

Our complex story of Joseph and his brothers approaches its climax, as we approach the end of Genesis. Joseph has gained power in Egypt, becoming second in command to Pharaoh, effectively the COO. Joseph is also working on reconciling with his brothers. For almost all of us, reconciling remains a current concern. We still need to reconcile with family members, or with dear friends, or with colleagues, or with God. Joseph and Judah provide us with a roadmap for reconciliation.

This week's portion begins with Judah's speech to Joseph. Judah still thinks that he is addressing an Egyptian, a very powerful leader.

Judah makes a courageous step. He not only confesses his own wrongs, but he also offers himself, sacrifices himself, in place of Benjamin. Rabbi Jim Ponet, from Yale Hillel, notes that a crucial word is the first one, *vayigash*, which means to draw near. Judah draws near and in doing so, he takes some risks, which are necessary for intimacy. Without that risk of intimacy, of emotional closeness, the brothers will not be able to reconcile. Judah risks punishment (money, freedom, or life) as a surrogate for the criminal penalties of stealing the goblet. He apologizes, implicitly here and more specifically, earlier, for what he and his brothers did to Joseph.

He especially risks emotional harm, both by exposing his deep love for Benjamin, and by exposing his deep concern for the suffering of his father, Jacob. Judah mentions Jacob more than a dozen times in this speech. That emotional exposure is vital to creating the possibility of intimacy. That exposure is what shakes Joseph. Judah's risk proves worthwhile. Joseph breaks down, reveals himself to his brothers, and brings the family back together.

Parallel to Judah, Joseph takes the risk of exposing his deepest concerns – his love for his father, and his faith in God, whom Joseph credits for all that of his success. Joseph even cries in public, another risky act, for an Egyptian leader. The result of both sides risking intimacy is -- reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not guaranteed. This is the only “happy ending” for siblings in Genesis. All the others, from Cain and Abel to Isaac and Ishmael to Jacob and Esau, end up separated. Even Rachel and Leah do not seem to end up close, as sisters.

Reconciliation requires risky struggles, with limited likelihood of success, but they can be achieved. What Joseph and Judah managed can be applied to our families, friends, colleagues, and God.

We would have to start by focusing on what we share, on our commonalities. We would have to show how deeply we cared. We might need to apologize for what we have done. We might need to accept the apologies of others. We would have to believe in the possibility of regaining that feeling of connectedness, before we would be willing to take the risks of intimacy. Those risks, especially our emotional vulnerability, are major, but if we won't confront them, then we won't reconcile.

We have this wonderful Biblical role model. If Joseph and his brothers, after what they did to each other, can achieve reconciliation, then we certainly can. All we have to do is take the first risk.