offers a deep interpretation of the scepter of majesty as a force that will never leaving Yehuda. He focuses on the eternity of the Jewish people, who as YEHUDIM are predominantly the descendants of Yehuda. Every Jew is included in that b'racha. The royal scepter, he explains, conveys the majesty that counters accusations, and it gives security to the king. He implies that

there is a frame of MALCHUT in every Jew: Ben Gurion was reputed to have quipped that he was not the leader of half-a-million people, but half-a-million prime ministers. Without that aura of spiritual majesty, but a with vibe of downtrodden refugees, the Jews would have been considerably more vulnerable.

It is important to note that through much of our history in exile, the Jews were connected with MALCHUT, the monarchy, being under the ruler's direct protection and outside the feudal system. This undoubtedly worked against them where peasants massacred Jews as associates of the ruling classes, but often worked in their favor: both the Rambam and Abarbanel were among the many with direct access to the monarch.

This MALCHUT, suggests the Kitvei Ramad Vali, underlies the declaration that we say every month at Kiddush L'vana: DAVID MELECH YISRAEL CHAI V'KAYAM. It is also affirmation of the driving spiritual force of MALCHUT that supports our continuing to exist wherever we are. 📖