

What is Your Spiritual Condition?

In this week's reading from Parashat Vayigash (*Shemot / Genesis 44:18-47:27*) the Portion begins with the brothers returning where Benjamin is caught with the cup of Joseph and the sons of Israel trying to explain to Joseph that they must bring their brother back to their father. We are told that Judah offers himself in the place of Benjamin (*44:8-34*). It is at this point Joseph says וְגַשׁוּ-נָא אֵלַי וְיִגְשׁוּ *“please come physically closer to me; they did so.”* Joseph reveals himself to his brothers (*45:1-8*) and says, *45:8 ‘Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (NASB)* Joseph asks, *“is my father still alive?”* In this discourse with his brothers, the rabbis say, *“first Joseph told his brothers that he was their brother; then he asked if his father was still alive; He did not want to raise the subject of their having sold him in the presence of his brother Binyamin who had been unaware of that.”* (*Daat Zkenim on Genesis 45:4, Part 1*) Based upon the flow of the Torah narrative, Joseph did not want to bring accusation against his brothers, he was a righteous man. Joseph then instructs Israel and his brothers to move to the land of Goshen to live near him since the famine was going to continue for another five years (*45:9-15*). Pharaoh ordered that the best land be given to Jacob and his family (*45:9-24*). Israel makes an offering to the Lord God Almighty and travels to Egypt (*45:28-46:26*). We learn that Jacob is 130 years old (*47:9*) and the people were settled in the land of Goshen and Joseph fed them because of the famine (*47:11-13*). The famine grew very severe and the people gave all their money in order to obtain food to survive (*47:14-15*). After the money was gone, the people brought their livestock and cattle to pay for the food (*47:16-17*). After this the people sold their land and themselves into slavery in order to buy grain for food to survive (*47:18-21*) and the people grew numerous in the land of Goshen (*47:27*).

This week, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. The question is though, why did his brothers not recognize him? Why did Joseph make himself look like an Egyptian? Did his brothers not recognize him because of their spiritual state, which consisted of injustice towards others?

ספר בראשית פרק מד Bereshit / Genesis 44:18-29

יח ויגש אליו יהודה ויאמר בי
אדני ידבר-נא עבדך דבר באזני
ני אדני ואל-יחר אפך בעבדך כי
כמוך כפרעה: יט אדני שאל את-
עבדיו לאמר היש-לכם אב או-אח:
כ ונאמר אל-אדני יש-לנו אב זקן
וילד זקנים קטן ואחיו מת ויגתר
הוא לבדו לאמו ואביו אהבו: כא
ותאמר אל-עבדי הורדהו אלי
ואשימה עיני עליו: כב ונאמר
אל-אדני לא-יוכל הנער לעזוב
את-אביו ועזב את-אביו ומת: כג
ותאמר אל-עבדי אם-לא ירד
אחיקם הקטן אתכם לא תספון
לראות פני: כד ויהי כי עלינו אל-
עבדך אבי ונגד-לו את דברי אדני:
כה ויאמר אבינו שבו שברו-לנו
מעט-אכל: כו ונאמר לא נוכל
לרדת אם-יש אחינו הקטן אתנו
וירדנו כי-לא נוכל לראות פני
האיש ואחינו הקטן איננו אתנו:
כז ויאמר עבדך אבי אלנו אתם
ידעתם כי שנים ילדה-לי אשתי:
כח ויצא האחד מאתי ואמר אף
טרף טרף ולא ראיתיו עד-הנה:
כט ולקחתם גם-את-זה מעם פני
וקרהו אסון והורדתם את-שיבתי
ברעה שאלה:

44:18 Then Judah approached him, and said, 'Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh. 44:19 'My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' 44:20 'We said to my lord, 'We have an old father and a little child of his old age. Now his brother is dead, so he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.' 44:21 'Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me that I may set my eyes on him.' 44:22 'But we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' 44:23 'You said to your servants, however, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' 44:24 'Thus it came about when we went up to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. 44:25 'Our father said, 'Go back, buy us a little food.' 44:26 'But we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' 44:27 'Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; 44:28 and the one went out from me, and I said, 'Surely he is torn in pieces,' and I have not seen him since. 44:29 'If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.' (NASB)

In this week's Torah Portion, we are told that Judah said, ויגש אליו יהודה ויאמר בי אדני ידבר-נא עבדך דבר באזני ני אדני ואל-יחר אפך בעבדך כי כמוך כפרעה: 44:18 Then Judah approached him, and said, 'Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be

angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh. (NASB) Note that he says, כִּי כְמוֹךָ כְּפָרְעֹה, “because you are like Pharaoh.” This is a very significant statement, because this raises a question about Jewish identity. When the brothers met Joseph after so many years, they recognized him as a son of Egypt and not as a son of Israel. Based upon the way Joseph behaved, where did his loyalties lay? After having lived for so many years in a foreign land, and taking on himself the appearance of the people, the culture, and the language of Egypt, did he still believe in the covenant of God? In the Torah portion, Joseph is presented positively, however, he causes his brothers and his father to go through a long process of accusations and psychological torment. Did Joseph still consider himself to have part in the covenant of Abraham or not? I believe that he did, but the manner in which he treated his brothers is important and concerns the Torah concept of Justice.

We can learn a lot about the Torah’s concept of justice from the Psalm of Asaph, according to *Tehillim / Psalms 82*, which states, “*A Psalm of Asaph. God stands in the congregation of the mighty, He is a Judge among judges (Elohim) (Tehillim / Psalms 82:1).*” The midrash (Part 1) on the psalm states, “*These words are to be considered in the light of Moshe’s charge to the judges in Israel, You will not respect persons in judgment for the judgment is God’s (Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:17).*” The rabbis cite *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:17*, יז לֹא-תִכְרִירוּ פְּנִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט כְּקִטּוֹן כְּגֹדֶל תִּשְׁמַעוּן, לֹא תִגְוְרוּ מִפְּנֵי-אִישׁ כִּי הַמִּשְׁפָּט לְאֱלֹהִים הוּא וְהִדְבַּר אֲשֶׁר יִקְשֶׁה מִכֶּם תִּקְרְבוּן אֵלַי: 1:17 ‘*You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God’s. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.*’ (NASB) This is connected to what Moshe wrote in *Shemot / Exodus 22:8-9*.

Shemot / Exodus 22:8-9

22:8 ‘If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor’s property. 22:9 ‘For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, ‘This is it,’ the case of both parties shall come before the

judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. (NASB, אִם-לֹא יִמָּצֵא הַגֹּנֵב וְנִקְרַב בְּעַל-הַבַּיִת, אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים אִם-לֹא נִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ בְּמִלְאֲכַת רֵעֵהוּ: ח עַל-כָּל-דְּבַר-פְּשָׁע עַל-שׂוֹר עַל-חֲמוֹר עַל-שָׂה עַל-שְׁלֵמָה עַל-כָּל-אַבְדָּה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר כִּי-הוּא זֶה עַד הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא דְבַר-שְׁנִיָּהֶם אֲשֶׁר יִרְשִׁיעַן אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁלַם (שְׁנַיִם לְרֵעֵהוּ:))

Notice how we are told that if a thief is not caught, the owner of the house is to appear before God (Elohim, אֱלֹהִים) and this is within the context of going before men to receive judgment. Note how Moshe describes a judge in the Torah, he calls them gods (Elohim, אֱלֹהִים). This is important if we consider Judah's statement, *"because you are like Pharaoh,"* where Pharaoh is considered a god, and even the son of the gods in the Egyptian culture and religion. The point to pay attention to is how Moshe wrote God (Elohim, אֱלֹהִים) to describe men, he is telling us that it is by God's appointment that men have been given divine authority to execute judgment in His (God's) name. These Scriptures indicate that each judge is a representative of the Lord God in heaven, bearing both the name, the character, and the authority of God, in order to administer justice. This suggests that the judge is to bear the name and the image of the Father in heaven. The psalmist reminds us that though we bear the image of God, we are still mortal and will die and give account of our lives before the Most High God in heaven (*Tehillim / Psalms 82:5-7*). What is being emphasized here is that judgment is being meted out with justice and that the sinner will die at the hands of justice, if a person persists in their wickedness.

What is interesting is Yeshua used these words in *John 10:34*, when the people accused him of blasphemy because he claimed to be one with the Father in heaven. Yeshua's claim to be at one with the Father, is connected to his walking according to the Torah, and being set upon the path the Lord God had established for him, as a representative of the Father in heaven, and to lay his life down for ours. The parallel Yeshua was using here in *John 10:34* is within a Torah context, and not something new. Yeshua draws the Torah into the discussion based upon *Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:17* and *Shemot / Exodus 22:8-9*, to say that from ancient times, the judges were called gods and sons of the Most High, in spite of their unwor-

thiness for such a position. Yeshua's question then is, "*was it blasphemy to say that he was one with the Father in heaven if he is walking and living according to the Torah?*" In addition, is it "*blasphemy*" for one who had received a special commission as God's representative, one whose life and work bore witness to the glory of God to then call Himself the Son of God?

The question though in relation to Joseph, he looked and felt like an Egyptian, though he was saving many lives through the food he had stored up over the years. Was Joseph bringing glory to God by the way he was saving lives? The narrative only implies that Joseph remained faithful to the Lord God of Israel, and that he was working in the commission the Lord had given him, as a righteous man. *Rabbi Chananel on Bereshit / Genesis 6:2* says the following:

Rabbeinu Chananel on Bereshit / Genesis 6:2:1

ויראו בני האלוהים את בנות האדם כי טובות הנה, ויקחו להם נשים. *We have already explained that the noun אלוהים is a noun which is sometimes applied to G'd, and sometimes to certain people, and sometimes to phenomena which some people worship even though they have nothing divine about them, In Genesis 1:1 בראשית ברא אלוקים, it is clearly a reference to G'd. In Genesis 20:3 ויבא אלוהים אל אבימלך, it is a reference to an angel, seeing that he carried out a mission on behalf of G'd. In Exodus 22:8 עד האלוהים יבא דבר שניהם, it is a reference to a judge, a human being. The term is also applied to select human beings of a spiritually high level, such as when David quotes G'd in Psalms 82:6 אני אמרתי אלהים אתם (man) are "divine," (until you sinned). In our verse here, the Torah in speaking of בני האלוהים, refers to the elite of the human species at the time. In our verse it is a reference to the male elite, the judges.*

The interpretation is that Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) is a reference to one who has been sent to carry out a mission on behalf of the Lord God in heaven. This is within the context of the one who is obedient to the calling of God walking in holiness and righteousness and not living in a life of sin. This is

why Rabbeinu Chananel states “*In our verse here, the Torah in speaking of בני האלוהים (the sons of God) refers to the elite of the human species at the time. In our verse it is a reference to the male elite, the judges.*” The word Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) translated as “judges” in *Shemot / Exodus 22:8-9*, is to indicate that these judges are above reproach, and do not live hypocritical lives. The rabbis in *Midrash Tehillim 80, Part 1* say the following:

מדורש תהלים פרק פב סימן

א א
 א מזמור לאסף אלהים נצב
 בעדת אל בקרב אלהים יש-
 פוט. זהו שאמר הכתוב לא
 תכירו פנים במשפט (דברים
 א יז), וכן יהושפט, ויאמר אל
 השופטים ראו מה אתם עושים
 כי לא לאדם תשפטו כי לה'
 ועמכם בדבר משפט (דה"ב
 דברי הימים ב' יט ו), וכתוב
 כי המשפט לאלהים הוא (דב-
 רים א יז), שלא יאמרו הדיינים
 אנו יושבים לעצמנו בדין, אלא
 אמר הקב"ה לדיינים הווי יודעין
 כי עמכם אני יושב, שנאמר
 אני ה' אוהב משפט (ישעיה
 סא ח), ואם הטיתם את הדין
 אותי אתם מטים, שנאמר וק-
 רבתי אליכם למשפט (מלאכי
 ג ה), הוי בקרב אלהים יש-
 פוט, באמצע הדיינים, ישפוט,
 ומאן אלהים דיינא, שנאמר
 עד האלהים יבא דבר שניהם
 (שמות כב ח).

Midrash Tehillim 82, Part 1

1. A Psalm of Asaph. God stands in the congregation of the mighty, He is a Judge among judges (Elohim) (Tehillim / Psalms 82:1). These words are to be considered in the light of Moshe's charge to the judges in Israel, You will not respect persons in judgment for the judgment is God's (Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:17). And when Jehoshaphat set up judges in the land, he also said to them, Consider what you do; for you judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment (2 Chronicles 19:6). The judgment is God's (Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:17) means that the judges should never say, We sit along in judgment, for the Holy One blessed be He, says to the judges, know that I sit among you, as is said, For I the Lord love judgment (Isaiah 61:18). If you push aside the right judgment, you push Me aside, for I said, And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against those that defraud the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me (Malachi 3:5). Hence the verse He is a Judge among Elohim is to be read, He is a Judge among judges. What can Elohim signify except judges, as in the verse, The cause of both will come before the judges (Elohim) (Shemot / Exodus 22:8)?

The midrash compares the psalm to Parashat Devarim and to Jehoshaphat setting up judges in the land of Israel and says *“for you judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment (2 Chronicles 19:6).”* Justice belongs to the Lord God in heaven, and a judge is meant for the purpose of bringing about God’s justice when a wrong has occurred. Rabbi Eliezer said *“when justice is done on earth, heaven suspends judgment and does not exact punishment; but when there is no justice, heaven sits in judgment and sends down punishment...”* The world is in a perilous state today because all the nations disregard God’s Torah command to pursue justice and truth, especially for the poor and the widows.

In Parashat Shoftim, we read in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 16:20*, כ צדק, 16:20 *‘Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you. (NASB)* The Hebrew word tzedek means *“righteousness”* or *“justice”* and is something that the Lord God our Father in heaven is called by *“the Lord our Righteousness,” “the Righteous God,” “the Righteous Judge,”* etc. According to Parashat Bereshit, we were created in God’s image, and therefore we are created to exercise righteousness in our daily lives. Based upon these Scriptures, an act of tzedakah (charity) is regarded as an moral obligation for the children of God. Isaiah said, יז וְהָיָה מַעֲשֵׂה הַצְדָקָה שְׁלוֹם וְעִבְדַת הַצְדָקָה הַשְׁקֵט, 32:17 *And the work of righteousness will be peace, And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. (NASB)* Even the Apostle Paul said *Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (NASB)* We were created for good deeds (maasim tovim), which God prepared beforehand (*before the creation of the world which is a reference to the Torah*) for us to walk in them.

The exercise of justice in our lives inevitably involves judging ourselves and others. This is not for the purpose of condemnation, but for the purpose of doing what is right, and to not follow in the path of unrighteousness and wickedness as David describes in his psalms (*Tehillim / Psalms 1:1-3*) The reason being, justice and righteousness requires us to discern what is morally true, and we are created to be moral and ethical creatures. The Lord God in heaven gave us His standard, and using His

example, judgment is always tempered with grace and love. The Lord God does care and calls us to practice righteousness. In addition to this, He holds us accountable for the way we live our lives. This is why the rabbis say in the midrash “*for you judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment (2 Chronicles 19:6).*” The midrash continues saying:

The judgment is God’s (Devarim / Deuteronomy 1:17) means that the judges should never say, We sit along in judgment, for the Holy One blessed be He, says to the judges, know that I sit among you, as is said, For I the Lord love judgment (Isaiah 61:18). If you push aside the right judgment, you push Me aside, for I said, And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against those that defraud the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me (Malachi 3:5).

The Scriptures testify that the Lord God loves justice, and likewise we should to. It may be the reason Joseph treated his brothers and his father in the way that he did, was because he too loved justice and he was sorting out whether his brothers knew the Lord God in heaven. The conclusion is that if we push justice aside, we push the Lord God aside. The reason being, God comes near when we make a judgment. This is why it is so important to show mercy, towards others in discernment (judgment) because the Lord God is merciful. Practicing justice therefore is synonymous to the presence of God, and this may be the reason Asaph puts all of these concepts together in his psalm saying, *ד פִּלְטוּ-דָל וְאֶבְיוֹן מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים, וְהִצִּילוּ: ה לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יָבִינוּ בְּחֻשְׁכָּה יִתְהַלְּכוּ לְמוֹטוֹ כָּל-מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ: ו אֲנִי-אֲמַדְּרֶם: 82:4 Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked. 82:5 They do not know nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are shaken. 82:6 I said, ‘You are gods, And all of you are sons of the Most High. (NASB)* The Lord says that He has defined justice, and He will be a witness against those who are corrupt and defraud others, and who do not take care to act with justice and truth. Those who do not do so also do not fear the Lord or His judgment. We are warned to be careful to live

in righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth, because we were created for such things, and because we are called “*gods*” in the sense of being the messengers of justice in this world. This seems to be the manner in which Joseph was living and functioning according to Parashat Vayigash.

In this week’s Torah Portion (*Shemot / Genesis 44:18-47:27*), Joseph caused his brothers and his father to go through a long process of accusation and psychological torment. The manner in which he treated his brothers is important and it may be that Joseph wanted to see if his brothers had changed and now lived according to God’s ways, in righteousness, justice, and truth. The Torah portion states, “*Joseph’s brothers came and bowed down low to him... Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him.*” (42:7-8) The point is that if they grew up together, they lived together, they played together, they celebrated and sang together, how then did his brothers not recognize him? Was it because he had changed so much that caused them to not be able to identify him? The Jewish commentators suggest a number of explanations. Sforno (Rabbi Ovadia forno) says that his harsh tone startled them. Joseph spoke in a tough voice rather than his customary soft tone and this threw the brothers off. Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir) suggests that translators communicated between them thereby creating a distance. The brothers heard only Egyptian from Joseph so they didn’t recognize his speech. Other commentators such as Ramban and Radak, point to a further aspect of this first meeting. The brothers met the viceroy of Egypt, *e.g. the Prime Minister dressed in royal regalia*, and are surrounded by advisors and translators. So no matter how much he would resemble their long lost brother, it would have never enter their minds that this high ranking official could be Joseph. They might think that he looks or sounds like Joseph, but they would never identify him as their brother. Rashi states that the Sons of Jacob all had beards, whereas Joseph had shaved off his beard in line with common Egyptian fashions. The brothers did not recognize the clean-shaven Joseph.

The point is that his brothers did not recognize him, but here we find Joseph functioning as Elohim (אֱלֹהִים), as judge and savior being in the position and carrying out the mission God had given him. In addition, he was seeking justice and truth from his brothers, something they did not put into practice throughout their lives. They did not recognize him because they did not practice these things. So the question for us is, if

we do not practice these things, will we be able to recognize our Father in heaven and Yeshua the Messiah? Righteousness, holiness, justice, truth, mercy, and love are the ways of our Father in heaven, and His Messiah Yeshua. If you are not actively trying to live according to God's ways, do you think it is possible to recognize the work of the Lord God in heaven and His Messiah Yeshua in our lives? Determine today to set your foot on the path of righteousness, and seek the Lord, our Father in heaven for help, in the Name of His Son Yeshua the Messiah!

