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Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

Yehoshaphat and Jewish Justice

In Sefer Melachim, we encountered King Yehoshaphat of the Judean kingdom in the space of one chapter, in which he serves as a foil for his *mechutan*, King Achav of the northern kingdom. In Sefer Melachim, Yehoshaphat allies himself with Achav to fight against the menace of Aram, who had been at war with the northern kingdom for three years. In what seems to be a personal encounter between the *mechutanim*, Achav asks Yehoshaphat if he would join him in battle against Aram, and Yehoshaphat consents, but requests that before going out to engage in battle, they consult with a prophet of God. Achav responds by assembling his team of four hundred false prophets, who jubilantly predict his victory. When Yehoshaphat wonders aloud, "Is there yet a prophet of God remaining here, with whom we might consult?" Achav initially resists, saying, "There is one prophet of God here, named Michayhu ben Yimlah, but I hate him, for he never says anything good about me, only bad."

When Yehoshaphat objects on principle to such thinking, Achav has Michayhu brought in. A dramatic scene ensues in which Michayhu ultimately predicts Achav's death in the forthcoming battle. The chapter ends with the death

of Achav and Yehoshaphat's return to his own kingdom, having narrowly escaped the death that may well have befallen him thanks to his alliance, both personal and political, with his rival king.



Rav Eliyahu Dessler zt"l

In stark contrast to this concise portrait of Yehoshaphat as a secondary character to Achav, around whom the real drama centered, in Divrei HaYamim we find a very different scenario. Achav is barely mentioned, and Yehoshaphat's exploits fill slightly more than four full chapters. In Chapter 17, Yehoshaphat is introduced as a strong monarch, who solidifies his kingdom politically, economically and spiritually. Chapter 18 reviews the story told in Sefer Melachim, and Chapter 19 adds new details of Yehoshaphat's achievements, notably appointing judges and reinforcing a judicial system that would function in complete accordance with Torah law. In Chapter 20 Yehoshaphat faces a threat from the neighboring countries of Moav and Ammon. In response, he offers a heartrending prayer that echoes the prayer of Shlomo HaMelech upon the inauguration of the Beit HaMikdash. His prayer effects a miraculous victory.

The nation bursts forth in celebration,

praising Hashem for their salvation, and the surrounding nations are intimidated by the recognition that Hashem defeats the enemies of Israel. In a brief epilogue we are informed of Yehoshaphat's single unsuccessful venture, in which he allied himself once again with Achazyah, king of Israel, and attempted to send a fleet of merchant ships to Tarshish, and Yehoshaphat is informed prophetically that the venture failed due to the evildoing of his partner. Yehoshaphat's epitaph categorically places him among the righteous kings of Yehudah.

One of the outstanding phrases in this expanded picture of Yehoshaphat is found in Chapter 17, verse 6: *וַיִּגְבַּהּ לְבוֹ בְּדַרְכֵי יְקֹנָק* - *And his heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem.*" The expression *לִבָּהּ* is generally associated with arrogance, yet in this context it is included in a description of Yehoshaphat's positive qualities. The midrash sees this as Yehoshaphat's defining quality, one that empowered him to reform the judicial system in Israel at the time.¹

Rav Dessler in *Michtav M'Eliyahu* teaches that Yehoshaphat achieved perfect harmony between arrogance and humility. This balance results in a sense of pride that is completely for the sake of Heaven, in which one realizes his own potential greatness in the service of Hashem. Yehoshaphat recognized his own strengths, enabling him to stand up to societal pressure and effect positive change. He stands in contrast to Shaul, who lost the kingship because he lacked this precise quality.²

The text records two campaigns initiated by Yehoshaphat - the appointment of teachers who circulated throughout the nations teaching Torah, and the appointment of judges. It's interesting that Ezra HaSofer, the

author of *Divrei HaYamim*, highlights these two efforts. Ezra was a member of the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, the religious leadership at the beginning of the Second Temple Era. The *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* are recorded as having emphasized three pillars of Jewish society: Justice, education and legislating fences to protect the integrity of Torah.³ Yehoshaphat's campaign to reinforce at least two of these three values would certainly have resonated with Ezra. They are essential to the foundation of a successful Jewish state.

Yehoshaphat's commitment to justice resonated with at least one other prophet. In *Sefer Yoel*, the Navi prophesies that at the end of days, the nations of the world will be brought to justice in the Valley of Yehoshaphat, where they will be punished for their persecution of the Jewish nation. The commentators explain that this is either a valley adjacent to Yerushalayim in which Yehoshaphat was known to have figured significantly, or a metaphor for a place of justice, which lies at the core of Yehoshaphat's name and character. May we merit to see the justice of Yehoshaphat implemented both within Jewish society and through the punishment served to the enemies of Israel. ■

3. אבות אב:

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

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1. מדרש תנחומא פרשת שופטים
2. מכתב מאליהו ד' 52, 231