

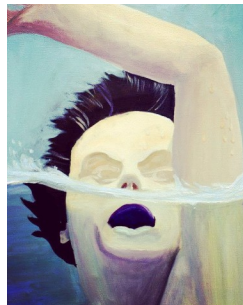
From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [282]

Then, in Jumped Nahshon ben Amminadab, and Descended into the Sea First

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sotah 36b-37a)

With appreciation to Rabbi Alfredo Borodowski, who was looking for a story about trust and inspired me to put together this shiur, as we are all looking to build trust in a vaccine against COVID-19.



Background to Our Story

Trust



<https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/covid-19-teaches-us-importance-trust-work>

"A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another."

Nahshon ben Amminadab



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nahshon>

In the Hebrew Bible, Nahshon (Hebrew: נַחֲשׁוֹן *Nahšon*) was a tribal leader of the Judahites during the wilderness wanderings of the Book of Numbers. According to the Hebrew Bible, Nahshon was a son of Amminadab, descendant in the fifth generation of Judah, and brother-in-law of Aaron.

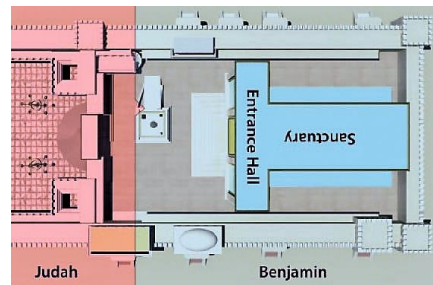
Nahshon was appointed by Moses, upon God's command, as prince and military commander of the Tribe of Judah and one of the leaders of the tribes of Israel. Although his tribe was fourth in the order of the Patriarchs, at the dedication of the Tabernacle he was the first to bring his dedicatory offering. Nahshon was, through Boaz, the direct male ancestor of David, and thus of Solomon and all of the kings of the Kingdom of Judah. He was exactly halfway in the direct male line between Judah and King David.

Portion of Judah and Benjamin



Koren Talmud Bavli, The Noe Edition. Yoma. Koren publishers Jerusalem Page 51

This diagram, which is not to scale, indicates the division of the territory of the Temple between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.



"as it was taught in a baraita: What part of the Temple was located in the portion of the tribe of Judah? It was the part including the entire Temple Mount, excluding those areas in the portion of Benjamin, the chambers, and the courtyards. And what part of the Temple was in the portion of the tribe of Benjamin? It was the part including the Entrance Hall of the Sanctuary, and the Sanctuary, and the Holy of Holies." (Yoma 12a)

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sotah 36B-37A

הֵיָה רַבִּי מֵאִיר אֹמֵר: כְּשֶׁעָמְדוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל הַיָּם, הָיוּ שֹׁבְטִים מִנִּצְחָתָם זֶה עִם זֶה, זֶה אֹמֵר "אֲנִי יוֹרֵד תְּחִלָּה לַיָּם" וְזֶה אֹמֵר "אֲנִי יוֹרֵד תְּחִלָּה לַיָּם". קִפְץ שֹׁבְטוֹ שֶׁל בְּנֵימִין וְיָרַד לַיָּם תְּחִלָּה, שְׁנֹאמַר: "שֵׁם בְּנֵימִין צִעִיר רַדָּם". אֵל תִּקְרִי "רַדָּם" אֶלָּא "רַד יָם". וְהָיוּ שְׂרֵי יְהוּדָה רוֹגְמִים אוֹתָם, שְׁנֹאמַר: "שְׂרֵי יְהוּדָה רֹגְמָתָם".
לְפִיכֹף זָכָה בְּנֵימִין הַצַּדִּיק וְנַעֲשָׂה אוֹשְׁפִיזָן לַגְּבוּרָה, שְׁנֹאמַר: "וּבֵין כְּתָפָיו שָׁכַן".

אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי יְהוּדָה: לֹא כָּף הָיָה מַעֲשָׂה, אֶלָּא זֶה אֹמֵר "אֵין אֲנִי יוֹרֵד תְּחִלָּה לַיָּם" וְזֶה אֹמֵר "אֵין אֲנִי יוֹרֵד תְּחִלָּה לַיָּם". קִפְץ נַחֲשׁוֹן בֶּן עַמִּינַדָּב וְיָרַד לַיָּם תְּחִלָּה, שְׁנֹאמַר: "סִבְבֵּנִי בְּכַחַשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וּבְמַרְמָה בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה עַד רַד עִם אֵל".
וְעָלְיוֹ מִפְּרֵשׁ בְּקִבְלָה: "הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהִים כִּי בָאוּ מֵיָם עַד נַפְשִׁי, טִבְעָתִי בִּיּוֹן מִצּוּלָה וְאֵין מַעֲמָד וְגו' אֵל תִּשְׁטַפְנִי שִׁבְלַת מַיִם וְאֵל תִּבְלַעֲנִי מִצּוּלָה" וְגו'.

בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה הָיָה מִשָּׁה מֵאֲרִיף בַּתְּפִלָּה. אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: יְדִידֵי טוֹבְעִים בַּיָּם, וְאוֹתָהּ מֵאֲרִיף בַּתְּפִלָּה לְפָנָיו? אָמַר לְפָנָיו: רְבוּנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, וּמָה בְּיָדִי לַעֲשׂוֹת? אָמַר לוֹ: "דַּבֵּר אֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִסְעוּ, וְאוֹתָהּ הָרַם אֶת מִטֵּה וְנָטָה אֶת קֶדֶף" וְגו'.

לְפִיכֹף זָכָה יְהוּדָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מִמְּשָׁלָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׁנֹאמַר: "הֵיָתָה יְהוּדָה לְקַדְּשׁוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמְּשָׁלוֹתָיו". מָה טַעַם "הֵיָתָה יְהוּדָה לְקַדְּשׁוֹ" וְ"יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמְּשָׁלוֹתָיו"? מִשׁוּם ד' הַיָּם רָאָה וַיִּגָּס.

Rabbi Meir would say: When the Jewish people stood at the Red Sea, the tribes were arguing with one other. This one was saying: I am going into the sea first, and that one was saying: I am going into the sea first. Then, in

jumped the tribe of Benjamin and descended into the sea first, as it is stated: "There is Benjamin, the youngest, ruling them [*rodem*]" (Psalms 68:28). Do not read it as: "Ruling them [*rodem*]"; rather, read it as: Descending [*red*] into the sea [*yam*]. And the princes of the tribe of Judah were stoning them [*rogmim otam*] for plunging in first and not in the proper order, as it is stated in the continuation of the verse: "The princes of Judah, their council [*rigmatam*]" (Psalms 68:28).

Therefore, Benjamin the righteous was privileged to serve as host to the Divine Presence of the Almighty, as the Temple was built in the territory of Benjamin, as it is stated in Moses' blessing for the tribe of Benjamin: "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; He covers him all the day, and He rests between his shoulders" (Deuteronomy 33:12).

Rabbi Yehuda said to Rabbi Meir: That is not how the incident took place. Rather, this tribe said: I am not going into the sea first, and that tribe said: I am not going into the sea first. Then, in jumped the prince of Judah, Nahshon ben Amminadab, and descended into the sea first, as it is stated: "Ephraim surrounds Me with lies and the house of Israel with deceit, and Judah is yet wayward toward God [*rad im El*]" (Hosea 12:1), which is interpreted homiletically as: And Judah descended [*rad*] with God [*im El*].

And in this regard, the tradition, i.e., the Writings, explicates Nahshon's prayer at that moment: "Save me, God; for the waters are come in even unto the soul. I am sunk in deep mire, where there is no standing...let not the water flood overwhelm me, neither let the deep swallow me up" (Psalms 69:2-3, 16).

At that time, Moses was prolonging his prayer. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: My beloved ones are drowning in the sea and you prolong your prayer to me?

Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, but what can I do? God said to him: "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward. And you, lift up your rod and stretch out your hand" (Exodus 14:15-16).

For this reason, the tribe of Judah merited to govern Israel, as it is stated: "Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion. The sea saw it and fled" (Psalms 114:2-3). The *baraita* interprets the verses in this manner: What is the reason that Judah became His sanctuary and Israel came under His dominion? It is because "the sea saw it and fled."



Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Our story presents two scenarios. In the first one, the tribes fight to be the first one to jump into the sea. In the second scenario, the tribes fight not to be the first one to jump. Which scenario seems more plausible to you?

? According to the first part of the story –the first scenario- why were the princes of the tribe of Judah stoning the members of the tribe of Benjamin?

Extra Bonus ? According to our story, what prompted Nahshon ben Amminadab to jump first?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus ? What do you think prompted Nahshon ben Amminadab to "take the plunge"?

? How do we know that Nahshon ben Amminadab was not enjoying his adventure?

? What do we learn from the short exchange between Moses and God?

Bonus ? According to our story, why did Judah merit to become the leader of the Jewish people?

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

! Change can only happen when (enough) people have faith and are willing to take risks.

! There is a time for talking (and prayer is a form of talking) and there is a time for action. This is the lesson God and Nahshon ben Amminadab taught Moses!



In the Biblical story, which provides the framework for our story -a classic in Talmudic literature- the Children of Israel find themselves between a rock and a hard place. According to the second, more realistic, scenario in our story, everybody, including Moses and Aaron, is paralyzed by inaction. Nahshon ben Amminadab, the hero of our story, takes the plunge, literally and figuratively, and things start happening. Of course there is an element of fear and anxiety in every life-changing decision. These feelings are conveyed by Nahshon in the words of the Psalmist (Psalms 69:2-3, 16): “Save me, God; for the waters are come in even unto the soul. I am sunk in deep mire, where there is no standing...let not the water flood overwhelm me, neither let the deep swallow me up.”

As an appendix to our story, Moses learns a lesson from God, and from Nahshon: there is a time for talking and there is a time for action.

At the end of our story, Nahshon, is rewarded with leadership. However, the keen reader can see that Nahshon’s leadership qualities: the readiness to take risks, prioritizing action over deliberation, and a quota of faith and trust, are already present within him from the beginning of our story, and they are only looking for an opportunity to show themselves.