



## 5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Vayeshev / פרשת וישב

### **Yedid Hashem: Binyamin's Unique Zechut**

The conflict between *Yosef* and his brothers is a jarring and painful chapter in our history. In many ways, we still suffer from the consequences of *mechirat Yosef* to this day. Rav Elchanan Wasserman tz"l is known to have suggested that the bloodied-coat deception employed by the brothers was a spiritual antecedent for the vicious blood libels spread against the Jewish people throughout history.

The tension between *Yosef* and his brothers transcends mundane and trivial sibling rivalry. A close read of *Bereishit* reveals a simple, yet endlessly anguishing explanation for the brothers' behavior. The *Shevatim* saw that *Yosef*, son of the favored wife of *Yaakov*, was himself favored by their father. *Yosef* then begins to dream about them; he dreams of economic and celestial dominance, clearly representing their eventual submission as they bow before him.

The *Shevatim* were not stupid. They knew what happened to their great-uncle *Yishmael*, son of the secondary wife of *Avraham*. כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע. *Yitzchak* carried on the legacy of *Avraham* and merited the awesome responsibility of God's eternal covenant. *Yishmael* was cast away. They also are well aware of the fate of Uncle *Eisav*, the brother who was also thrown aside and found unworthy of carrying on the legacy of *Avraham*. But it was obvious to the *Shevatim* why *Yishmael* and *Eisav* were unworthy of being part of the eternal covenant with the *Ribbono Shel Olam*.

The sons of *Leah*, *Bilhah*, and *Zilpah* knew that they were not guilty of the same mistakes as their uncles. They were worthy of being part of *Bnei Yisrael*. But along comes the dreamer, son of the favored wife of *Yaakov*, seemingly prophesizing of them eventually joining the ranks of those ejected out of the *brit Avraham*. *Yosef's* dreams are awfully reminiscent of the *beracha* that *Yaakov* received from *Yitzchak*, " הוה גביר לאחריך וישתחוו לך בני אמך יוה." *Yosef* also dreams of his brothers bowing to him, ותשתחוין לאלמתי.

The brothers are terrified of losing the only thing they cherish; they fear being broken off from the eternity of *Yisrael*. In their desperation to maintain their connection to the Rock of Israel and the Land of their forefathers, they tragically try to remove the problem by selling *Yosef* away.

This sale created a deep spiritual rift that ironically disqualified them from an essential role for the Jewish people. The *Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah Vayechi 99:1)* describes that when *Shlomo HaMelech* made known his intention to build the temple, the various tribes rushed forth and begged for the opportunity to host the House of Hashem. "Let it be built within my borders!" *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* responds, " כולכים שבטים כולכים צדיקים, you are all righteous...but you were all partners in the sale of *Yosef*." No matter how righteous, the mystical breakdown between the brothers, between *Leah* and *Rachel*, made the Temple's construction impossible. After all, an essential role of *Yerushalayim* and the *Makom HaMikdash* is the capacity to unite all



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of *Klal Yisrael* into a seamless organic unit. Those who tragically betrayed a brother to the land of *Mitzrayim* cannot host such a place.

However, there is one other *shevet* that never partook in the mutual distrust and betrayal represented by *mechirat Yosef*. While *Binyamin* was also a son of *Rachel*, he never expressed future dominance over the brothers. Even as his father bestows him with unique favor, the other brothers also respond in kind with extra devotion to him. *Binyamin* was uniquely situated to be the *shevet* that could host the *Makom HaMikdash* and bind together all of *Klal Yisrael*. His ancestral portion was naturally chosen to host the *Shechinah* in the holiest sanctum of Jerusalem.

As we discussed last week, the *Makom HaMikdash* and its sanctity are particularly effective for showing every Jew, and *Shevet*, that they are an essential piece of the Rock of *Yisrael*. How befitting that *Binyamin*, who never caused anyone to doubt their place among the שבטי י-ה, should merit to possess it.

Hundreds of years later, *Binyamin* again proved his impartiality in the rivalry between the brothers, reaffirming his right to the choicest portion of Jerusalem. When *Yeravam ben Nevat* rebels against *Rechavam ben Shlomo* and is crowned as king in *Shechem*, ten tribes follow this descendant of *Ephraim* as he split the northern kingdom away from *Shevet Yehudah* and Jerusalem. Only *Binyamin* remains with *Shevet Yehudah*. How ironic: when *Yehudah* advised selling *Yosef* away, all of the brothers except for *Binyamin* obliged and followed him. Now, when *Yosef* advises splitting away from *Yehudah*, all of the brothers follow, except for Binyamin.

May we merit to speedily witness the *Shechinah* rest in the portion of *Binyamin* again.





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