

Parsha Ponders

Rosh Hashanah | September 16, 2020 | 28 Elul 5780

*Hashem's ways of judgement*¹

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון וכו' בראש השנה כל באי עולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון שנאמר היוצר יחד לבם
המבין אל כל מעשיהם

On four occasions the world is judged...on Rosh Hashanah all of the world's inhabitants pass before Him like *benei Maron*, as it is written: "The One who makes together their hearts, The One who understands all of their actions"²

Our Sages teach us that on Rosh Hashanah every individual on Earth passes before Hashem for judgement, like *benei maron*. What does *benei maron* mean? The *gemarra* provides³ three explanations: like a flock of sheep⁴, like the steps of the House of Maron, or like the soldiers of King David. A flock a sheep refers to when a shepherd wants to count his sheep, he counts them one-by-one as they pass through a narrow entrance⁵. The steps of the House of Maron was a narrow path that not even two people could walk up side-by-side⁶. The soldiers of King David's army would be counted one-by-one as they went out to wage war⁷. These three explanations seem to all be saying the same thing: Hashem judges every individual on Rosh Hashanah one after the other. What then is their dispute?

Rav Chaim of Volozhin explains⁸ that these three opinions are expressing the three types of judgement that occur on Rosh Hashanah. One type of judgement is that Hashem examines every single deed a person performed throughout the year⁹. This is alluded to by the explanation of *benei maron* as referring to a flock of sheep¹⁰. In this type of judgement, everyone is judged according to their actions.

The second type of judgement is not according to the specific deed, but according to its spiritual damage. The damage caused by a sin is dependent on the person's spiritual stature¹¹. The greater the person, the greater the damage their sin inflicts, which in turn deserves a greater punishment. What this means is that two different people who break the exact same transgression could be punished entirely differently. The person on the higher level did a more destructive act, and will thus be punished more¹². This mode of judgement is alluded to by the steps of the House of Maron. The steps represent the different spiritual levels people are at, and it is with this that they are judged.

The third type of judgement is very much like that of a human army. If a foot soldier fails to perform their tasks, that is a crime, but it won't lose the war. Every soldier is needed, but an individual who falters won't make or break the battle. They'll be penalized accordingly. It's worse if their commanding officer messes up, which could cause their whole unit defeat. However, if the general of the army

¹ Based on Be'er Yosef on Rosh Hashanah, printed between *parshas Nitzavim* and *Vayeilech*

² Rosh Hashanah 1:2, quoting Psalms 33:15

³ Ibid 18a

⁴ Rashi ad. loc. s.v. כבני אימרנא בר"ה כל באי עולם כו' כבני אימרנא

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid s.v. כמעלות בין מרון

⁷ Ibid s.v. כחיילות של בית דוד

⁸ Derashas Maharach Derasha L'Yom Rishon D'Slichos 5572, printed in the back of some versions of Nefesh HaChaim. For an alternate explanation of this *gemarra*, see <https://parshaponders.com/rosh-hashanah-5779>

⁹ See Chagigah 5b that even light talk between husband and wife scrutinized during the Final Judgement

¹⁰ Rav Chaim and the Be'er Yosef don't explain exactly how this is alluded to by the comparison to a flock of sheep

¹¹ This is determined by how "high" the person's root of their soul resides

¹² The language of Rav Chaim is זה פגם בחצר המלך וזה בכסא

blunders in his duties, that would have catastrophic consequences for the war. Likewise, every person has someone they are responsible for, be it a sibling, a spouse, a child. If it's a community leader, it's their community, and if it's one of the *gedolei hador*, the leaders of the generation, they're responsible for all of Jewry. *Chazal say*¹³ that we are held accountable for failing to reprove those we are responsible for. Just like different positions in the army, the greater the responsibility, the greater the consequences for failure. Hashem's third way of judgement is according to how many people the person is responsible for.

While this is an incredibly insightful explanation, something still needs clarification. Hashem's mode of judgement which is similar to positions in the army could have been compared to any army. Why then did the *gemarra* specify soldiers from the army of King David¹⁴? Maybe there's something deeper being hinted at here. Perhaps we can take Rav Chaim's foundation and expand upon it.

At the end of what's known as the *Tochacha*, the curses destined upon the Jewish people if they abandon the Torah¹⁵, there's an interesting verse. It says that Hashem will remember the covenant He made with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and He will remember the land¹⁶. This is seemingly a verse of comfort, telling the Jews that there is still hope. The very next verse however says another curse, that the land will expel them for breaking and despising the Torah. Why is there this verse of comfort before the curses are fully finished?

The *Shela HaKadosh* says¹⁷ that he has a tradition that this verse is also part of the rebuke of the curses. It's telling us that there's no comparison between a wicked person, the son of a wicked person, and a wicked person the son of a righteous person. The latter saw their parents act properly, and chose to abandon their ways and instead live wickedly. This person's punishment is far worse than someone who was born into an immoral family. This is what the Torah is alluding to by mentioning our forefathers. The curses are so much greater for abandoning the Torah, since the Jewish people come from such righteous individuals, and they lived in such a spiritual land.

There's an interesting *gemarra* which discusses people of proper lineage. It says that a person who descends from someone who was in the Jewish King's army doesn't need to be investigated¹⁸. They're assured have an impeccable pedigree. The *gemarra* clarifies¹⁹ that this refers to the soldiers from King David's army. This is because they ensured that all their soldiers had perfect ancestry, confirming that they were all righteous. This was so the merit of their ancestors would help them in battle.

¹³ [Shabbos 54b](#)

¹⁴ The [Be'er Yosef](#) doesn't ask, but we could similarly wonder why the *gemarra* chose the steps of the House of Maron. Perhaps it's because of what [Rashi](#) said, that those steps specifically were so narrow that only one person could go up then at a time. However, a deeper explanation is found in the source brought in note 8. What's interesting is that source doesn't address why the *gemarra* chose King David's soldiers, which the [Be'er Yosef](#) addresses

¹⁵ [Leviticus 27:14-46](#)

¹⁶ [Ibid v. 42](#)

¹⁷ [Shenei Luchos HaBris Torah SheBiksav parshas Bechukosai § 4](#)

¹⁸ [Kiddushin 4:5](#)

¹⁹ [Ibid 76b](#)

We can then say that this is the intent of the *gemarra* which specified the soldiers of King David²⁰. Not only is it referring to Hashem judging a person based on their level of responsibility, like positions in the army. Additionally²¹, it's referring to a person's ancestry²². Like the *Shela HaKadosh* says, if a person descends from righteous individuals, and doesn't follow in their ways, their punishment is that much greater. Hashem takes everything into account. As we say in *Unesaneh Tokef*²³, this is the might of the holiness of this day. This Day of Judgement is astonishing and powerful.

Kesiva VeChasima Tovah. Have a happy, healthy, sweet, New Year.

²⁰ This explanation of *benei Maron* is given in the *gemarra* by Rav Yehudah in the name of Shmuel. The Be'er Yosef points out that the same speaker in Kiddushin about lineage is Rav Yehudah in the name of Shmuel. We can easily say then that the two appearances of בית דוד של חיילות have the same intent

²¹ The Be'er Yosef seems to want to maintain Rav Chaim's approach, but just add this extra detail due to the specificity of the soldiers of King David

²² The Be'er Yosef suggests how the words *benei Maron* could refer to this concept (something Rav Chaim's approach also didn't address). בני אנשים רמי מעלה בצדקת מעשיהם הטובים alludes to בני מרון

²³ In the *Mussaf* section of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers