

LOVE CONQUERS ALL

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Binyamin, youngest of Yakov's children, father of 10 sons, progenitor of a tribe, appears to be the "apple of his family's eye." Who was he and why was he so important?

Yakov did not want to send him to Egypt. Had it not been for the increasing hunger in the famine's 2nd year he would never have allowed Binyamin to leave the protection of his home and watchful eye.

When Binyamin was made the focus of Yoseph's manipulations and machinations, the Brothers banded together to defend him. Keep in mind that Binyamin was already 30 years old and the father of 10 sons.

In this week's Parsha Yehudah offered (44:33) to become Yoseph's slave, instead of Binyamin. Yehudah's stated concern was not Binyamin himself but the aging Yakov. "His soul is bound up with his soul. he will die. you will have brought him in sorrow to the grave. lest I see the evil that will befall my father!"

Why was Binyamin any more important to Yakov than the other brothers? If Binyamin had not had his own children it would make sense that his "not returning home" would spell certain disaster for the future of the Jewish nation. Yakov / Yisroel would have been rightfully concerned about the well being of his child and rightfully concerned about the future of the nation that had to emanate from 12 sons. However, Binyamin had more sons than any of his brothers. His absence or even death would not have spelled disaster for the nation. True, it would have been painful and sorrowful for the family, but not disastrous for the nation. Life would have gone on and Binyamin's ten sons have grown to become the tribe of Binyamin!

In fact, we could argue that Yehudah, as the recognized leader and king of the brothers, should have been more important to Yakov than Binyamin. He was far more active than Binyamin in guaranteeing the survival of the family. In this week's Parsha Yakov dispatched Yehudah to "prepare the way" for the families arrival. Obviously, Yehudah's involvement was more crucial than Binyamin's! The Torah doesn't even record a single action or statement attributed to Binyamin! Not so with Yehudah!

The most obvious approach to understanding Binyamin's importance is to recognize his emotional importance within the family. He was the youngest. He was the single remaining child of Rachel. He was the one brother who had not participated in the sale of Yoseph. Given the guilt that the Brother's

carried regarding their actions toward Yoseph and the pain they had caused Yakov, Binyamin took on far greater significance than otherwise would have been. Their love and concern for him and their acceptance that he was Yakov's favorite were fueled by that guilt.

However, it is important to remember that the story of Yoseph and his brothers is far more than a story of family dynamics, whether good or bad. The story is about twelve uniquely gifted and righteous individuals struggling to create a cohesive whole that would maximize their individual and collective potentials in service to G-d and humanity. How did Binyamin fit into that collective whole and what part did he play in maximizing their individual and collective potentials?

In last week's Parsha the Shem Meshmuel explained that Yoseph and Binyamin shared a mission. As the two sons of Rachel their destinies were similar. In describing Yakov's relationship with Rachel the Torah used the word Ahavah, love. (29:18) "And Yakov loved Rachel"

As we have explained in past issues of the Rabbi's Notebook, The children born to Rachel were responsible for the external strength of the nation. Whereas Leah's children included Layvie and Yehudah, priesthood and kingship, representing the inner structure of the nation, Rachel's children included Yoseph who would survive alone in Egypt and rise to such prominence that he became responsible for feeding the entire world. Rachel's strength, and therefore Yoseph and Binyamin's strengths were in the external structure of the nation.

Part of the external structure involved creating an environment wherein which the individual brothers would have a chance to grow and develop, and it was the job of Yoseph and then Binyamin to do just that. They had to ensure that the Brothers would stay together and become as one. Yoseph understood this because Yakov had shared it with him during his first 17 years as Yakov's prized student. That is why he became the resented "do-gooder" always running to Yakov and relating his concerns for their individual development.

When Yakov dispatched Yoseph to his brothers the mission was to "look into the welfare" (37:14) of the brothers. Considering that they were all older than Yoseph and had already proven themselves very capable of caring for themselves (Dina), we can wonder why Yakov sent Yoseph in the first place. I would like to suggest that Yakov sent Yoseph to do exactly what he was supposed to do as the son of Rachel. He was supposed to create an environment of Ahavah - love and Shelaimut - wholeness. Yakov sent Yoseph to apologize to his brothers for the approach he had taken until then. True, his intentions may have been noble but his methods had backfired! It was time to assume his rightful role as a leader that would ensure the healthy growth and development of the collective whole!

G-d had other ideas for Yoseph and the story continued. With Yoseph being held in reserve till that time that he would become responsible for the physical well being of the collective Jewish people, the job of being Rachel's son fell to Binyamin. It was Binyamin who would hold the brothers together while they grew individually and collectively into their destinies.

Binyamin was different than Yoseph because he represented a different strength and method for unifying the nation. At first he did so by being the youngest. As such, the brothers were unified in their sense of love and protection for their youngest brother. However, soon enough Binyamin matured and his contribution had to become far more substantial.

Binyamin was the only of the brothers to have been born in Canaan. Binyamin was the only of the brothers not responsible for Yoseph's sale into slavery. It was in Binyamin's portion that the Holy of Holies would one day be built.

There are two ways to create unity. Unity can be achieved by encompassing the individual components in a single protective shell. The other way is to bind each component to a single central part. Yoseph represented the encompassing of the whole in a protective shell. He was to be the Mashbir - the provider who would reorganize all of Egypt so that the Brothers and their families would be able to withstand the assimilative lure of Egyptian amorality. He placed them in Goshen, the first Jewish ghetto, and elevated them to the level of the Egyptian priesthood, so that they would remain whole and apart from the rest of Egypt.

Binyamin on the other hand represented the second method. As the phrase states, "In my heart I will build a sanctuary for the glory of G-d's honor." The Holy of Holies destined to be in Binyamin's portion represented the strength of Binyamin as the son of Rachel. It is the center to which each and every Jew is personally and collectively bound. It is the Mizrach (east) toward which we pray three times a day and evoke the memories of Kohanim (priests) and Leviyim (Levites) doing the Avodah (Temple service) and singing the songs of G-d.

Binyamin's strength was in giving purpose to his brothers. He was the rarest of them all because he was the only remaining son of Rachel. He needed to be cherished just as every single Jew must be cherished. Each of us is ultimately the intended of G-d with a unique mission and purpose that only we can provide. Binyamin became a symbol of their singular unified resolve to never again do to themselves what they had done to Yoseph. Yoseph was irreplaceable just as Binyamin was irreplaceable. How great their regret, how profound must have been their shame!

Binyamin also represented the potential for Teshuvah (repentance). Just as the Holy of Holies would become the focus of the nations' repentance so too did Binyamin become the focus of the Brother's Teshuvah. It was not by coincidence that Yoseph decided to focus his machinations on Binyamin. Yoseph needed to know whether or not the Brothers had gained an understanding of the gravity of their actions in having removed him from their midst. If they could appreciate Binyamin they would realize what they had done when they sold Yoseph!

Yoseph indicates this in this week's Parsha after he revealed himself to his brothers. It states, (45:14) "He fell on upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept." Rashi quotes the Gemara in Megilah ((17b), "He cried for the two Temples that stood in the portion of Binyamin and were destined to be destroyed."

This also explains why Yoseph revealed himself to the other Brothers in Binyamin's presence (there are Medrashim that say otherwise). Rashi says that Yoseph cleared out all those who were present before revealing himself to his brothers so that they would not be shamed. Yet, until that moment Binyamin did not know that the other brothers were responsible for Yoseph's disappearance! Why wasn't Yoseph concerned that they would be shamed in front of Binyamin? Furthermore, we see no mention of recriminations on Binyamin's part toward his brothers for what they had done to Yoseph!

Binyamin represented the center that held them together. Binyamin represented the ability of every Jew to do Teshuvah, especially in relation to sins that are "Between a person and his friend." (The story of Pilegish B'Givon) Therefore, the revelation had to take place in his presence and of course he would not harbor resentment against them! Their Teshuvah was equally toward Binyamin as it was toward Yoseph, and equally accepted by both of them!

The verse in Mishlei (Proverbs) states (10:12), ".But love covers all offenses." The Ralbbag explained that this refers to the victim of an offense who responds to the sinner with love rather than recriminations. Such a person promotes even greater love within society. As the children of Rachel, the beloved of Yakov, Yoseph and Binyamin were endowed with the quality and strength of love. For Yoseph it was expressed in his unyielding Emunah (trust) that all that had transpired had been for the benefit of the Jewish people. For Binyamin it was expressed in his quiet acceptance of his brother's Teshuvah and the gift of being reunited with Yoseph.

Tenth of Tevet

This coming Sunday, January 4, will be the Fast of the 10th of Tevet. This is the second fast-day commemorating the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. The fast begins about 72 minutes before sunrise and concludes 45 minutes after sunset.

Eating and drinking are prohibited, but should there be the need for an exemption due to illness or health related conditions contact your local Rabbi for possible consideration. Except for Yom Kippur which is Biblical, the other five fast-days are Rabbinically mandated. The Rabbis imposed the fast on all adults, both male and female. Contrary to popular thought, women are equally obligated to fast.

The Rest of the Story

Five tragic events occurred during the month of Tevet.

1. 1st of Tevet: In the year 3319 - 442 b.c.e., Yicchoniah and the great scholars and prophets were exiled to Bavel.
2. 8th of Tevet: In the year 3515 -- 246 b.c.e., the Torah, as per the demand of Talmi, was translated into Greek (Septuagint) by 72 different Torah Scholars. His intention was to find inconsistencies that would undermine the power of the Rabbinic tradition. Instead, every one of

the 72 translated the Torah in the exact same manner. The translation was completed on the 8th of Tevet and Chazal compared it to the day on which the Golden Calf was worshipped.

3. 9th of Tevet: In the year 3448 - 313 b.c.e., the great Ezra Hasofer died.
4. 10th of Tevet: In the year 3336 - 425 b.c.e., Neevuchadnetzar began the 2 and 1/2 year siege against Yerushalayim that ended in the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash.
5. 23rd of Tevet: In the year 5257 - 1497 c.e., the Jews of Portugal were expelled. Among those expelled was Rav Avraham Zacuto who had been consulted on astronomy and navigation by the explorer Vasco da Gama before a trip to India. Rav Yitzchak Karo, Uncle of Rav Yoseph Karo, was also among the refugees.

(The Jewish Timeline, Rabbi Mattis Kantor)

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