

Parshat Vayigash Bridging the Divide

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This week's Parsha begins with the dramatic and emotional showdown between Yehuda and Yosef. The tension-wrought drama is reflective of a more existential struggle between the children of Leah and the children of Rachel over the leadership of Bnei Yisrael. In this instance, the rivalry is manifest in a virtual tug-of-war between Yosef and Yehuda over their brother Binyamin. As we have seen many times before, the narrative of Sefer Breishit sets a paradigm for that which will take place throughout Bnei Yisrael's history (מעשה אבות סימן לבנים). The conflict presented here is a presage of the future schisms that will develop between the children of Rachel, represented by Yosef and later Menashe and Efrayim, and the children of Leah led by Yehuda. What is so interesting is the role that Binyamin plays in this dispute. While Binyamin is completely passive in the story, in a sense a pawn, he nevertheless ends up being the bridge that allows for the reconciliation between Yosef and his brothers. Binyamin's unique standing is partially due to his being the youngest brother which puts him out of contention for the leadership of the family. Not only is Binyamin the youngest brother, but there is also a significant age gap between him and his brothers. His eleven older brothers were born together in a cluster over a period of fourteen years and then there is a seven to nine year gap before the birth of Binyamin. That age differential combined with the tragic circumstances of his mother's death at his birth made him more likely to win the affection of his older brothers. In addition, he was born or grew up after many of the significant and influential events experienced by his brothers. Due to his mother's death, he was never witness to the sibling co-wife rivalry that existed between Rachel and Leah. He was born after Yaakov's difficult encounters with Lavan and Eisav and after the incident with Dina and Sh'chem. Lastly, he was very young when all the tensions between Yosef and his brothers played out and he was under the age of ten when Yosef was sold by his brothers. This puts Binyamin in the enviable position of being a non-threatening sibling beloved to all despite his being a son of Rachel. In addition, the events of this week's Parsha create or enhance a special bond between Yehuda and Binyamin which was on top of the natural bond that existed between Yosef and Binyamin as full siblings. This standing puts Binyamin in a unique position to be both a

transitional bridge between Yosef and Yehuda as well as play a pivotal role in ensuring a reconciliation between them when internecine divisions arise.

Early on, Yosef was thrust into a leadership position by his father Yaakov. Despite numerous setbacks, including antagonizing his brothers with his dreams that landed him being sold to Mitzrayim, Yosef's leadership is extremely resilient. He rises to power in every situation that he finds himself and every misfortune just provides another opportunity for his star to rise. As the viceroy of Egypt, he clearly paves the way for the survival of his family¹ and sets the stage for their relocation to Mitzrayim.² Yehuda's early attempts at leadership were an unmitigated failure. His poor judgment with regards to the selling of Yosef leaves Yaakov and the family suffering for many years. In the immediate aftermath of that incident, the brothers depose Yehuda as their leader.³ He continues to suffer setbacks with the death of his children and the incident with Tamar. His downward spiral only reaches its nadir when Yehuda finally admits his culpability in the affair with Tamar (See Parshat Vayeshev – The Turning Point in Sefer Breishit). From there, Yehuda's successful return to leadership only manifests itself many years later when he successfully convinces Yaakov to allow Binyamin to travel with the brothers to Mitzrayim by taking personal responsibility for Binyamin's well-being and safe return. Yehuda's leadership is further bolstered when Yaakov sends him ahead to Yosef in Mitzrayim to prepare the way for Yaakov's resettlement in Goshen.⁴ Parshat Vayigash sees these two leaders in their prime sparring over Binyamin and then finally reaching its climax with their reconciliation.

The clash and reconciliation between these two leaders leads one to contemplate comparing and contrasting these two models of leadership. Yosef is never the ultimate leader, but rather he is always the right-hand man or the second-in-command. He rises quickly to the top, but faces high turnover in his positions of leadership. His leadership mostly involves interactions with outsiders rather than internal family or Bnei Yisrael affairs. On the other hand, Yehuda's leadership is one of being in the definitive position of responsibility, a place where the buck stops. He learns from his mistakes to become a better leader. His rise to power is slow and steady, but his leadership is enduring. In addition, his leadership is mostly focused on familial or internal Bnei Yisrael matters. Rather than looking

¹ וישלחני אלקים לפניכם לשום לכם שארית בארץ ויהי חיות לכם לפליטה גדולה (בראשית מה, ז)
² ...למה נקרא יוסף ראש, כשם שהראש מלך לכל האברים, כך המלך יוסף על אחיו. מה מציון שכל הגוף הולך אחר הראש, כך יוסף ירד למצרים תחלה ומשך כל זרע אביו אחריו (בראשית רבתי פרשת ויחי עמוד 252)

³ ...ללמד שהורידוהו אחיו מגדולתו כשראו בצרת אביהם... (בראשית רבה וישב פה, ב, ורש"י בראשית לח, א)

⁴ ואת יהודה שלח לפניו אל יוסף להורת לפניו גשנה ויבאו ארצה גשן (בראשית מו, כח)

at these as clashing models of leadership, it might be possible to see them as complementary forms of leadership since they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.⁵ A good example of this positive cooperation is found in the case of the Meraglim. The two spies that go against the grain and become the leaders of the next generation are Yehoshua from the tribe of Efrayim and Calev from the tribe of Yehuda.⁶ While it might be appealing to suggest that these leaders could coexist contemporaneously, it is more likely that they fulfill different roles in the evolution of the nation. In its positive formulation, the pattern that develops and culminates in this week's Parsha and repeats itself throughout Tanach is that Yosef is the pioneer, Binyamin is the bridge and Yehuda is the closer. The negative formulation of this same pattern is that Binyamin is the buffer and reconciler in the tensions between Yehuda and Yosef. In other words, Binyamin plays a pivotal role in the relationship and rivalry between Yosef and Yehuda whether it manifests itself in a constructive or destructive manner.

One place where this is very apparent is in the division of the land between the tribes. In Sefer Yehoshua, despite the fact that the tribe of Yosef was already subdivided into Menashe and Efrayim, the Navi points out that Binyamin is situated in between Yosef and Yehuda. "Yehoshua cast lots for them at Shilo before God, and there Yehoshua apportioned the land amongst Bnei Yisrael according to their divisions. The lot of the tribe of **Binyamin**, by their families, came out first. **The territory of their lot lay between the children of Yehuda and the children of Yosef.**"⁷ Yehuda's apportionment of the land lay south of Binyamin with their border running through Yerushalayim.⁸ The lands of Efrayim and Menashe were situated to the north of Binyamin with their border running just south of Beit El and the Gilgal. So, not only does Binyamin play an arbitrating role and act as a liaison between Yehuda and Yosef, but the placement of the land of their inheritance is a physical buffer between the tribes of Yehuda and Yosef.

The first leader of Bnei Yisrael upon entering the Land of Israel is **Yehoshua Bin Nun** from the tribe of **Efrayim**. He was the protégé of Moshe Rabbeinu and the Torah describes him as "the attendant of Moshe, Yehoshua Bin Nun, a youth, who would not leave the Tent."⁹ Yehoshua leads Bnei Yisrael in their conquest of the Land of Israel and oversees the division of the land between the tribes. While he is eminently successful in his role, he nevertheless does not complete the task as Sefer Yehoshua is replete with statements that Bnei Yisrael did not completely remove the Canaanites from among the lands of their inheritance.¹⁰ In his advanced age, Yehoshua tells the leaders of the nation that they have witnessed all the battles that God has waged on their behalf and while he had allocated the Land of Israel to all the tribes, it still requires that they complete the work that Yehoshua began. They must continue to wage war with the assistance of God to complete the conquest and settlement of the land without leaving pockets of enemies and negative influences in their midst.¹¹ While there were intermittent successes after the passing of Yehoshua, Sefer Shoftim is filled with challenges and failures because of the lack of consistent national leadership and the detrimental impact and difficulties wrought by the residual unconquered nations found in the Land of Israel. The next national leader to come on the scene is **Shaul HaMelech** from the tribe of **Binyamin** who functions as a transitional king until the Davidic dynasty is established.¹² It is the first time since Yehoshua that the entire nation is united under a single leader and Shaul begins the process of bringing a lasting salvation to Bnei Yisrael from their enemies. He wages war against Bnei Yisrael's archenemy Amalek and begins the process of pushing the Plishtim out of the Land of Israel and impeding the advances of Ammon to the east. During his monarchy, the warrior David is a young rising star. Much to Shaul's chagrin, David and Yonatan, Shaul's son, become soul mates¹³ and create a bond of friendship that bridges the divide between Binyamin and Yehuda.¹⁴ That kinship is tragically broken with the death of Shaul and Yonatan in a battle with the Plishtim. After the death of Shaul,

⁵ ובני ראובן בכור ישראל כי הוא הבכור ובחללו יועזי אביו נתנה בכרתו לבני יוסף בן ישראל ולא להתחשש לבכרה: כי יהודה גבר באחיו ולנגיד ממנו והבכרה ליוסף: (דה"א ה,א-ב)
⁶ למטה יהודה קבל בני יוסף: למטה אפרים הושע בן נון: (במדבר יג, ח)
⁷ ויעל גורל מטה בני בנימין למשפחתם ויצא גבול גורלם בין בני יהודה ובין בני יוסף (יהושע יח, יא)
⁸ ועלה הגבול גי בן הנם אל קתף היבואי מנגב היא וירושלם ועלה הגבול אל ראש ההר אשר על פני גי הנם ימה אשר בקצה עמק רפאים צפונה: (יהושע טו, ח) ואת היבואי יושבי וירושלם לא יקלו בני יהודה להורישם וישב היבואי את בני יהודה בירושלם עד היום הזה: (יהושע טו, ג) וירד הגבול אל קצה ההר אשר על פני גי בן הנם אשר בעמק רפאים צפונה וירד גי הנם אל קתף היבואי נגבה וירד עין רגל: (יהושע יח, ט) ויצלע האלף והיבואי היא וירושלם גבעת קרית ערים ארבע עשרה ויחצריהן זאת נחלת בני בנימין למשפחתם: (יהושע יח, כ)
⁹ וידבר יקוק אל משה פנים אל פנים פאשר ידבר איש אל רעהו וישב אל המחנה ומשרתו הושע בן נון נער לא ימיש מתוך האהל (שמות לג, יא) ויקם משה והושע משרתו ויעל משה אל הר האלקים: (שמות כד, יג) ויען הושע בן נון משרת משה מבחרי ויאמר אדוני משה קלאם: (במדבר יא, כח)

¹⁰ לדוגמא: ולא הורישו את־הכנעני היושב בגזר וישב הכנעני בקרב אפרים עד־היום הזה ויהי למס־עבד (יהושע טז, ט) וגם עיני יהושע טו, טג זי, יב־ג זי, יח ויח, ג ויח, כח ועוד
¹¹ ראו הפלתי לכם את־הגוים הנשארים האלה בנתלה לשבטכם מן־הירדן וכל־הגוים אשר הכרתי והגם הגדול מבוא השמש: ויקוק אלקיכם הוא יהדכם מפניכם והוריש אתם מלפניכם וירשתם את־ארצם פאשר דבר יקוק אלקיכם לכם: (יהושע כג, ד-ה) וידוע גדעו כי לא יוסף יקוק אלקיכם להוריש את־הגוים האלה מלפניכם והיו לכם לפח ולמוקש ולשטט בצדכם ולצננים בעיניכם עד־אבדכם מעל האדמה הטובה הזאת אשר נתן לכם יקוק אלקיכם: (יהושע כג, יג) וגם עיני שם בכל הפרק
¹² ועיני שאול היה, כי בעבור שדבר שאלת המלכות בעת ההיא נתעב אצל הקדוש ברוך הוא, לא רצה להמליך עליהם מן השבט אשר לו המלכות שלא יסור ממנו לעולמים, ונתן להם מלכות שעה...ולפיכך לא נתן להם מלכות של קיימא... (רמב"ן בראשית מט, י)
¹³ והי ככלתו לדבר אל שאול ונפש והונתו נקשרה בנפש דוד ויאבהו: והונתו כנפשו (שמואל א יח, א)
¹⁴ ויאמר והונתו לדוד לך לשלום אשר נשבוענו שנינו אנהו בשם יקוק לאמר יקוק יהיה ויבי יבין ויבין זרעי ויבין זרעך עד־עולם (שמואל א כ, מב)

Yehuda's inheritance. Once again here, there is a progression by which the presence of God is first hosted in **Efrayim** (שילה), then the center of worship shifts to **Binyamin** (נב וגבעון) and eventually resides with **Yehuda** (ירושלים). Yerushalayim becomes the unified political and religious capital of the Davidic dynasty and its position on the dividing line between Binyamin and Yehuda makes it a city of unification as can be seen in Divrei Hayamim where Yerushalayim is described as a city housing "the children of Yehuda, the children of Binyamin and the children of Menashe and Efrayim."³⁰

The pivotal role Binyamin plays in the creation of the monarchy and the political and religious capital of Yerushalayim is even more pronounced when things go awry. When the northern Kingdom of Yisrael secedes from the Kingdom of Yehuda in the time of Rechavam, king of Yehuda, the person appointed to be the king of the north is Yeravam Ben N'vat. Yeravam was from the tribe of Efrayim³¹ and was appointed by Shlomo HaMelech to "oversee the work of all the forced labor from the House of Yosef."³² After escaping to exile in Mitzrayim due to his insubordination and subversion during the reign of Shlomo HaMelech, he returns to a hero's welcome when Rechavam inherits the throne from his father Shlomo.³³ Naturally all the tribes aside from Yehuda gravitate towards him and anoint him as the king of the northern Kingdom of Yisrael as was predicted by the prophet Achiya HaShiloni.³⁴ Amazingly, the tribe of Binyamin remains loyal to the Kingdom of Yehuda³⁵ the reason of which is prophesied in name of God, "But one tribe shall remain his – for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel."³⁶ God sees the tribe of Binyamin as being essential to the survival of the Davidic line and the city of Yerushalayim. Had Binyamin joined forces with the northern Kingdom of Yisrael, there would have been no chance of reconciliation between Yehuda and Yisrael (Yosef). All the children of Rachel would have been unified in their opposition to the Kingdom of Yehuda and there would be no one left to bridge the divide. Keeping the city of Yerushalayim unified

over the shared territory of Binyamin and Yehuda ensured that the Kingdom of Yisrael did not feel completely disenfranchised from the religious center and preserved hope of a mending of the rift. Binyamin, the essential player in creating the transition between Yosef and Yehuda, is indispensable when it comes to unifying Bnei Yisrael. Therefore it was essential for Binyamin to remain with the political and religious Kingdom of Yehuda so that their bond with Yehuda (like the bond created between Yehuda and Binyamin in Miketz and Vayigash) can be unified with their natural brotherly bond with Efrayim and Menashe (Yosef) in the Kingdom of Yisrael and bring about the prophecy that is read in this week's Haftarah. "And you, O mortal, take a stick and write on it, 'Of Yehuda and Bnei Yisrael associated with him'; and take another stick and write on it, 'Of Yosef – the stick of Efrayim – and all the House of Yisrael associated with him.' Bring them close to each other, so that they become one stick, joined together in your hand...and you shall declare to them: Thus said the Lord God: I am going to take Bnei Yisrael from among the nations they have gone to, and gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them a single nation in the land, on the hills of Israel, and one king shall be king of them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms...My servant David shall be king over them; there shall be one shepherd for all of them. They shall follow My rules and faithfully obey My laws. Thus they shall remain in the land which I gave to My servant Yaakov and in which your fathers dwelt; they and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, with My servant David as their prince for all time."³⁷ We should merit to see the fulfillment of this prophecy and the fulfillment of the words of Chazal that a similar plan to the paradigm outlined above will play out in the Messianic times with the arrival first of Mashiach Ben Yosef followed by Mashiach Ben David.³⁸

Shabbat Shalom

³⁰ וירושלים ישבו מן בני יהודה ומן בני בנימין ומן בני אפרים ומנשה (דה"א ט, ג) \\ וגם עיין יומא יב. והאי תנא סבר ירושלים לא נתחלקה לשבטים

³¹ וירבעם בן נבט אפרתי מן הצורה ושם אמו צרועה אשה אלמנה עבד לשלמה וירם: ד' במלך (מלכים א, יא, כו) \\ ועיין ברד"ק שם אפרתי - משבט אפרים

³² והאיש ירבעם גבור חיל ויגרא שלמה את הנער כי עשה מלאכה הוא ויפקד אתו לקל סבל בית יוסף (מלכים א, יא, כח)

³³ והי' כשמע כל ישראל כי שב ירבעם וישלחו ויקראו אתו אל העדה וימליכו אתו על כל ישראל לא היה אחרי בית דוד זולתי שבט יהודה לבדו (מלכים א, יב, כ)

³⁴ מלכים א, יא, כט-לט

³⁵ וגם בשיבת ציון בזמן כורש כתוב: ויקומו ראשי האבות ליהודה ובנימן והכהנים והלויים לכל העיר האלקים את רוחו לעלות לבנות את בית יקוק אשר בירושלים (עזרא א, ה)

³⁶ והשבט האחד יהיה לו למען עבדי דוד ולמען ירושלים העיר אשר בחרתי בה מפל שבטי ישראל (שם יא, לב)

³⁷ ואתה בן אדם קח לך עץ אחד וכתב עליו ליהודה ולבני ישראל חבירו ולקח עץ אחד וכתוב עליו ליוסף עץ אפרים וכל בית ישראל חבירו: וקרב אתם אחד אל אחד לך לעץ

אחד והיו לאחדים בידך... ודבר אליהם כה אמר אדני יקוק הנה אני לקח את בני ישראל מבין הגוים אשר הלכו שם וקבצתי אתם מסביב והבאתי אותם אל אדמתם: ועשיתי אתם לגוי אחד בארץ בהרי ישראל ומלך אחד יהיה לכלם למלך ולא יהיו עוד לשני גוים ולא יחצו עוד לשתי ממלכות עוד... ועבדי דוד מלך עליהם ורעה אחד יהיה לכלם ובמשפטי ילכו וחקתי ישמרו ועשו אותם: וישבו על הארץ אשר נתתי לעבדי ליעקב אשר ישבו בה אבותיכם וישבו עליה הנה ובנייהם ובני בנייהם עד עולם ודוד עבדי נשיא להם לעולם (יחזקאל לז, טז-יז כא-כב וכד-כה) \\ וגברתי את בית יהודה ואת בית יוסף אושיע והושבותים כי רחמתיים והיו כאשר לא זנחתיים כי אני יקוק אלקיהם ואענם: (זכריה י, 1)

³⁸ משלחי רגל השור זה משיח בן יוסף שנמשל לשור, וחמור זה משיח בן דוד שנאל עני ורוכב על חמור (זכריה ט) כשיבאו על אותה שעה הוא אומר ומעולם לא שמעו ולא האזינו, עין לא ראתה אלהים זולתך וגו' (תנחומא בראשית א) \\ והוא יבא בראש לעתיד לבא, זה משיח בן יוסף שיבא תחלה למשיח בן דוד (בראשית רבתי יוחי עמוד 252)