

VAYIGASH

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayigash

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Today's Learning:

Nedarim 8:1-2

O.C. 695:4-696:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Rosh Hashanah 25

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shabbat 58

In this week's parashah, Yosef is reunited with his brothers after a 22-year separation. Yosef gives each of them gifts and encourages them to bring their father to Egypt. The Torah records (Bereishit 45:23), "To his father he sent the following -- ten he- donkeys laden with the best of Egypt . . ." Rashi comments: "The following' - According to this calculation. And what was the calculation? Ten he- donkeys." What is Rashi adding to our understanding of the verse?

R' Moshe Zuriel shlita (former mashgiach ruchani of Yeshivat Sha'alvim) writes in the name of R' Shmuel of Bialystok: Rashi was disturbed by the fact that Yosef was encouraging his father to leave Eretz Yisrael, an action that our Sages equate with idol worship. Therefore, Rashi explains that Yosef was hinting to his father that it was halachically permitted to leave the Land.

How so? The Gemara (Bava Batra 91a) teaches that it is permitted to leave Eretz Yisrael if there is a famine so severe that two say'im of barley (a certain volume) sell for a coin called a selah. Now the Torah records that Yosef gave his brother Binyamin 300 silver coins. The smallest silver coin is a dinar; thus, Yosef presumably gave his brother 300 dinar, which is equal to 75 sela'im (plural of selah).

Yosef sent his father ten he-donkeys laden with the best of Egypt. How much can a donkey carry? R' Ovadiah of Bartenura writes in his commentary to the Mishnah (Bava Metzia 6:5) that a donkey carries 15 say'im. Thus, ten donkeys carry 150 say'im. When compared to the 75 sela'im that Yosef gave Binyamin, we find the ratio of two say'im to a selah - an allusion to the circumstances that permitted Yaakov to leave Eretz Yisrael.

R' Zuriel adds: Why this complex hint? This demonstrates the lengths to which a person should go to avoid speaking ill of Eretz Yisrael. (Otzrot Ha'mussar p.88)

"Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him because they were left disconcerted before him." (Bereishit 45:3)

Midrash Rabbah states: Rabbi Abba Kohen Bardela says, "Woe to us from the Day of Judgment! Woe to us from the Day of Rebuke! Yosef was the youngest of the tribes [involved in the dispute], yet his brothers could not reply to him. When Hashem comes and rebukes each of us, how much more so [will we be left speechless]?"

R' Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg z"l (rosh yeshiva in Berlin and Switzerland; died 1966) asks: Where do we see that Yosef rebuked his brothers? Furthermore, why will Hashem rebuke us on the Day of Judgment? At that point, it will be too late for rebuke!

He answers: Yosef gave his brothers the greatest rebuke possible - he said nothing. When the brothers recognized Yosef's power and saw that, despite having the ability to do so, he had no plan to harm them, they were thoroughly humiliated. Similarly, the rebuke that we will sense on the Day of Judgment will not come from anything Hashem will say to us. It will simply result from our recognition of His greatness. The shame we will feel will be the ultimate rebuke.

(Li'frakim p.607)

From the Haftarah . . .

"Behold! I am taking Bnei Yisrael from among the nations to which they have gone, and I shall gather them from all around and bring them to their soil. I shall make them into a single nation in the land upon Israel's hills, and a single king shall be king for them all; and they shall no longer be two nations, no longer divided into two kingdoms again." (Yechezkel 37:21-22)

This week's haftarah describes the reunification into one kingdom of the two realms that existed after the ten northern tribes split from the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin following the death of King Shlomo. These two kingdoms existed side-by-side in Eretz Yisrael for about 300 years until the ten northern tribes were exiled to Assyria and subsequently disappeared.

R' Don Yitzchak Abravanel z"l (Spain and Italy; died 1508) notes that these verses would seem to contradict the view of Rabbi Akiva who maintained that the ten "lost" tribes will never return. [Other Sages disagree.] It is undeniable, R' Abravanel writes, that Rabbi Akiva's view is well-founded on Biblical verses. We read, for example (Amos 5:1-2), "Hear this pronouncement that I recite over you in lamentation, O House of Yisrael: 'She has fallen and will no longer rise'." Indeed, the Torah itself hints to the disappearance of part of the nation, stating (Devarim 29:17, 20), "Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from being with Hashem, our G-d, to go and serve the gods of those nations . . . Hashem will set him aside for evil from among all the tribes of Yisrael, like all the curses of the covenant that is written in this Book of the Torah." We read further (ibid verse 27), "Hashem removed them from upon their soil, with anger, with wrath, and with great fury, and He cast them to another land, as this very day!" [R' Abravanel cites additional sources, as well.] Nevertheless, we are justified in asking: How would R' Akiva interpret our verses, which imply that the two kingdoms will be reunified?

R' Abravanel explains: When R' Akiva taught that the Ten Tribes will never return, he meant that they will not return as a unit. However, throughout history, stragglers and refugees from those tribes have returned to the Jewish Nation. The first return occurred immediately upon the Ten Tribes' exile, when refugees from that exile settled in the southern kingdom of Yehuda (as described in Seder Olam ch.12). A century later, the prophet Yirmiyahu brought some of the members of the Ten Tribes back to Eretz Yisrael. These partial redemptions are alluded to in verses such as Amos 5:15, "Perhaps Hashem, the G-d of Legions, will grant favor to the remnant of Yosef" - a reference to the Ten Tribes, whose first king came from the tribe of Yosef.

(Yeshuot Meshicho Ch.4)

R' Menashe ben Israel z"l (see page 4) writes: The nature of the future redemption is sealed and is hidden from every person. It appears from the Prophets, however, that the Ten Tribes will travel to the Holy Land led by a nobleman to whom our Sages refer alternately as "Mashiach ben / son of Yosef" and "Mashiach ben Ephraim." The Gemara teaches that Mashiach ben Yosef will be killed in the War of Gog and Magog, after which "Mashiach ben David" will be revealed, as it is written [in our haftarah - 37:24], "My servant David will be king over them, and there will be a single shepherd for all of them." We also read (Hoshea 3:5), "Afterward, Bnei Yisrael will return and seek out Hashem their G-d and David their king, and they will tremble for Hashem and for His goodness in the end of days."

R' Menashe ben Yisrael continues: The appellation "Mashiach ben Yosef" or "ben Ephraim" may refer to the fact that the first mashiach will come from that tribe, just as the first king of the Ten Tribes -

Yerovam ben Nevat - was from Yosef, and particularly, Ephraim. In any case, "Yosef" also symbolizes the Jewish People in general, for the original Yosef also suffered in captivity and vanished from his people, only to be found in the end to be living a life of happiness and success. This is exactly the fate of the Ten Tribes.

He adds: "Mashiach ben Yosef," who will be killed in battle, will arise at the time of techiyat ha'meimot and will receive reward and honor. He will not reign as king, but only as a viceroy to the king from the descendants of David, just as Yosef was second to the king in Egypt.

(Mikveh Yisrael ch. 13)

R' Menashe ben Yisrael z"l

R' Menashe ben Yisrael was born into a family of hidden Jews in Madeira, Portugal in 1604. When he was a young child, his father escaped a death sentence at the hands of the Inquisition and moved his family to Amsterdam, where they openly re-adopted the Jewish faith. In Amsterdam, young Menashe studied under R' Yitzchak Uziel and, at the age of 18, succeeded his teacher as rabbi of the Sephardic Neveh Shalom congregation. R' Menashe also received a thorough secular education and was fluent in ten languages. Among his friends or acquaintances was Rembrandt, who etched R' Menashe's portrait and also designed cover plates for one of R' Menashe's written works.

In 1639, the Jewish community of Amsterdam reorganized, leaving R' Menashe without adequate employment. R' Menashe had nearly completed final preparations for settling in Brazil when the Amsterdam community appointed him assistant to the Chief Rabbi, Shaul Mortera. In 1644, R' Menashe also became head of a newly opened yeshiva in Amsterdam.

R' Menashe believed that a prerequisite to the coming of mashiach was that the Jewish People be dispersed to every corner of the globe. To this end, he traveled to England in 1655 to persuade Oliver Cromwell to annul the almost four-century old expulsion of the Jews from England. R' Menashe also authored Mikveh Yisrael in which he argued that the American Indians are the "Ten Lost Tribes" (see inside pages of this issue).

R' Menashe's mission to England did not achieve the success he had hoped for and, to make matters worse, his son Shmuel died on the journey. Shortly after returning to Holland in 1657, R' Menashe died penniless and heartbroken.

R' Menashe wrote many works in Portugese, Spanish and Latin that were meant to answer theological questions that trouble Marranos. Among his best known Hebrew works is Nishmat Chaim which discusses the nature of the soul and related matters. (Source: The Early Acharonim)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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