

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayigash

7 Tevet, 5783 / Dec. 31, 2022

Vol. 14 Num. 16 (#560)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Dr. Allan Kaplan & Cheryl Reicin and family
in honour of the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Phillip Kaplan, Rav Pesach ben Chana z"l

It's Not What You Do, It's Who You Are

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

In this week's parshah, Yosef confronts his brothers and reveals to them that he is really their brother. As the Torah says: "Yosef said to his brothers: I am Yosef. Is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him because they were terrified of him." (Bereishit 45-3).

A midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 45:10) says the following on this verse: "Abba Kohen Bardala says: How we should worry before the days of judgment, the days of rebuke!... Yosef was the youngest of the tribes and his brothers couldn't bear his rebuke... All the more so when Hashem will judge each person as he is".

It is interesting to note that in other midrashim (Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit 152), the ending of the midrash is that "Hashem will judge people according to their actions." We can understand this edition; it is logical to judge people according to their actions. But what does it mean to judge a person "as he is"?

Perhaps we may answer based on a comment by Rav Yechezkel Abramsky z"l regarding the Tehillim we read in Kabbalat Shabbat. Two of them, Tehillim 96 and 98, have striking similarities – and key differences.

- Tehillim 96:13 describes the world rejoicing "before Hashem, for He has come, for He has come to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the nations according to their beliefs." The next verse, 97:1, be-

gins, "Hashem reigns! Let the earth rejoice."

- Tehillim 98:9 describes the world rejoicing "before Hashem, for He has come to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples according to their righteousness." The next verse, 99:1, begins, "Hashem reigns; let the nations tremble."

Rav Abramsky asks: why is it that when Hashem judges the nations of the world "according to their beliefs" the earth rejoices, whereas when He judges the world according to their righteousness they tremble?

Rav Abramsky explains that when Hashem judges a person according to his beliefs, that person has a valid argument to justify himself: "This is what my faith dictates." "This is the ruling according to my spiritual leader." "This was my religious duty." Throughout history we have witnessed people doing terrible things in the name of a deity, thinking this was their religious obligation. The nations of the world will characterize their actions as obedience to their spiritual authority.

However, Tehillim 98:9 says that Hashem will judge people according to their righteousness. Meaning, Hashem will ask, "Are you a good person? You may have reason to make mistakes because of the time and place and community in which you live, but are you a mensch?" People may do terrible things in the name of a deity, but if you are a righteous person then even with all of

the religious justification – a mensch doesn't do these things. That's why when Hashem will judge the world according to people's righteousness, they will start to tremble.

This may explain why the brothers were rebuked "as they were." In terms of their actions, they had reason to believe that Halachah would approve of their path. Many commentators explain that they sold Yosef because they considered him a *rodef* pursuing them to harm them, or because he was a rebel against the monarchy of Yehudah. They had their spiritual reasons to believe they were doing the right thing. But if they were going to be judged "as they were" – as human beings selling their own brother into slavery – then they would have no answer.

We often want to do things that are obviously wrong, and sometimes we allow ourselves to do so because we think we have found halachic support – reasons to say *lashon hara*, reasons to avoid davening in a minyan, reasons to avoid paying taxes. It could be that our actions might have some halachic approval, but we should ask: what kind of people will we become in the process?

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Summary

Chapters 28 to 33 of Yeshayahu present a series of six cries of “Hoi”, in which Yeshayahu complains of the Jews’ failure to listen to the warnings of their prophets. The “Hoi” of Chapter 30 inveighs against the nation’s desire to turn to Egypt for support. Yeshayahu speaks against seeking protective alliances frequently, such as in Chapter 7 regarding joining the Syro-Ephraimite Alliance, and in Chapter 39 regarding seeking aid from the Assyrians. Here, Egypt is the target.

The identity of Yeshayahu’s intended audience in our chapter is unclear. We know that the Judeans would later look to Egypt for support against Bavel, toward the end of the first Beit haMikdash. However, Radak (30:1) contends that in our chapter Yeshayahu addressed the Judeans of his own day, the time of King Achaz and King Chizkiyahu. That generation sought Egypt’s help against the Assyrian invasion, as seen in Yeshayahu 36:6, where the Assyrians mock the Jews for seeking Egyptian support. [For a different view, see Don Issac Abarbanel’s introduction to our chapter.]

Yeshayahu warns the Jews, “who descend to Egypt and do not ask for my

counsel,” that none of this will help. Egypt will disappoint them. Yeshayahu describes the nation telling their prophets not to offer prophecy, and asking their visionaries for sweet messages that will not disturb them. The result of this will be the nation’s collapse. (30:1-14)

Yeshayahu offers a different path forward: trust in Hashem will bring the Jews tranquility, a better option than their frantic search for support among the horses of Egypt. If they will remain in Jerusalem, faithful to Hashem, Hashem will provide support for them. (30:15-22)

Finally, Yeshayahu promises that Hashem will redeem the Jews, and Assyria will fall, without Egypt’s intervention. The light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, which will grow sevenfold like the light of the seven days of Creation. The Jews will be healed, our enemies will be swept away, and we will come to Hashem’s mountain with song and musical instruments. (30:23-33)

Insight

This chapter contains many well-known verses. One example is 30:20, which predicts that when you rely on

Hashem, “your eyes shall see *morecha*.”

The literal meaning of *morecha* is “your rain”, as explained by Radak there; Hashem is promising that we will have the rain we need.

Nonetheless, commentators also suggest that it could mean “your guide”:

- According to Ibn Ezra and Radak, this refers to Chizkiyahu and his officers, who will lead the Jews righteously.
- According to Abarbanel, it refers to the prophets, who instruct us.
- The Talmud frames this as an imperative, rather than a prediction; we should watch our teachers’ mouths when they are explaining words of Torah. (Eruvin 13b, Keritot 6a) This is sometimes cited as a basis for posting photographs of our role models on our walls, but at its core the message is about watching them relate the Torah’s lessons.

Finally, the Talmud also suggests that *morecha* may refer to Hashem, as in the future the righteous will benefit from the radiance of the Shechinah. (Sotah 49a)

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**All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.
Many of our classes are on break this week, and return next week.**

Shabbat Dec 30-31

After hashkamah R’ Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Halachah in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

Sun Jan 1

9:00 AM R’ Zev Spitz & R’ Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

Mon Jan 2

9:00 AM R’ Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of the Rav, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

Tues Jan 3 Fast of the Tenth of Tevet

8:30 PM R’ Jared Anstandig, Women’s Beit Midrash, Shaarei Shomayim (university women)

Fri Jan 6

9:00 AM R’ Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R’ Jared Anstandig, R’ Mordechai Torczyner, R’ Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

COMING UP ON ZOOM!

10 AM Wednesdays January 11 to February 1: Icons of Jewish Morocco!

With Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesday> (there is a fee), ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

2 PM Mondays January 16 to February 13: Esther: Wine, Humour and Mysteries!

With Idan Rakovsky

Register at <http://tiny.cc/purimreg> (no fee), ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>