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Parshat HaShavua  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

## **PARASHAT VAYIGASH**

### **Yosef and Yehuda**

**By Rav Yaakov Medan**

At the beginning of our parasha, Yehuda and Yosef clash over Binyamin's fate. The Midrash, in addressing this tension, teaches: "They [the brothers] said: Kings are negotiating with each other; of what concern is it to us?" (Bereishit Rabba 93, 2).

If the brothers refer to Yehuda and Yosef as "kings," these two tribes must clearly be special in some way. This will be the subject of our shiur.

A.

"These are the generations of Yaakov; Yosef was seventeen years old when he was a shepherd with his brothers..." (37:2)

The commentators have a difficult time with this expression at the beginning of parashat Vayeshev, for a list of Yaakov's children appears nowhere in the parasha. Various explanations have been offered to resolve this problem. Among the better known are the following:

- i. "Generations" (toldot) is meant here in the sense of "events of his life," as in "What the day will bring forth (yeiled)" (Ibn Ezra, Radak, Seforno, Abarbanel, Malbim and others);
- ii. "Toldot" refers here to "sons," and the sons of Yaakov are indeed Yosef and his brothers, who are referred to in the parasha, although not listed by name (Ramban, in his first explanation);
- iii. The heading ("the generations of Yaakov") refers to chapter 46: "These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt," where Yaakov's children and grandchildren are all listed (Rashbam, and Ramban in his second explanation);
- iv. The word "dwelled" in the previous verse is carried into this verse; what the Torah means is, "These are the DWELLING PLACES of the generations of Yaakov" (Rashi).

I shall not discuss in detail the difficulties presented by each of these interpretations; suffice it to say that I find them unsatisfactory. I prefer to adopt the midrash quoted by

Rashi, with a slight change which, in my view, enables it to sit more squarely with the literal sense of the text:

"These are the generations of Yaakov: Yosef...' - What the text should have said here is, 'These are the generations of Yaakov: Reuven...' Why, then, does it say Yosef? To tell us that all that happened to one of them likewise happened to the other." (Bereishit Rabba 84:6)

The Midrash regards Yosef the most important of Yaakov's offspring, for it was to Yosef that Yaakov passed down "the image of his face," and similar events happened to both of them (see Rashi).

In my understanding, the "generations of Yaakov" are Yosef and Yehuda, to whose lives and families the next few chapters of Sefer Bereishit are devoted. It appears that this is the fundamental explanation for why the story of the establishment of Yehuda's family is interwoven with the establishment of Yosef's family. The two stories even parallel one another:

1. Yehuda: Ill-fated marriage to Bat-Shua

Yosef: Ill-fated relationship with the wife of Potifar

2. Yehuda: True, lasting marriage to Tamar

Yosef: True, lasting marriage to Osnat

3. Yehuda: Birth of Peretz and Zerach

Yosef: Birth of Menashe and Efraim

4. Yehuda: the younger bursts forth (paratz) and takes the birthright

Yosef: the younger is blessed with power and royalty

## B.

The story of Yaakov's "generations," then, concludes with chapter 41, and the beginning of the years of famine, when the respective families of Yehuda and of Yosef are fully established.

I have proceeded from the assumption that just as each of the initial matriarchs - Sara and Rivka - had one son who was most important, so did the latter matriarchs - Yaakov's wives. Leah's most important son was Yehuda, while Rachel's most important son was Yosef. The fact that Yaakov had two principal heirs - Yehuda and Yosef, rather than one principal heir, as his forefathers had, results from Yaakov having had two wives of full status (as opposed to maidservants or concubines), while Avraham and Yitzhak each had only one wife of full status.

Let us elaborate on this matter of Yosef and Yehuda as being the most important of Yaakov's sons. Some of the points that make Yosef and Yehuda stand out among their brothers are well known; the following is a brief summary of them:

1. After Reuven's violation of his father's privacy, the birthright was given to Yosef, and the leadership to Yehuda. Only Yosef (aside from Reuven) is worthy of the birthright, since only he is a firstborn of a wife of Yaakov. The leadership, on the other hand, passes naturally to the eldest among the brothers. Since Shimon and Levi had lost their chances of being considered worthy candidates because of what they had done in Shekhem, the leadership passed to Yehuda. The verse tells us: "...Because he violated his father's bed, his birthright was given to the children of Yosef, son of Israel - but not to have the birthright attributed to him by genealogy. For Yehuda prevailed over his brothers; the chief ruler came from him, but the birthright was given to Yosef" (Divrei ha-Yamim I 5:1-2).

2. We have already mentioned that even the brothers themselves (according to the Midrash) referred to Yosef and Yehuda as "kings." Yaakov also recognized this; he chose to send Yehuda, specifically, to Yosef, "to show the way before him to Goshen" (46:28).

3. When the kingdom split, following the death of King Shelomo, Rechavam and his descendants, of the house of David, ruled in Jerusalem, while Yeravam, of the house of Yosef, ruled in Tirtza. Later on, too, most of Yeravam's successors - up until the Destruction of the Temple - were from the house of Yosef, and the kingdom of the ten tribes is very often referred to by the prophets by the name "Efraim."

4. The Mishkan resided in the portion of Yosef and the Temple in the portion of Yehuda. The tribe of Binyamin was part of both of them - both in Jerusalem and in the strip emerging from their portion towards Shilo.

5. In the days to come, the prophecy of Yechezkel (chapter 37) is destined to be fulfilled, concerning the joining of the branch of Yehuda and the branch of Efraim into a single royal house. According to tradition and Kabbala, two messiahs are destined to arise: Messiah son of Yosef and Messiah son of David.

What is common to all of these points is that all are related to the royalty and to the Temple. These points are the basis for the tradition that the two messiahs that will arise in the days to come will be from the descendants of Yosef and of Yehuda.

### C.

In this section, I shall address the importance of Yosef and Yehuda from other perspectives, not only that of royalty:

1. The Torah refers to the tribes as "Yehuda and his brothers" (44:14) and "Yosef's brothers" (42:6). Nowhere is the group ever referred to as "Reuven and his brothers," "Dan's brothers," etc.

2. The details that the Torah provides concerning Yehuda's family and Yosef's family are far more numerous than those provided with regard to all the other brothers and their families. We know that Yehuda's wife's name was Tamar, and that Yosef's wife's name was Osnat. We are also told of the circumstances in which Yehuda married Tamar, and of the circumstances surrounding Yosef's marriage to Osnat. Likewise, we know the reasons for the names that Yehuda chooses for his sons and the circumstances of their birth, as well as the reasons for the names of Yosef's sons and when they were born.

From this perspective, Yosef and Yehuda resemble the forefathers, concerning whom the Torah details the circumstances of their marriages, the names of their wives, the circumstances of their children's births, and the reasons for the names given to them. As for the rest of the tribes, we have no idea what Yissakhar's wife's name was, or why Zevulun called his children Sered, Elon and Yachle'el.

3. The phenomenon discussed in (2.) may be related to another one: all the brothers married Canaanite wives [1], deviating thereby from the practice of the forefathers and from the oath that Avraham made his servant swear: "You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell" (24:3). The only brothers who did not marry Canaanite wives were Yosef and Yehuda. Admittedly, Yehuda's first marriage was to the daughter of a Canaanite (38:2), but the failure of this marriage (the premature death of his wife and the death of her two sons, both childless) appears to prove that it was not proper for him to have married a Canaanite wife, for he was the most important of the "generations of Yaakov." This may be the reason why the Canaanite woman's name is not mentioned explicitly, nor are we told about the circumstances of their marriage, the birth of their children or the meanings of their names [2]. In marrying the daughter of Shua, Yehuda resembled the rest of his brothers, not Yosef.

When Yehuda married the daughter of Shua, the Torah says, "Yehuda DESCENDED from among his brothers" (38:1) - i.e., his status became diminished; only when he married Tamar did he regain the level of "the generations of Yaakov" [3]. Yehuda and Yosef, then, are the only two sons who establish families like the forefathers.

4. Like the forefathers, Yehuda and Yosef are the only two of Yaakov's children concerning whom the Torah recounts at length what happened during their lives, and especially the challenges they faced. They are the only brothers whose good deeds are recorded in the Torah: Yosef is depicted as a righteous man for standing firm against the advances of Potifar's wife, while Yehuda is described as stumbling and later repenting in the story of Tamar. Likewise, Yosef is righteous for forgiving his brothers, while Yehuda stumbles in selling Yosef but then repents and is ready to sacrifice himself for Binyamin [4].

5. The special Divine providence that rests upon Yehuda and Yosef seems to be hinted at in their very names. These two are the only ones among Yaakov's children who have God's Name within their own names: Yehuda's name includes the original form of God's name [5], as does Yosef's name in its form in Tehillim 81 ('Yehosef'). Their names are also the only ones that include an inherent appeal to God: Yosef - in the prayer, "May God add (yosef) for me another son," and Yehuda - in praise (hoda'ah) to God.

6. It is not difficult to see that in Yaakov's will to his sons (chapter 49), he blesses his other sons in brief language, while the blessings to Yehuda and Yosef are lengthy [6]. It is likewise clear that the size of the inheritance of Yehuda and of Yosef, larger than that of their brothers, is directly linked to the "size" of the blessing they received from their father.

#### D.

We shall now turn our attention to some more general issues, related not only to Yehuda and Yosef personally, but to the tribes that descended from them. By their nature, the scope of these issues exceeds the bounds of Sefer Bereishit.

1. The tribe of Yehuda and the combined House of Yosef are the largest of the tribes in both of the censuses that are conducted in the desert.
2. In the war against Amalek (Shemot 17), four leaders emerge: Moshe and Aharon - the permanent leaders, and also Chur of the tribe of Yehuda (at the top of the mountain) and Yehoshua of the tribe of Efraim (on the battlefield). Throughout the forty years in the desert, we find no other instance of additional or auxiliary leaders on the national level.
3. In the story of the spies, the only two who do not fail are Yehoshua (tribe of Efraim) and Kalev (tribe of Yehuda).
4. In addition to their inheritances in the land, Yehuda and Yosef are each given a special city from among the cities of the forefathers, in special circumstances. Moreover, both earn their special city even before they receive their inheritance.

Yosef is given Shekhem, as Yaakov tells him - "I have given you one portion (shekhem ehad) more than your brothers" (48:22). Apparently, Yosef earns Shekhem as reward for his courage for going off to Shekhem at his father's bidding, although he is aware of the dangers awaiting him.

Kalev, the prince of the tribe of Yehuda, is awarded the city of Chevron for his courage in going there at the bidding of Moshe, although he knew of the dangers involved in this mission and despite the four giants that threatened the city [7]. It is in Chevron that the royal house of Yehuda starts out (Shemuel II 2), while the royalty of the house of Yosef begins in Shekhem (Melakhim I 12-13).

5. We have already noted that the inheritances of Yehuda and of Yosef are considerably larger than those of their brothers; they occupy most of the area of Eretz Yisrael. It should also be noted that in Sefer Yehoshua, their inheritances are given special attention: we find a list of their cities, their borders, and many other details. The number of verses devoted to their inheritances attests to this fact [8].

We may also note that the children of Yehuda and the children of Yosef were the only ones who possessed "the inheritance at its [proper] time" - at the time when they were commanded to conquer and possess the land. The children of Gad and Reuven carry out a "hurried inheritance," before its time; they are rebuked by Moshe and are even punished by being the first of the tribes to go into exile. The other seven tribes have a

"delayed inheritance," they are rebuked by Yehoshua (chapter 18) for their feebleness, and are punished by being deprived of their inheritance.

It should also be remembered that stories of selfless love for Eretz Yisrael are found only among the children of Yehuda - who demand to receive Chevron and to conquer it (Yehoshua 14) - and the children of Yosef, who claim for themselves an additional inheritance (Yehoshua 17). Yehoshua also makes mention of the love of the women who inherited the land: the daughters of Tzelofhad, of the tribe of Menashe, and Ikhsa, daughter of Kalev, from the tribe of Yehuda.

#### E.

Let us conclude with the two messiahs: Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David. The image of these two figures may be seen in Yehoshua (as Mashiach ben Yosef) and David (as Mashiach ben David). The primary task of the king is to destroy the seed of Amalek. The war against Amalek was initiated by Yehoshua in Refidim (Shemot 17) and was successfully completed by David (Shemuel I 30), unlike Shaul, who failed in this respect. Yehoshua, who initiated the war, was ultimately the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael. David, who concluded the war, was ultimately the conqueror of Jerusalem - may it be established and rebuilt speedily in our days [9].

#### NOTES:

[1] This is the opinion of R. Nechemia, which seems more likely than the interpretation of R. Yehuda, who maintains that the twin daughters were born with them. According to R. Yehuda, we must assume (as Rashi does) that all the women died at the age of about forty, prior to the descent to Egypt, and therefore they are not listed there (see Rashi on 37:35).

[2] The third son - Shela - has a separate unit devoted to him. It is possible that we do have an explanation for his name (see Ramban), but the scope of the shiur does not allow for elaboration.

[3] I elaborated a little on this in my article in Megadim #2 (<http://www.herzog.ac.il/main/megadim/2medan.html>). The story of this marriage may be regarded as a parallel to the stories of Sara and Hagar, Yishmael and Yitzhak, but I shall not elaborate here.

[4] I expanded on this idea in the above-mentioned article in Megadim 2, and in my shiur last week.

[5] I assume that in order to express the idea of praise and thanks (as Yehuda's name is explained at his birth), the name did not necessarily need the three first letters as they appear.

[6] Admittedly, Yaakov speaks at length also to Shimon and Levi, but what he conveys there is not a blessing. It should also perhaps be mentioned that among the six tribes that are compared to various creatures in the blessings of Yaakov and Moshe, Yehuda (lion) and Yosef (ox) are the only ones whose representative animals form part of the basis of the celestial chariot (Yechezkel chapter 1).

[7] See my article in Megadim 10, where I elaborate on this.

[8] Concerning this point, we may say the same of the inheritance of Binyamin.

[9] There are many other points that are unique to Yehuda and Yosef; I have omitted them here for the sake of brevity.

Translated by Kaeren Fish