

Insights garnered while teaching this class

Yehudah may be filled with guilt and shame after being involved in selling Yosef and deceiving his father. He may feel that he is all washed up, unworthy and worth nothing, not a fitting heir of his father and grandfather and great grandfather. He despairs of himself.

He may be leaving the fold and turning his back on the family, out to leave the past behind and become a Canaanite, God forbid.

Tamar is certainly a Canaanite but is never explicitly called one. Her behavior does not reflect her Canaanite roots at all. She is loyal to her deceased husband even when her father in law is not. She acts for the family and for proper sexual morality even when her father in laws acts sexually like a Canaanite.

The story about a son of Yaacov who acts like a Canaanite and a Canaanite woman who acts like a daughter of Yaacov, thus teaching that you can transcend your blood line for good or for bad. Each individual is free to make his or her own choices.

Tamar bring Yehudah to teshuva. She brings him ultimately back to his family and his heritage. He becomes a penitent who not only acknowledges his sin but also the righteousness of Tamar. He could have burnt her now and answers questions later as it were. As a man's word against that of a woman, he could have completely stonewalled. But he did not and he becomes a baal teshuva and thereby an important role model for us.

Tamar teaches us fidelity to values and loyalty to family even at the expense of social taboos. She is woman of daring and audacity and courage. She takes risks and breaks with precedent and expectations. She is not passive as women are often expected to be. She is about the ends justifying the means.

The following chapters:

Yehudah becomes a leader of his brothers who now does good and leads them to good. He now epitomizes loyalty to family and father and brother. All this is not only to his credit but also to the credit of Tamar.

And in that chapter 39 follows chapter 38, Yehudah's sexual mistakes and eventual rehabilitation is contrasted with the perfect sexual restraint from the outset of Yosef. Yosef is the model of the fully righteous and Yehudah is the model of the righteous penitent. Two different models are set up for us.

After this class it is very fitting to learn the Mei haShiloach