

TORAH THOUGHTS – BE A MAN!!

The haftarah for this week's portion, *Vayechi* opens with King David near death. He advised his son Solomon to follow the Torah, so that the Davidic rule over Israel would continue uninterrupted. (I Kings 2:3-4). But then, David commanded his son to exact revenge on two of his enemies, Yoav and Shimei, and to show favor to the sons of Barzillai (ibid. 5-9).

Once a shepherd whose faith emboldened him to slay a giant, David became a jaded, politically motivated man at his death. What happened?

David was a complex individual. As W. Gunther Plaut, the great German biblical scholar of the Reform movement wrote, David was, “generous and vengeful, spiritual and lustful, desiring peace but waging war. He had a hard life ... elevated to a throne that was never quite secure; a father who had terrible trouble with three of his sons. His last request is not that of a philosopher; it is that of an embattled man.” (The Haftarah Commentary, p.119)

This complexity is summed up in David's opening charge to Solomon, “Be strong, and a man.” (1 Kings 2:1) I think David was stating that a real man is both compassionate and strict. He is willing to confront those who wrong him, but also wishes to be with those who love him. His emotions run the gamut from joy to anger. I don't know which side is “strong” and which is “being a man,” and it doesn't matter because there is no one set definition of manhood! Men can cry, laugh, and scream; ultimately, I hope we will love.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Hillel taught, “In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.” (Pirkei Avot 2:6) Why do you think Hillel said “strive” as opposed to simply “be a man”? How do you apply this dictum in your life?
2. In the Book of Numbers, God was furious with Israel's insolence and threatened to destroy the nation. Moses pleaded with God saying, “Please increase your strength (*yigdal nah koach*)” presumably by holding back divine wrath; indeed, God relented (See the spies episode, chapter 14). How is staying calm when provoked a show of strength? How is this counter to the stereotypical approach to

manhood? Do you think this understanding of being a man is important in today's world?

Shabbat shalom!

Rabbi Pont