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Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayetze

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The Human Tithe

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

“Jacob then made a vow, saying, ‘If G-d remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return safe to my father’s house—the Lord shall be my G-d. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be G-d’s abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You.’” (Bereishit 28:20-22, JPS Translation)

When Yaakov had his prophetic vision as he fled Israel for Charan, he committed to dedicating a tithe to G-d if G-d would take care of him. While it is normally assumed that he referred to ten percent of his material wealth, several traditions suggest that his pledge cast a wider net, including human resources as well.

Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer (37) propounds that the tribe of Levi’s eventual status as the officers of the Mikdash was decided as a result of this vow. This midrash contends that when Yaakov fought an angel at Maavar Yabok, the angel had come to demand that Yaakov fulfill his promised tithe. After Yaakov calculated and designated ten percent of his cattle, the angel challenged Yaakov, “Don’t you also have ten sons? You owe one to G-d.”

This midrash then offers two ways in which Yaakov counted his sons, to conclude that Levi was the tenth:

- Either, Yaakov discounted the firstborns of different mothers, leaving him with eight. Then he counted through all of them, and when he finished, began again. Levi,

being the second non-firstborn, came out as number ten. (See also the Targum attributed to Yonatan ben Uziel.)

- Alternatively, Yaakov began counting backwards from Binyamin, making Levi number ten. (This midrash does not mention that Binyamin was not yet born, thus making both calculations problematic.)

The Maaseh Rokeach (Maasrot 1) notes the gemara which derives from Yaakov’s language of “*aser a’aserenu*” (I will surely tithe), a double reference to tithing, that one is permitted to give up to one-fifth (2x 1/10) of his money to charity, if he so chooses. (Ketuvot 50a) Maaseh Rokeach argues that not only was Levi dedicated to G-d because of Yaakov’s pledge, but Yehudah was as well. This is why his tribe became dedicated to the monarchy.

From this analysis, two lessons emerge. First, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer 4:26:3) suggests that in addition to giving monetary charity, people should strive to dedicate 10% of their time to others. Rabbi Feinstein originally presented this as part of a call to action to yeshiva students to recognize their responsibilities to others. This notion, that all we have from G-d, including our wealth, our time, and the very essence of our being, are gifts that must be shared, is already evident in the above midrashic tradition.

Additionally, as the Talmud notes (Horayot 10a), positions of authority are not viewed primarily as privileges.

Rather, leaders are “civil servants”, appointed to their roles so that they can help the community at large. Thus, giving Levi and Yehudah the roles of priesthood and kingship respectively could be qualified as “*maaser*”, a commitment to G-d and others. Perhaps it is for this reason that our greatest leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, was a reluctant leader. Rabbi Feinstein, in the above call to action, notes that Moshe’s precedent should encourage those who would prefer to focus on their own spirituality to leave their comfort zones, as Moshe eventually did.

However, with that self-sacrifice comes sanctity. As Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer continues: “Michael, the angel, descended and took Levi, and brought him up before the Throne of Glory, and he said: Master of the Universe! This is Your lot, and the portion of Your works. And He put forth His right hand and blessed him, that the sons of Levi should minister on earth before Him, like the ministering angels in heaven...” As Rambam notes (Hilchot Shemitah v’Yovel 13:13), these opportunities are not limited to Leviyim. Rather, any of us who follow a Divine mission in life, to some extent, share the sanctity of that holy, dedicated tribe.

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הורשתם את הארץ וישבתם בה (במדבר לו)
Marking the State of Israel's 70th Year!

Israeli Landmarks: Ben-Gurion Airport

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Our parshah is framed by two international border crossings: it begins with Yaakov leaving Canaan, and ends with him coming back. According to Rashi, our parshah also records the “changing of the guard” of angels at these borders, first at Beit El in his departure and then at Machanayim upon his return.

Border crossings remain crucial for the Jewish state. In 1948, once the State of Israel was declared, all potential land connections to the world were severed as the young country was surrounded by bitter enemies. Thus, its only gates of entry were by sea or by air, and securing a safe and reliable airport immediately became a top priority.

The airport known today as Ben-Gurion Airport was founded by the British Mandate in 1935 as “Wilhelma Airport”. Its main purpose was military, and a Royal Air Force (RAF) unit was constantly stationed there. The airfield was attacked by both Arabs and Jews on separate occasions, including the famous bombing of eleven RAF aircrafts

by the Etzel in 1946. These attacks notwithstanding, the British continued to develop the airfield as local demand grew. The first transatlantic line began to fly between Tel Aviv and New York during December of that year.

After the British withdrawal, the Transjordan Arab Legion took control of the airfield. The temporary Israeli government, led by David Ben-Gurion, understood the urgent need to secure the field, and sent two heavy tanks – a rare “luxury” in those days – to back the units assigned with conquering the airport. On July 14, 1948, Ben Gurion visited and wrote in his diary – “The great acts being done are almost unbelievable... who knows if the Israeli government could have succeeded in building such an airfield, even in ten years.”

The field’s traffic increased rapidly: from 40,000 yearly passengers in 1948, to 120,000 in 1958. This growth has continued and over 19,000,000 are expected in 2017. The airport was also put to the test in its early years in

special operations to bring in Jews from Yemen and Iraq.

As Israel’s main gateway to the world, the airport has been the target of several terrorist attacks. Two of the best-known assaults occurred in May, 1972: the hijack of Sabena Flight 571 on May 8th, in which one passenger was killed, and the massacre by Japanese terrorists on May 30th, resulting in the death of 24 victims. The security measures instituted since then have made Ben Gurion Airport one of the most secure airports in the world.

After Ben-Gurion’s death in 1973, the airport was named after him, preserving the memory of a leader who had the strategic understanding to see the crucial importance of a large international airport for the young insulated country. He was a ladder with its feet in the ground, but with its head in the heavens.

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The Zionist Idea: The Diaspora

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Even before the Jewish nation arrived in its homeland under Yehoshua, there was a Diaspora – not in the Greek definition of the word as a “scattering”, but in the colloquial sense of Jews who opted to live outside of the Land of Israel. The tribes of Reuven and Gad, later joined by part of Menasheh, opted for the green pastures found on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. (Bamidbar 32:1-5)

From the beginning, too, Jews who chose exile faced criticism from their brethren. Moshe challenged Reuven and Gad both in terms of their commitment to their brethren (“Shall your brothers go to war, while you remain here?” *ibid.* 32:6) and to G-d (“adding more to Divine rage” *ibid.* 32:14-15). The issue was only resolved when those tribes agreed to cross the Jordan and fight for the land west of the Jordan - and the land east of the Jordan was actually converted into halachic Israel as well. Even then, though, there was some suspicion, and when the soldiers of Reuven and Gad finally crossed the Jordan eastward to return to their families, there were fears on both sides that this geographic separation would lead to a schism in the nation. (Yehoshua 22)

The same challenge arose when Jews returned to build the second Beit haMikdash. The prophet Zecharyah condemned the Jews who remained in Babylon and refused to return (Ibn Ezra to Zecharyah 5:5), and Ezra penalized the Levites who did not return to Israel with him. (Ezra 8:15, Yevamot 86b) Moving forward to the Roman era, we find the Sages state that those who live outside of Israel are “as though they have

no G-d” (Ketuvot 110b), and that the mitzvot of Jews who live outside of Israel are viewed as rehearsal for the day when they will return to the land. (Sifri Devarim 43) Even the scholarship of Babylonian sages was viewed as suspect (Yoma 57a, Bava Metzia 85a), although similar allegations went the other way as well (Succah 44a).

Fundamentally, the existence of a Diaspora is a problem that can be solved only with the end of the exile. However, until then, the model established in those early days remains a positive way to avoid human resentment and schism, as well as Divine penalty. First, Reuven and Gad demonstrated their commitment by fighting on behalf of their brethren. And second, they created a visual reminder of their connection with the land. As they crossed the Jordan River, these tribes erected an oversized replica of the altar in the Mishkan, to demonstrate for future generations their eternal connection with the Land of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants.

Being outside of the land need not mean that we are a separate nation. With ties of investment both financial and personal, and with visible symbols of our unity, we can demonstrate that the tribes of Reuven, Gad and Menasheh were right: we remain one people, displaced but united.

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Biography
Rabbi Gershon Leiner
Adam Friedmann

Rabbi Gershon Henoah Leiner (1839-1891) was a grandson and student of Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Ishbitz, author of the popular but controversial Chassidic work *Mei haShiloach*. He was the third Rebbe in the Ishbitz dynasty, and he moved its center to the town of Radzyn in Eastern Poland, earning him the moniker “Radzyner Rebbe”.

Rabbi Leiner was a tremendous scholar, and he possessed a powerful memory. One of his works, *Orchot Chaim*, was written in only twelve days, without reference books, while he stood trial for a fabricated charge of libel. Internally, the Radzyner chassidim refer to Rabbi Leiner as the “Orchos Chaim” after the name of this work.

To the rest of the world, Rabbi Leiner is known best as the person who toiled to bring back the techelet dye to the Jewish people. In 1858, Rabbi Leiner set out to discover the identity of *chilazon*, the sea creature which is the source for the dye. He traveled to Italy numerous times, visiting what was then the world’s largest aquarium, in Naples, to study various aquatic specimens. After significant research, he concluded that the cuttlefish (*sepia officinalis*), a type of squid, was likely the source of techelet. He could not, however, convert its ink from black to blue. Eventually, after consulting with chemists, he found a process for producing blue dye out of the ink and announced that this was, in fact, the long-lost techelet. The techelet became popular amongst chassidim, and it is estimated that around 10,000 people wore it in Europe before World War II. Today, most authorities reject the cuttlefish as the source of techelet, though many chassidim, notably the Breslover chassidim, continue to use cuttlefish dye in their tzitzit.

Rabbi Leiner wrote three books on the subject of techelet, explaining and later defending his view. One issue regarding the reinstitution of techelet is the lack of a legal tradition regarding the details of the dye. The accompanying translation is part of Rabbi Leiner’s response to this objection.

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Torah and Translation
What Constitutes the “Oral Torah”?
Rabbi Gershon Leiner, Ein haTechelet pg. 12
Translated by Adam Friedmann

אחד מהם אמר במחבואו כי לא יכול להטיל התכלת בטליתו להיות שאינו ברור לו היאך הוא מהות מראית צבע התכלת אדום או שחור או ירוק, וכפי נטיית דעתו צריך להיות נוטה לאדום ואמר שכבר עשה בזה קונטרס מיוחד באריכות נפלא ונשאר בזה בצ"ע :

אבל אנו ישראל בני אברהם יצחק ויעקב שיש לנו קבלה ומסורת כידוע שתורה שבע"פ אינו דוקא הש"ס ויתר ספרי חז"ל שכבר באו בכתובים או בדפוס אלא כל פירוש או הנהגה טובה אשר יש לישראל מהוריו או מוריו אם הוא רק שלא כנגד התורה הקדושה בגדר תורה שבע"פ וקבלה נכנס ונצטוונו על זה בלאו דלא תסור.

ומסוג זה קריאת צורת א בשם אלף וצורת ב בשם בית וכן כל האותיות ופי' ה"לא" שלילה, וה"הן" חיוב, והתחלת ספירת השבוע ליום השביעי ממנו להחזיקו ליום השבת ולקדשהו. כל אלה ודומיהם הרבה אשר לא יוכל להציל ידיעתו מן הספר ונדע רק במסורה מאבותינו וממלמדינו אשר נאמר כי הוא ממש מסיני איש מפי איש.

וגם פי' תכלת מה היא מראיתה נודע וברור לכל תינוק מישראל ההולך לבית הספר כשלומד בתורה משה תיבת תכלת מפרש לו מלמדו (בלאה וואל) וידיעת בית רבו שמה ידיעה. והרי יש לנו קבלה ומסורת בפירוש מראית צבע התכלת, ומה לנו ליכנס בחקירות שלא יועילו ולא יגרעו, שהרי אפילו יבא גאון וחכם וירבה כחול ראיות היפך הקבלה והמסורה אסור לנו לשמוע אליו ומוזהרים אנו על זה בלאו דלא תסור :

One of them said from in hiding [i.e. anonymously] that he cannot put the techelet on his tallit because he is unsure about the hue of the techelet: is it red, or black, or green. And according to his opinion it should be a shade of red. And he said that he has already written a special pamphlet where he has treated the matter at length and has not come to a conclusion.

But we, Israel, the children of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov have a received tradition, as is known, that the Oral Torah includes not only the Talmud and the other works of our Sages which have already been written or printed. Rather, every explanation and virtuous practice which the people of Israel inherit from their parents or teachers, as long as it does not oppose the holy Torah, is considered part of the Oral Torah and our accepted traditions, and we are bound in it by the prohibition of “Do not stray.” (Devarim 28:14)

[Examples] of this type [of tradition] are calling the letter shaped א “alef” and the letter shaped ב “bet” and so too all the letters, and the fact that *lo* means negation and that *hen* means affirmation, and that seven days after the [accepted] beginning of the week is considered to be Shabbat and sanctified as such. About all of these and the many things similar to them, the knowledge of which cannot emerge from books and are known only through tradition from our ancestors and teachers, we say that they are received from Moshe at Sinai through direct transmission.

So, too, the explanation of the hue of techelet is known and clear to every child of Israel who attends school. When he learns in the Torah of Moshe the word “techelet” his teacher explains to him (blue wool), and the knowledge received from his teacher is acceptable knowledge. And so, we have a clear received tradition about the hue of the color techelet. And why should we involve ourselves with academic analyses which can neither help nor hurt? Even if a wise and brilliant person would come and enumerate proofs like sand against our received tradition it would be forbidden for us to listen to him, and we are warned against this as part of the prohibition of “Do not stray.”

Weekly Highlights: Nov. 25 – Dec. 1 / 7 Kislev – 13 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Nov. 24-25 Shabbaton at BAYT: Celebrating 70: Can a Halachic State Thrive?				
Fri. 4:10 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Dirty Politics	BAYT	<i>Parshah & Kugel</i>
Fri. Dvar Torah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Who Needs a Halachic State?	BAYT	<i>Before maariv</i>
Fri. 7:45 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Civil Marriage in Israel	128 Theodore Pl.	<i>Oneg</i>
8:50 AM	Yaron Perez	Yaakov's Angels	BAYT	<i>Turk Bais Medrash</i>
After hashkamah	Adam Friedmann	Civil Law in a Jewish State	BAYT	<i>Rabbi's Classroom</i>
After musaf	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Halachah & Prime Ministers	BAYT	<i>JLIC Minyan</i>
3:15 PM	Yaron Perez	מי הוא יהודי? מי הוא ישראלי?	BAYT	<i>Hebrew Shiur</i>
Seudah Shlishit	Adam Friedmann	G-d's Hand in Our Sovereignty	BAYT	
Before minchah	R' Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	<i>Rabbi's Classroom</i>
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gem. Avodah Zarah	BAYT	<i>Simcha Suite</i>
Motzaei, 6:30 PM	Yaron Perez	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
Sun. Nov. 26				
9:00 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	<i>Hebrew</i>
Mon. Nov. 27				
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Ethics: Informing of a Terminal Diagnosis	Shaarei Shomayim	<i>CME Approved; Laypeople welcome</i>
Tue. Nov. 28				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Nechemiah: The Surveyor	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua: Achan's Crime	129 Theodore Pl.	<i>For men</i>
8:00 PM	Rabbi Daniel Korobkin	Constructing a Dvar Torah	BAYT	<i>Week 3 of 4</i>
Wed. Nov. 29				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Mental Health in Judaism Week 5: Rest & Relaxation	Beth Emeth	<i>To register: torontotorah.com/mh</i>
12:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Ethical Challenge 3: Ethical Advertising	Zeifmans LLP 201 Bridgeland Ave	<i>Lunch provided RSVP rk@zeifmans.ca</i>
2:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Exploring Bamidbar	32 Timberlane Ave.	<i>For women</i>
8:00 PM	Adam Friedmann	Why do we do that?	Shaarei Tefillah	
8:00 PM	Yaron Perez	הפרשה ואני	Shaarei Shomayim	<i>In Easy Hebrew</i>
Thu. Nov. 30				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Dan's Conquest	49 Michael Ct.	<i>For women</i>
7:00 PM	Dr. Leora Pinhas Prof. Rael Strous R' Mordechai Torczyner	Eating Disorders in the Jewish Community	Shaarei Shomayim	<i>Presented by Mayanei HaYeshua Medical Centre</i>
Fri. Dec. 1				
10:30 AM	Yaakov Rand	Melachot of Shabbat	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<i>Advanced</i>

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

11 AM Sunday, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, Long Lost Friends in 2017

8:30 AM Monday, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, Nefesh haChaim

8:30 AM Friday, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, The Book of Yeshayah

For University Women, at Ulpanat Orot

9:30-11:30 AM Monday, Mrs. Elliezra Perez, From Rachel Imeinu to Racheli Frenkel

9:30-11:30 AM Tuesday, Mrs. Ora Ziring, Shabbat

9:30-11:30 AM Wednesday, Mrs. Ora Ziring, Contemporary Halachah

9:30-11:30 AM Thursday, Mrs. Elliezra Perez, Parshah in the Eyes of Chassidut