

Parashat Vayigash

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JUDAH'S LEADERSHIP (2)

In the first part of this lesson (*Parashot Vayeshev-Mikketz-Vayigash*) we examined the contrasting behavior and leadership styles of Reuben and Judah during the sale of Joseph. This week we will further compare their leadership styles, as reflected in their attempts to convince Jacob to send Benjamin with them to Egypt. We will also explore Judah's leadership qualities, which prompted the transfer of leadership from Reuben to Judah.

A. Reuben's Offer to Guarantee Benjamin's Safety is Rejected

Jacob's Refusal to Send Benjamin

The brothers return to Canaan from Egypt and tell their father of their treatment by the Egyptian ruler, and his demand that Benjamin be brought to Egypt. Jacob responds immediately:

And their father Jacob said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children, Joseph is gone and Simeon is gone; shall you take Benjamin from me? All of these things have come upon me." (Gen. 42:36)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אֲתִי שָׁבְלָתֶם יוֹסֵף אֵינְנִי וְשִׁמְעוֹן אֵינְנִי וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵימִן תִּקְחוּ עָלַי הֲיוֹ בְּלָנָה. (פרק מ"ב, לו')

Jacob does not actually refuse to send Benjamin.

Rather, he expresses anguish and fear that Benjamin's fate will ultimately be identical to that of his brothers, Joseph and Simeon.

Reuben's
Oath – on the
Lives of His
Sons

Reuben reacts to his father's words immediately and attempts to convince him to send Benjamin:

And Reuben said to his father, saying, “Put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands and I will return him to you.” (Gen. 42:37)

וַיֹּאמֶר רְאוּבֵן אֶל אָבִיו לֵאמֹר אֶת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי תַמְתִּית אִם לֹא אָבִיָּאֲנִי אֶלֶיךָ תִּנְהַ אֹתוֹ עַל יָדִי וְאֲנִי אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ. (שם, לו')

In his offer, Reuben takes personal responsibility to ensure Benjamin's return. But Jacob refuses this offer:

My Son Shall
Not Go Down
with You

And he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone remains, and if a disaster befell him during your travels, you shall have brought down my gray hair to the grave with sorrow.” (Gen. 42:38)

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יֵרֵד בְּנִי עִמָּכֶם כִּי אָחִיו מֵת וְהוּא לְבֶדּוֹ נִשְׁאַר וְקִרְאָהוּ אִסּוֹן בְּדַרְכְּךָ אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכוּ בָּהּ וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת שִׁבְתִּי בְּעִיּוֹן שְׂאוּלָה. (שם, לח)

Reuben meant to convince Jacob to send Benjamin, but his words have the opposite effect: before Reuben spoke Jacob was merely anxious; now he **absolutely refuses** to send Benjamin, declaring: “My son shall not go down with you”! Reuben's offer actually reinforced

Jacob's resistance instead of diminishing it.¹

Was
Reuben's
Offer
Lacking?

Later on Judah succeeds in convincing Jacob to send Benjamin to Egypt with them. Why? Does Jacob not trust Reuben? Was it simply a matter of poor timing, or was the offer itself problematic?

Poor
Timing

Reuben might have made his offer at the wrong time. The brothers had just returned from Egypt, Jacob had not yet processed his sons' account of the events that took place and is not prepared to consider his options rationally. This is not the moment to pressure him;

¹ This is indicated by the commentary of *Mizrahi*:

אלא על כרחק לומר שמה שאמר “לא ירד בני עמכם” אינו אלא מפני שלא קבל דבריו של ראובן.

You must say that what [Jacob] said – “My son shall not go down with you” – was only because he did not accept Reuben's words. (*Mizrahi* on Gen. 42:38)

However, other commentators interpret Reuben's speech in a positive light, explaining that Jacob's refusal stemmed from other factors, as *Gur Aryeh* explains:

וכך רוצה לומר אף על גב שיפעה אמרת “את שני בני תמית” לא אעשה זה, לכן אמר “לא ירד בני עמכם כי אחיו מת”, וחזר יעקב את דבריו הראשונים, שרוצה לומר מה שהייתי מתירא תחלה – עדיין הוא במקומו.

And he wanted to say, “Even though you did well to say ‘Put both of my sons to death,’ I shall not do so,” and this is why he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead”; Jacob repeated his first statement [regarding Benjamin], for he wanted to say: what I feared at the beginning still applies. (*Gur Aryeh* on Gen. 42:38)

Emek Davar's explanation also suggests that Reuben is not at fault:

“לא ירד בני עמכם” – אפשר הייתי מניחו בדרך אחר (=לארץ אחרת) על ידי ערבות זו של ראובן, אבל עמכם למצרים לא ירד.

“My son shall not go down with you” – I may have let him go on another journey (to another country) based on this offer of Reuben's, but to Egypt he shall not go down with you.

he should be given time to calm down and consider the situation.² In addition, the brothers have just brought food from Egypt and so Jacob does not see any need to send Benjamin. Only after the food runs out does Jacob realize that he has no choice but to

- 2 Reuben's haste is one of his dominant character traits. Reuben is the first son born to Jacob, the first to react and the first to conquer the Land of Israel (see *Ba'alei HaTosafot* on Gen. 49:4, in accordance with Num. 32:17). Jacob hints to this in his blessing to Reuben:

פָּחוּ כַמַּיִם אֶל תּוֹתֵר כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבִי אָבִיךָ אוֹ חִלְלִיתָ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֶה.

Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up to your father's bed and defiled it; he went up to my sheets. (Gen. 49:4)

Rashi explains that this haste causes him to lose the birthright:

"פָּחוּ כַמַּיִם" – הפָּחוּ וְהִבְהִילָה אֲשֶׁר מְהֵרָה לְהִרְאוֹת כַּעֲסָךְ כַּמַּיִם הַלָּלוּ הַמִּמְהָרִים לְמִרוּצָתָם. לִכְךָ "אֶל תּוֹתֵר" – אֶל תִּרְבֶּה לִּטּוֹל כָּל הַיִּתְרוֹת הַלָּלוּ שֶׁהָיוּ רְאוּיֹת לָךְ. "Turbulent as the waters" – The haste with which you hurried to display your anger, as these waters hurry on their way. Therefore, you shall not be quick to take these additional privileges that were meant for you. (Rashi on Gen. 49:4)

Sefer Toledot Yitzhak also emphasizes this theme:

"פָּחוּ כַמַּיִם" – אָמַר שֶׁאֵבֶד הַמְּלוּכָה, שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ צָרִיךְ מִתּוֹן וְעֵצָה לְכָל מַעֲשָׂיו, לְפִי שֶׁהֵם כּוֹלֵלִים לְכָל הַמְּלוּכָה, וְחָטָא קִטְנָן בּוֹ הוּא גָדוֹל מְאֹד... וְאַתָּה שֶׁפָּחוּת כַּמַּיִם הַנִּגְרָם בַּחֲפוּזָה, אֶל תּוֹתֵר, לֹא יִהְיֶה לָּךְ יִתְרוֹן עַל שֶׁאַר בְּנֵי אָדָם כַּמֶּלֶךְ.

"Turbulent as the waters" – he said this [to explain why Reuben] lost the kingship, for a king must be moderate and counseled in all of his doings, for they include the entire kingdom, and a small sin for him is actually very great... and you, as hasty as the waters which are dragged along in their hurry, "you will no longer excel," you shall not have an advantage over the rest of the people, as a king does.

Reuben, in contrast to Judah, is quick to react, both in attempting to convince Jacob to send Benjamin and in trying to convince the brothers not to kill Joseph. Perhaps this is why his suggestions are not logical and why they are not accepted, which ultimately led to his loss of the birthright.

allow Benjamin to go to Egypt. From this perspective, Judah's leadership skills are reflected in his ability to determine the right time to speak to Jacob, when Jacob is less likely to be resistant.

But was Reuben's offer rejected **solely** because of bad timing? Two elements of Reuben's speech support the possibility that his offer was rejected due to its content, not only due to bad timing.

Adding Grief on Top of Grief

First, Reuben's offer to kill his sons is particularly bizarre, as Rashi points out:

לֹא קִיבַל דְּבָרָיו שֶׁל רְאוּבֵן, אָמַר: "בְּבוֹר שׁוֹטָה הוּא זֶה – הוּא אוֹמֵר לְהַמִּית בְּנָיו, וְכִי בְנָיו הֵם וְלֹא בְנֵי?"

He did not accept Reuben's words; he said: "This is a foolish firstborn – he says to kill his sons; are they [only] his sons and not mine [as well]?"

Reuben's intentions were, of course, the opposite: he meant to express to Jacob that he would do everything possible to bring Benjamin back home, since he valued his own sons' lives so greatly. By offering to allow Jacob to "put both of my sons to death," he was resorting to the common practice of taking an oath on the life of his relatives – but clearly he did not actually want them to die.³ While Reuben's intentions were good,

- 3 A number of commentators offer explanations for Reuben's bizarre offer (see Ramban, Ibn Ezra and Rabbi Yitzhak ben Asher HaLevi on Gen. 42:38). According to Rashi, Jacob was aware that Reuben did not actually intend for his sons to die, and his anger was mainly directed at Reuben's choice of words: "Put [them] to death" (as opposed to "they will die") – how could Reuben dare to suggest, even theoretically, that

one must choose words carefully so that they will be palatable to the listener. The very idea of bringing up his sons' deaths was misguided. This hypothetical scenario was particularly difficult for Jacob to hear, as he had already suffered the loss of multiple sons – Joseph is gone, Simeon is now in jail and he fears for Benjamin's life. Clearly, Reuben should not have mentioned the possibility of his sons' deaths.

Pessimistic
Tone

In addition, Reuben begins his speech with a proposed punishment should he violate his oath – “put both of my sons to death” – as opposed to beginning on a more positive note, with the commitment itself. Had Reuben said, “Put him in my hands and I will return him to you,” and only afterwards sworn on the life of his sons, tying their fate to Benjamin's, his offer might have been viewed more positively by Jacob.

Reuben made the offer with good intentions: he meant to swear that he would go to any length to bring Benjamin back. However, his bad timing and pessimistic phrasing caused Jacob to oppose the idea of sending Benjamin even more: “My son shall not go down with you.”⁴

Jacob would kill his own grandsons? If he refused to say “I will put them to death,” how could he suggest that Jacob do so?

- 4 If the reason for Jacob's refusal was Reuben's insensitive offer, why does Jacob explain his position by saying, “His brother is dead and he alone remains”? *Mizrahi* answers: “The explanation that ‘if a disaster befell him’ was [intended as] a total rejection, but he did not want to embarrass [Reuben] by saying that he did not accept his offer” (*Mizrahi* on Gen. 42:38).

B. Judah Guarantees for Benjamin's Return

Judah
Waits for
the Right
Moment

And the famine was severe in the land. And it was when they finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go back and buy a bit of food for us.” (Gen. 43:1-2)

וְהָרָעָב כָּבֵד בְּאֶרֶץ:
וַיְהִי כִּשְׁשָׁר פָּלוּ לֶאֱכֹל
אֶת הַשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר הָבִיאוּ
מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם
אֲבִיהֶם שִׁבוּ שִׁבְרוּ לָנוּ
מִעֵט אֶכֶל. (פרק מ"ג,
א-ב)

Once they finish the food from Egypt, Jacob asks his sons to return to Egypt to bring back more food. After Jacob's complete refusal to send Benjamin in Reuben's care, no one dares mention the subject again and the brothers do not suggest returning to Egypt. Only when **Jacob himself mentions the subject** does Judah use the opportunity to explain the situation to Jacob:

Judah
Emphasizes
the Need
to Take
Benjamin

And Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘Do not come before me without your brother’; if you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy food for you. And if you do not send [him] we shall not go down, for the man said to us, ‘Do not come before me without your brother.’” (Gen. 43:3-5)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה
לֵאמֹר הָעֵד הָעֵד בָּנוּ
הָאִישׁ לֹאמֹר לֹא תָרֹאוּ
פָּנַי בְּלֹתֵי אֲחֵיכֶם
אִתְּכֶם: אִם יֵשֶׁךְ מִשְׁלַח
אֶת אֲחִינוּ אֲתָנוּ נֵרְדָה
וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לָךְ אֶכֶל: וְאִם
אֵינְךָ מִשְׁלַח לֹא נֵרְדָה
כִּי הָאִישׁ אָמַר אֵלָינוּ לֹא
תָרֹאוּ פָנַי בְּלֹתֵי אֲחֵיכֶם
אִתְּכֶם. (שם, ג-ה)

Judah emphasizes twice, at the beginning and end of his speech, that “the man” – the Egyptian ruler – told them, “Do not come before me without your brother.” Returning to Egypt without Benjamin is not an option. Judah then presents Jacob with a choice: if you send Benjamin with us, we will go and bring back food; if not, we won’t go, and we will have no food. After explaining the situation, Judah leaves the choice up to Jacob, as if to say: You decide; the responsibility is yours alone⁵.

Jacob's
Reaction
– Anguish
and Despair

A dialogue begins between Jacob and Judah. Jacob responds:

And Israel said, “Why have you caused me misery by telling the man that you have another brother?” (Gen. 43:6)

וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמָה הִרְעֵיתָם לִי לְהַגִּיד לָאִישׁ הָעוֹד לָכֶם אָח. (שם, ו)

Jacob reacts with despair – “Why did you do this to me?” He does not actually address the problem, nor does he respond to the choice presented to him by

⁵ Here too, as in his speech to his brothers during the sale of Joseph, Judah emphasizes to his father:

אִם יֵשֶׁךְ מִשְׁלַח אֶת אֶחָיו אֲתָנוּ נֵרְדָה וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לָךְ אֶכֶל.
If you send **our brother with us**, we will go down and buy food for you. (Gen. 43:4)

Judah hints to Jacob – he is our brother just as much as he is your son. Be assured that we will do all possible to bring him back home. Reuben, on the other hand, does not use any affectionate language in describing Benjamin and merely says, “Put him in my hands and I will return him to you” (Gen. 42:37). In addition, Judah emphasizes the responsibility of all of the brothers toward Benjamin – “our brother with us” – while Reuben merely says, “I will return him to you.”

Judah. Jacob knows well that he has no choice and that he must come to a decision, but the decision is a painful one. He reacts out of grief and sorrow but not reason, as the *midrash* describes:

Rabbi Levi in the name of Rabbi Hama bar Hanina [said]: Our forefather Jacob never spoke in vain apart from here... של בטלה אלא כאן... (בראשית רבה צ"א, י)

Rabbi Levi in the name of Rabbi Hama bar Hanina [said]: Our forefather Jacob never spoke in vain apart from here... (Bereshit Rabba 91:10)

The
Brothers'
Apology

The brothers answer Jacob:

And they said, “The man asked us particularly about ourselves and our homeland, saying, ‘Is your father still alive? Do you have a brother?’ And we spoke in accordance with these questions; could we somehow have known that he would say, ‘Bring your brother down?’” (Gen. 43:7)

וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁאוּל שְׁאֵל הָאִישׁ לָנוּ וּלְמוֹלַדְתָּנוּ לֵאמֹר הָעוֹד אֲבִיכֶם חַי הִישׁ לָכֶם אָח וְנַגִּיד לוֹ עַל פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הִידוּעַ נִדַּע כִּי יֹאמַר הוֹרִידוּ אֶת אֲחִיכֶם. (שם, ז)

The brothers respond apologetically: first, the man asked us, we did not decide to tell him of our own accord; second, we couldn’t have known that we would have to bring Benjamin to Egypt – there was no reason to think so. The brothers try to justify their actions facing Jacob’s accusation – “Why have you caused me misery” – but Jacob’s question was a rhetorical one expressing his grief, not a literal question requiring a response.

Judah's Reaction – Logical and To the Point Judah is the only brother who understands Jacob's feelings. Judah understands that Jacob is not looking for excuses. He does not attempt to answer Jacob's question, but returns to the practical topic of going down to Egypt:

And Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the youth with me, and we shall get up and go, and we shall live and not die, we and you and our children. I shall guarantee his safety; demand him from my hand. If I do not bring him back to you and present him to you, I will have sinned to you all of my days. For had we not delayed now, we could have returned twice already." (Gen. 43:8-10)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיו שְׁלַחָה הַנָּעַר אִתִּי וְנִקְוָמָה וְנִלְכָּה וְנַחֲיָה וְלֹא נָמוּת גַּם אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אַתָּה גַּם טִפְנוּ: אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱרְבֶנּוּ מִיַּד תִּבְקָשׁנוּ אִם לֹא הֵבִיאֵנִי אֵלֶיךָ וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ וְחָטָאתִי לְךָ כָּל הַיָּמִים: כִּי לֹא־הִתְמַהֲמַהְנוּ כִּי עָתָה שָׁבְנוּ זֶה פַעַמַּיִם. (פרק מ"ג, ח-י)

At the beginning of his speech (verse 8), Judah presents the two alternatives once again: if Jacob agrees to send Benjamin, we will live. If not – we will all die. Judah emphasizes that this includes “we and you and our children,” as though saying to Jacob: consider the options: certain death for all of us, or possible disaster for Benjamin.⁶

An Optimistic Beginning Judah then presents another argument: “I shall guarantee his safety; demand him from my hand” (verse 9). This is parallel to Reuben's offer: “Put both

⁶ See *Bereshit Rabba* 91:10 and *Tanhuma, Mikketz* 8.

of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you”⁷ (Gen. 42:37), but it is presented differently:

First, Judah begins with the positive side of his oath – “I shall guarantee his safety; demand him from my hand.” He promises to ensure Benjamin's safe return. Only later does he mention the “price” he will pay if he fails: “If I do not bring him... I will have sinned to you all of my days.”

Whose Offer is Greater? Reuben's proposed “price” of failure seems at first greater than Judah's – Reuben swears on the life of his children – which seems to express a greater commitment to Benjamin's safety. However, as discussed above, Reuben's offer to accept responsibility was presented at the wrong time and in an insensitive manner. Moreover, Rashi explains (citing *Bereshit Rabba* 91:10) that the meaning of Judah's statement that “I will have sinned to you **all of my days**” refers to **the World to Come**. Judah, therefore, has actually accepted a greater “price” for failure than Reuben: should he fail, his conscience will trouble him all his

⁷ Here Judah changes from the way he related to Benjamin in his first offer to Jacob, saying “**I shall guarantee his safety**,” taking sole responsibility for Benjamin's welfare. Also, he does not refer to Benjamin as “**our brother**,” but as a “**youth**” – “send the youth with me.” In expressing to Jacob that the matter is one of life and death (“we shall live and not die”), Judah shows Jacob that his concern for Benjamin endangers the entire family. This time, therefore, Judah regards Benjamin more distantly – as a “youth” as opposed to a “brother.” Judah may also have perceived implicit criticism of the brothers' management of the situation from Jacob's question, “Why have you caused me mystery,” and he therefore declares to Jacob: I alone will guarantee Benjamin's safe return.

life and beyond – a greater punishment than anything one could endure in this world.

C. Jacob's Consent to Judah's Offer

How does Jacob react to Judah's speech?

And their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do the following: take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels, and take for the man a gift; a bit of balm and a bit of honey, spices and ladanum, nuts and almonds. And take double money in your hand, and return the money which was returned to your sacks; perhaps it was a mistake. And take your brother, and get up and return to the man. And may the Lord *Sha-kkai* give you mercy before the man, and let him release your other brother and Benjamin; and I, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved." (Gen. 43:11-14)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲבִיהֶם אִם כֵּן אֶפּוֹא
וְאֵת עֲשׂוֹ קַחוּ מִזֶּמְרַת
הָאָרֶץ בְּכֻלֵּיכֶם וְהוֹרִידוּ
לְאִישׁ מִנְחָה מֵעֵט צָרִי
וּמֵעֵט דְּבַשׁ נִבְאֵת וְלֵט
בָּטָנִים וְשִׁקְדִּים: וְכֶסֶף
מִשְׁנֶה קַחוּ בְיָדְכֶם וְאֵת
הַכֶּסֶף הַמּוֹשָׁב בְּפִי
אֲמַתְחֹתֵיכֶם תְּשִׁיבוּ
בְיָדְכֶם אוֹלֵי מִשְׁנֶה
הוּא: וְאֵת אֲחֵיכֶם קַחוּ
וְקוּמוּ שׁוּבוּ אֶל הָאִישׁ:
וְאֵל שְׂדֵי יִתֵּן לָכֶם
רַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ
וְשַׁלַּח לָכֶם אֶת אֲחֵיכֶם
אַחֵר וְאֵת בְּנִימִן וְאֲנִי
כִּאֲשֶׁר שָׁכַלְתִּי שְׂכָלְתִּי.
(שם, יא-יד)

Jacob agrees to Judah's offer, seemingly due to the reasons mentioned above:

A. Timing – there is no food left and no choice. Judah's harsh speech clarifies the situation for Jacob.

B. Style – Judah's approach was more convincing than Reuben's. Judah first presents the positive side of his offer, in which everything goes well; only later does he mention the possibility for failure. The phrasing of his oath is also easier for Jacob to hear: Judah does not raise the possibility of losing another son, as Reuben does. Rather, he places tremendous responsibility on himself – not only in this world, but in the next as well.⁸

With a Heavy
Heart, Jacob
Agrees

In spite of this, Jacob does not agree to Judah's proposition happily:

Jacob begins his speech with a hint of reluctance: "If it must be so, then..." In addition, Jacob does not mention Benjamin at first; he begins by listing the gifts that the brothers are to take with them. The brothers are surely waiting to hear if he will agree to send Benjamin, but **only at the end** does he say: "And take your brother." Clearly it is difficult for him to agree to this, and only does so for lack of

⁸ However, some commentators regard Jacob's speech as a response the brothers' earlier justifications and not to Judah's offer.. Seforno explains:

"אם כן" – אם הדבר כן, כמו שאמרתם, שהתגרה האיש בכם והוא ירא אלהים.
"אפוא" – מן ההכרח ראוי שזאת תעשו: "קחו מזמרת הארץ בכליכם מעט צרי וכו'".
"If it must be so – "if it was as you said ,that the man provoked you and he is God-fearing.
"Then – "You must do the following" :Take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels...a bit of balm ,etc".

See also the *Mizrachi* ad loc.

alternatives. At the end of his speech he says, “And I, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved,” expressing his intense fear and possibly even despair.

Jacob Does
Not Accept
Judah's
Offer of Sole
Responsibility

Although Jacob allows Benjamin to travel to Egypt, he does not rely solely on Judah's promise. He does not thank Judah for his willingness to take responsibility for Benjamin – in fact, he does not respond to Judah's offer at all. Instead, he addresses the brothers – “And their father Israel said **to them...**” Jacob does not place Benjamin specifically with Judah, but with all of the brothers: “**And take your brother.**”⁹

The fact that Jacob ignores Judah's offer indicates that he did not wholeheartedly accept it. He only agreed to send Benjamin because he had no other choice, due to the worsening famine. Judah's offer merely softened Jacob's intense opposition to sending Benjamin, as reflected in his absolute refusal of Reuben's offer.

9 This point will be discussed in detail next week.

D. Testing the Brothers' Mutual Responsibility

All of the
Brothers are
Responsible

Two elements in the text suggest that the responsibility for Benjamin's return was placed collectively on all of the brothers, including Reuben:

A. As described above, Jacob sends Benjamin with all of the brothers and does not designate Judah as specifically responsible for his welfare.

B. When Joseph's messenger pursues the brothers to inform them that they are suspected of theft, **they all answer:**

And they said to him, “Why does my lord speak of these things?... With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we too shall be slaves to my lord.” And he said, “Now let it be according to your words; the one with whom it is found shall be a slave for me, and you shall be blameless.” And each man hurried to put his sack down on the ground, and each man opened his sack. (Gen. 44:7-11)

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לָמָּה יְדַבֵּר אֲדֹנָי כְּדַבְּרִים הָאֵלֶּה... אִשָּׁר יִמָּצָא אֹתוֹ מֵעַבְדֶּיךָ וּמָתָה וְגַם אֲנַחְנוּ נָהְיָה לְאֲדֹנָי לְעַבְדִּים: וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם עַתָּה כְּדַבְּרֵיכֶם כֵּן הוּא אִשָּׁר יִמָּצָא אֹתוֹ יְהִיָּה לִי עֶבֶד וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ נְקִיִּים: וַיְמַהֲרוּ וַיּוֹרְדוּ אִישׁ אֶת אֲמֻתָּתוֹ אֶרְצָה וַיִּפְתְּחוּ אִישׁ אֲמֻתָּתוֹ. (פרק מ"ד, ז-יא)

In this dialogue, none of the brothers is the clear leader; none of them directs the negotiations with the

Egyptian ruler – they are all of equal status. Similarly, after the goblet is found in Benjamin’s bag, **all of the brothers share the responsibility** and return to Egypt with him. They do not abandon Benjamin and are not angry with him for taking the goblet¹⁰ – they all return to Egypt in solidarity (Gen. 44:12-13).

It is interesting, then, that in the next verse one brother steps forward:

Judah Takes Responsibility

And Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, and he was still there, and they fell to the earth before him. (Gen. 44:14)

וַיָּבֹאוּ יְהוּדָה וְאֶחָיו
בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף וְהוּא
עוֹדָנָה שָׁם וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנֵי
אֶרְצָה. (שם, יד)

Here **Judah is mentioned first, before his brothers**, and it is clear that he is the leader. Indeed, later on Judah is the one to speak to Joseph on behalf of the brothers:

And Joseph said to them, “What is this thing that you have done?”

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מָה
הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר

¹⁰ However, the Sages describe the discussion between the brothers differently:

“וימצא הגביע באמתחת בנימין” – כיון שנמצא הגביע אמרו לו מה גנבא בר גנבתא.

“And the goblet was found in Benjamin’s sack” – when the goblet was found, they said to him, “This is a thief, son of a thief!” (*Bereshit Rabba* 92:8)

Benjamin is a “thief, son of a thief” – his mother, Rachel, stole her father Laban’s idols. The commentators add that the brothers “struck him on his shoulders” (Rabbenu Bahya on Gen. 44:12). In any case, the simple reading of the text indicates that the brothers (are united/stand with) Benjamin when the goblet is found.

Do you not know that a man like me would discover this through divination?” And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord – how can we speak, how can we excuse ourselves? God has found your servants’ sin; we are servants to my lord – both we and he in whose hand the cup was found.” (Gen. 44:15-16)

עֲשִׂיתֶם הֲלוֹא יִדְעֲתֶם
כִּי נִחַשׁ יִנְחֹשׁ אִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר כְּמֹנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוּדָה מֶה נֹאמַר לַאֲדֹנִי
מֶה נִדְבֹר וּמֶה נִצְטַדֵּק
הָאֱלֹהִים מִצָּא אֶת עוֹן
עַבְדֶּיךָ הַנֶּנּוּ עַבְדִּים
לַאֲדֹנִי גַם אֲנַחְנוּ גַם
אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא הַגִּבִּיעַ
בְּיָדוֹ. (שם, טו-טז)

Judah speaks in the plural, on behalf of all of the brothers. He proposes to Joseph the same offer that the brothers made to Joseph’s messenger – that all of the brothers would become slaves to Pharaoh.

This offer is evidently acceptable to all of the brothers, as they originally presented it themselves. However, the brothers agreed to the messenger’s counteroffer that only the one who stole the goblet would become a slave. Now that the thief has been identified, why do they refuse to let Benjamin alone be taken into slavery? Why do they revert to their original offer that all of them become slaves?

Perhaps, before Benjamin was found with the goblet, the brothers thought that none of them was the thief. Therefore, they made a commitment that no one believed they would have to honor.¹¹ Now that the

¹¹ This assumption also explains the brothers’ first promise to the messenger: “With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die” (verse 9). Rosh comments: “It is puzzling that

goblet has been found in Benjamin's sack, the others realize their mistake in proposing this arrangement, as they are unwilling to abandon Benjamin.

However, there might be a different motive behind the brothers' behavior. If another one of the brothers was accused of theft and stood to be imprisoned, the rest might agree to leave him in Egypt and return home. But **Benjamin**, they are not willing to abandon: they know how important it is that he return home. Jacob sent his youngest son with them and placed the responsibility for his well-being on all of their shoulders – not only Judah's – as discussed above. Therefore, all of the brothers feel responsible for him and they are all willing to be enslaved with him.¹²

The Brothers' Test of Brotherhood

Joseph, still playing the role of Egyptian ruler, does not agree to this arrangement. It would be unjust to imprison all of the brothers for a single man's transgression:

they would say such a thing; did they not see that the money had been returned to their sacks? They should have been wary that someone might place an obstacle for them without their knowledge" (Rosh on Gen. 44:9). See his answer (ad loc.). According to our interpretation, the brothers simply never expected that one of them could have stolen the goblet.

¹² Hizkuni provides a similar explanation:

כשראו אחיו שנמצא ביד בנימין אמרו גם אנחנו עבדים כאשר אמרנו גם אשר נמצא הגביע בידו לא יהיה אלא עבד כי יראים היו פן ימיתוהו.

When his brothers saw that [the goblet] was found in Benjamin's possession, they said, "We, too, shall become slaves, as we said, 'Both we and he in whose hand the cup was found,'" – he [too] shall only become a slave; for they feared that [Joseph] would kill him. (Hizkuni on Gen 44:9)

See also the comments of *Orah Hayyim* ad loc.

And he said, "Far be it from me
to do this; the man in whose
hand the goblet was found shall
be a slave to me, and you return
in peace to your father." (Gen.
44:17)

וַיֹּאמֶר חֲלִילָה לִּי
מַעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת הָאִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר נִמְצָא הַגִּבִּיעַ
בְּיָדוֹ הוּא יִהְיֶה לִּי עֶבֶד
וְאַתֶּם עֲלוּ לְשָׁלוֹם אֶל
אֲבִיכֶם. (שם, יז)

The brothers 'mutual responsibility is now put to the test :what will they do now that the Egyptian sovereign insists on keeping only Benjamin as a slave and will not allow the rest of the brothers to stay with him?

E. Judah's Speech

At this critical moment Judah steps forward:

And Judah approached him and said, "Please, my lord, allow your servant to speak a word into my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant, for you are equal to Pharaoh..." (Gen. 44:18)

Judah presents a lengthy speech. Afterwards, Joseph breaks down and reveals his true identity to his brothers.

What part of Judah's speech causes Joseph to reveal himself?

Judah
Describes
Jacob's
Intense Grief
over His Son

Judah describes to Joseph the relationship between Benjamin and Jacob. He emphasizes how important Benjamin is to his father, and how heartbroken Jacob would be should his youngest son remain in Egypt:

"And now, when I come to your servant, my father, and the youth is not with us, and his soul is bound to his. And when he sees that the youth is gone, he shall die, and your servants shall bring down your servant's gray hair to the grave with sorrow." (Gen. 44:30-31)

ויגש אליו יהודה
ויאמר בי אדני ידבר
נא עבדך דבר באזני
אדני ואל יחר אפך
בעבדך כי כמוך
כפרעה... (שם, יח)

ועתה קבאי אל
עבדך אבי והנער
איננו אתנו ונפש
קשורה בנפשו: והיה
כראותו כי אין הנער
ומת והורידו עבדיך
את שيبת עבדך
אבינו בגוון שאלה.
(שם, ל-לא)

Judah Takes
Personal
Responsibility

Finally Judah explains his personal commitment to his father:

"For your servant has guaranteed the youth's safety to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I shall have sinned to my father all of my days.' And now let your servant stay instead of the youth as a servant to my lord, and the youth shall return with his brothers. For how can I return to my father if the youth is not with me, lest I see the grief that shall find my father." (Gen. 44:32-34)

כי עבדך ערב את
הנער מעם אבי
לאמר אם לא אביאנו
אליו וקטאתי לאבי
כל הימים: ועתה
ישב נא עבדך תחת
הנער עבד לאדני
והנער יעל עם אחיו:
כי איך אעלה אל
אבי והנער איננו
אתי פן אראה ברע
אשר ימצא את אבי.
(שם, לב-לד)

Judah demonstrates his **personal responsibility** for Benjamin, despite the fact that Jacob did not explicitly make him responsible. He emphasizes that he cannot return to his father without Benjamin; he cannot face the grief that will strike Jacob if Benjamin does not return.

Judah does not focus on **the punishment he would receive** for losing Benjamin,¹³ but **the anguish it would cause his father**.

Willing to
Accept the
Consequences

In taking responsibility for Benjamin's welfare, Judah makes an astonishing offer: he **alone** will be

¹³ In contrast to Reuben's reaction to Joseph's disappearance: "And I, where shall I go?" (Gen. 37:30).

imprisoned and Benjamin will return home with his brothers. There does not seem to be any chance that the Egyptian ruler will accept this proposal – why should he imprison the “thief’s” brother while letting the thief himself walk free?

**The Bonds of
Brotherhood
Lead Joseph
to Reveal
Himself**

But Joseph, the Egyptian ruler, agrees to the offer – and ultimately it is this that compels him to reveal himself to his brothers. Joseph perceives that Judah’s willingness to lead his brothers is based on the strong fraternal bonds between them. Judah and all of his brothers are willing to take responsibility for the well-being of Benjamin and their father – to the point that Judah is willing to remain in Egypt as a slave to ensure that Benjamin returns home safely.

**Repairing the
Relationship
with the
Hated Brother**

Joseph recognizes the brothers’ love and concern for **their father, Jacob**, as well as their strong devotion and concern **for one another**. This devotion drives them to take care of Benjamin, despite that Jacob favored him and was more concerned for his welfare than anyone else’s. In fact, they recognize Jacob’s preference and fully **accept** it. Benjamin will be freed and Judah will remain in his place.

This bond **reverses the intense hatred** that the brothers demonstrated toward Joseph, which leads him to remove his disguise and reveal his true identity.

**Responsibility,
Brotherhood,
Sensitivity and
Talent**

In this episode, the full strength of Judah’s leadership is demonstrated in a number of instances:

A. He is the one who takes personal responsibility for Benjamin’s welfare, despite that Jacob had not made anyone specifically responsible for him.

B. He creates an atmosphere of brotherhood among the brothers¹⁴ and leads them to recognize that they cannot leave Benjamin in Egypt.

C. He is prepared to pay the price himself and become a slave to save his father from misery.

Once again, we are shown that Judah has a particular talent for saying the right thing at the right time, making his listeners more open to his suggestions. Although Judah is not aware that the Egyptian ruler was in fact Joseph, he still manages to affect Joseph emotionally. Judah’s speech to Joseph as the representative of the brothers demonstrates his leadership approach.

**Transferring
the Leadership
from Reuben to
Judah**

Following this episode, Judah becomes the clear leader of the brothers; even Jacob recognizes this. Later, when Jacob decides to travel to Egypt, he sends Judah before him:

And Judah he sent before him to Joseph, to show him the way to Goshen, and they came to the land of Goshen. (Gen. 46:28)

וְאֶת יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לִפְנֵי
אֶל יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לִפְנֵי
גֹשֶׁן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן.
(בראשית מ"ו, כח)

¹⁴ In the first part of our lesson (on *Parashot Vayeshev-Mikketz*) we discussed the significance of the fraternal bond to Judah’s leadership. During the sale of Joseph, he emphasized that Joseph is “our brother,” and thus persuaded the brothers to sell him instead of killing him.

Similarly, when Jacob blesses his sons prior to his death, he praises Judah and gives him the blessing of leadership:

Judah, your brothers will thank you, your hand will be upon your enemies' necks, your father's sons will bow to you. Judah is a lion cub; you rise from your prey, my son; he crouches like a lion, like a lioness; who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shilo comes, and the nations obey him. (Gen. 49:8-10)	יהודה אתה יודוך אחיך ידך בערף אויבך ושתחו לך בני אביך: גור אריה יהודה מטורף בני עלית פרע רבץ כאריה וכלביא מי יקימנו: לא יסור שבט מיהודה ומחקק מבין רגליו עד כי יבא שילו ולו יקחת עמים. (בראשית מ"ט, ח-י)
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JUDAH'S LEADERSHIP QUALITIES (SUMMARY)

Judah's leadership skills are displayed during two episodes – the sale of Joseph and accepting responsibility for Benjamin's welfare. These events lead to Judah's being crowned as "the strongest of his brothers" and receiving the leadership from Reuben.

The *midrash* states:

Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai said: the text is speaking in praise of Judah; In three places Judah spoke to his brothers and they made him king over them: "And Judah said to his	א"ר יהודה בר אילעי: בשבח יהודה הכתוב מדבר, בג' מקומות דבר יהודה בפני אחיו ועשו אותו מלך עליהם: "ויאמר יהודה אל אחיו"
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brothers" (Gen. 37:26); "And Judah and his brothers came" (Gen. 44:14); "And Judah approached him" (Gen. 44:18). (Bereshit Rabba 84:17, s.v. "And they sat down to eat")	(בראשית ל"ז, כו), "ויבא יהודה ואחיו" (שם מ"ד, יד), "ויגש אליו יהודה" (שם, יח). (בראשית רבה פ"ד, יז (ד"ה "וישבו לאכל"))
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In these two episodes, we are exposed to the contrasting leadership styles of Reuben and Judah. In both instances, Judah's suggestion is accepted while Reuben's is rejected. Why?

A number of significant differences emerge from the comparison between Reuben and Judah's leadership approaches:

A. Their relationship with their brothers. Reuben is somewhat distant from his brothers, while Judah places himself together with them, participates in their conversation and defines himself as one of them. The partnership and brotherhood between Judah and his brothers allow him to influence them and cause them to listen to him. This ability to foster feelings of comradery is an essential quality in a leader. A leader must be part of his people, and aware of their needs, desires and circumstances. Only when he is part of them can he truly represent them, act on their behalf and lead them to a new and better future.

B. During the sale of Joseph, Judah emphasizes that Joseph is "our brother, our flesh." As a result, he not only prevents Joseph's death, but also reminds the brothers of the fraternal bond between Joseph and

themselves. This bond resurfaces later, when the brothers regret their cruelty toward Joseph, and feel love and concern toward Benjamin. This effect demonstrates another important quality in a leader: **the ability to bring about change in the nation's perception.**

C. Judah is gifted with **the ability to speak persuasively**, demonstrating a **deep understanding of his fellow man**. While Reuben takes a strong moral stand he does not truly identify with his listeners; he speaks in a tone that others are unable to relate to. Judah, on the other hand, recognizes the right time and way to express himself. This is not merely a matter of rhetorical talent or charisma. Rather, it is a manifestation his ability to empathize with others and understand what they are willing to hear. In this way, Judah succeeds in convincing his brothers to sell Joseph instead of killing him, in convincing his father to send Benjamin to Egypt, and in convincing Joseph (albeit unknowingly) to soften his position and reveal himself to his brothers.

D. Both Reuben and Judah take responsibility for events that occur, but at the critical moment Reuben is either absent (during the sale of Joseph) or passive (when Benjamin is taken). Judah, on the other hand, is able to **act properly at the crucial time**, saving Joseph and later Benjamin. Judah takes full responsibility for his brothers, even when his father does not demand it of him. He is willing to not only act on Benjamin's behalf but to **pay a heavy personal price**.

Reuben is the firstborn of the brothers. As such, he is held responsible for the family's actions. Although his intentions are good, his character is not suitable for leadership and he fails. Therefore, the leadership role is taken from him and given to Judah, the brother truly worthy of it.