

Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Yitro

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Esther and Craig Guttman and Family
in honour of the yahrtzeit of Clara Berglas בריינדל בת ישעיהו ז"ל

and by Helen and David Wm. Brown and Family, and Golda Brown and Harry Krakowsky and Family,
in honour of the first yahrtzeit of David and Golda's father, Al G. Brown אליהו גדליה בן ירוחם פישל ז"ל

Har Sinai: It's Not (Only) About Mitzvot

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

When people think about the giving of the Torah, they often focus on the **content** of what was given. Specifically, they visualize the Ten Commandments on the Two Tablets. However, as important as those principles are, the central importance of the Revelation was the **interaction** with G-d.

As evidence, take the haftarot that are traditionally recited the two times a year that the Aseret HaDibrot are read. (This does not include Parshat Va'etchanan where Moshe retells the story of the giving of the Torah.) Both on the week of Parshat Yitro, and on the holiday of Shavuot, haftarot are read that record intense visions prophets had of G-d and His throne – *Maaseh Merkavah*. For Yitro, the sixth chapter of Yeshayah is read; for Shavuot, it is the first chapter of Yechezkel. In both, it is the vision itself, and not the information conveyed, that is paramount.

One may argue that the purpose of the experience was to lay a philosophical groundwork for the commandments. The Rambam, in the eighth chapter of Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, carefully spells this out. He asks why Jews are forever forbidden to believe the words of any "prophet" who seeks to undermine the Torah, regardless of what miracles the prophet may perform. If belief in Moshe were due to the miracles he had performed, it would stand to reason that a later prophet could perform more impressive miracles and thereby undermine or supersede the dictates of Moshe. Thus,

the Rambam explains, the doctrines of belief in the eternity and immutability of Torah are not predicated on the wonders Moshe wrought. Rather, the foundation of Jewish belief is that at Sinai every Jew saw, heard, and experienced G-d such that no other prophecy could replace the message of G-d articulated there. Still, it seems that the power of that moment was not due to the instructions they received, but the belief and trust instilled in their hearts by "meeting" G-d, by seeing that it was He who was behind Moshe's mission and message.

At this point we may ask: if the encounter with G-d was really the central purpose of Har Sinai, why include mitzvot at all?

The experience at Sinai was meant to be one of intense pleasure. However, that intensity could be overwhelming, even terrifying. Ramban (Bamidbar 10:35), building on midrash, contends that the original sin of the Jews in the desert, the sin that caused the subsequent complaints and rebellions, was that the Jews fled from Har Sinai as children run from school when vacation begins. Netziv (Harchev Davar, Bamidbar 11:4) suggests that it was the *oneg*, the enjoyment of being with G-d from which they fled. It was too much to handle.

To prove his point, Netziv notes that the event that follows the Jews' retreat from Har Sinai details their insatiable desire for meat. (Bamidbar 11) They no longer wanted the pleasure that comes from a rendezvous with G-d. However, that created a void – which they attempted to

fill with the meaningless pleasures of flesh.

Perhaps, it was in recognition of the difficulty of coping with the direct encounter with G-d that G-d offered the Jews a way to concretize the experience – with a legal system that would permeate every aspect of life. It was, after all, not only the Ten Commandments that were given at Sinai, but the myriad laws recorded in Parshat Mishpatim, and possibly many others found elsewhere in the Torah. However, the laws are the trees. The forest is where we find G-d, whose presence is immanent in the spirit of those laws. The challenge is to neither miss the forest for the trees, nor the trees for the forest.

On the one hand, we strive to not just have an amorphous relationship with G-d. We insist that a connection with the Almighty comes with demands. We cannot lose ourselves in the overwhelming joy that can come from pure spirituality. On the other hand, we cannot forget that the mitzvot are a means to creating a sustained relationship with G-d – that we must keep in mind the Speaker of the laws, not just the words that He Spoke.

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

Israeli Landmarks: Heichal Shlomo

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

When some three thousand years ago, Yitro suggested that Moshe should choose men to help him judge the Jews, he initiated an institution that in different shapes and forms exists to this very day – Batei Din (Halachic courts). The highest court, called also “The Great Sanhedrin”, fully functioned until slightly before the destruction of the Second Temple. Even after the destruction, with certain limitations, its members continued to be the “pillars of instruction from whom statutes and judgments issue forth for the entire Jewish people” (Rambam, Hilchot Mamrim 1:1).

Nonetheless, in the centuries following the destruction, the scattering of the Jews brought the denigration of any centralized Torah authority, and the Sanhedrin was disbanded. During the long years of exile, there were a few attempts to reestablish this supreme Jewish court, but without lasting success.

When the State of Israel was established, a few rabbis hoped to rekindle efforts to bring back the

Sanhedrin. One of the leading voices in this movement was Rabbi Yehudah Leib Maimon, the first Minister of Religion in the young state. Rabbi Maimon hoped that the Chief Rabbinate of Israel could become the foundation of the renewal of the Sanhedrin. Driven by this aspiration, he worked hard to convince his fellow ministers of the importance of investing properly in the Rabbinate. To his sorrow, he found himself attacked from both sides – those who were worried that a strong rabbinate would impose religious coercion, and those who were wary of any interference by the “Zionist state” into Halachic affairs and saw the Israeli Rabbinate as a “Crown Rabbi” of a sort.

However, Rabbi Maimon did not despair, and in 1952, together with Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog, he collected the money needed for the erection of a glorious building which would serve as the home to the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. The beautiful building, completed in 1958, included a huge library, courtrooms, prayer halls with ancient arks and Sifrei

Torah, and above all – a magnificent meeting hall. The name “Heichal Shlomo” commemorated Shlomo Wolfson, father of Sir Isaac Wolfson, who contributed most of the money.

The opening of Heichal Shlomo was somewhat controversial. From the left, it was seen as a waste of money which should have been spent on “more practical matters”. From the right, it was even put under a *cherem* ban. Nonetheless, the opening ceremony was attended by the most important people in the State, including Israel’s president, ministers, Knesset members and more.

The Chief Rabbinate sat in Heichal Shlomo for 40 years, and then moved to a newer building at the entrance to Jerusalem. Heichal Shlomo still stands on King George Street, and is a much-recommended site to visit for anyone who wants to see Jerusalem and its yearnings, disappointments, and dreams.

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The Zionist Idea: Land of Halachah and Spiritual Striving

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Some religious writers frame their Zionism as a function of halachah, desiring to live in Israel to fulfill mitzvot. Others take a purely philosophical approach, viewing Israel as a site for enhanced spirituality. In a 2007 essay, [Diaspora Religious Zionism: Some Current Reflections](#), Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein put forth a unique approach, blending halachah and philosophy.

In developing his outlook, Rabbi Lichtenstein channeled the metaphysical framework of Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner. In a 1962 conversation during Rabbi Lichtenstein’s first visit to Israel, Rabbi Hutner asked what had struck Rabbi Lichtenstein. “Every reply was rebutted with the comment that its subject could have been found in Eastern Europe as well, and so was neither endemic nor unique to Eretz Israel. When he sensed that I had exhausted my material, he pressed on... and, when it became clear that I could, at best, only respond feebly, the Rosh Yeshiva opened with a volley of sources and dicta – the description of Eretz Israel as (a land that Hashem your G-d cares for), or as that to which Moshe and Aharon had been barred access, which was now open to us... all trumpeting forth the sacral, metaphysical, and historical uniqueness of the land.” Having absorbed a view of Israel as the theatre for our personal and national spiritual striving, Rabbi Lichtenstein explained his 1971 decision to join Yeshivat Har Etzion as fueled by, “the very thought that here one stands, engaged in the intensive study of Torah, within the very context that the avot, the patriarchs, followed on the one hand, or, that led of old to Jerusalem on the other...”

At the same time, true to the views of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rabbi Lichtenstein expressed his metaphysical Zionism in a halachic framework. He once said of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s approach to metaphysical Zionism, “Once he even expressed a criticism, saying that people who speak in that way are talking not in metaphysical but rather in mythological terms.” ([Rav Soloveitchik’s Approach to Zionism](#)) And so Rabbi Lichtenstein positioned Zionism as a fulfillment of the technical halachic concept of *zecher l’mikdash* [memorializing the Temple]. Commenting on the Talmud’s presentation of *zecher l’mikdash*, he wrote, “The source is cited here with respect to a very specific halachic ordinance, and it presumably serves as the *raison d’être* for similar ordinances. Unquestionably, however, it serves equally to enunciate a principle whose scope extends beyond the explicitly normative to embrace the realm of consciousness and sensibility. To sustain the memory of mikdash, that whose locus is in Jerusalem and that which coincides with the boundaries of the concentric country, is to vivify it, to rejuvenate it via mental image and soul’s yearning.”

Rav Aharon’s approach may resonate well with today’s yeshiva-educated Jew. Contemporary educational values emphasize both halachah and inspiration, and a Zionism which emanates from both brain and heart, and is true to our tradition, is well-suited to guide our youth.

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Biography

Rabbi Dovid Zvi Hoffman

Adam Friedmann

Rabbi Dovid Zvi Hoffman was born in the Slovakian town of Verbo in 1843. His father was a rabbinical judge in the town. The young Dovid Zvi studied in various yeshivot, including that of Rabbi Moshe Schick, one of the leading Hungarian rabbis at the time.

In 1851, he joined the yeshiva of Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer in Eisenstadt, Austria. Rabbi Hildesheimer sought to combine classic Torah study with the academic approach of the western university. This experiment prompted strong opposition from both the traditionalist rabbinic in Hungary, and the progressive Neologue movement, both of which felt it was misguided. When Rabbi Hildesheimer fled these communal disputes for Germany, Dovid Zvi joined the yeshiva at Pressburg until 1865.

After completing his time in yeshiva, he studied in the universities of Vienna and Berlin and received a doctorate in 1871. The following year, Rabbi Hoffman was invited to serve as a teacher in Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's school in Frankfurt. He remained in this position for two years. Leaving Frankfurt, Rabbi Hoffman joined the teaching staff of Rabbi Hildesheimer's nascent Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin, which embodied the latter's goal of creating a school that combined classical yeshiva learning with university studies. Upon Rabbi Hildesheimer's death, Rabbi Hoffman was appointed the head of the institution. He also served as an important community rabbi in Berlin.

Rabbi Hoffman earned great esteem in the larger community, and received the title of "Professor" from the German government and University of Berlin upon celebrating his 75th birthday. Utilizing his knowledge of classic Torah sources and bible scholarship from the university, he wrote a Torah commentary which responded to contemporary academic claims about authorship and dating, including the Documentary Hypothesis. He was also recognized as one of the country's greatest halachic experts of the time. His three-volume set of responsa, *Melamed leHoil*, was published posthumously. One of those responsa is translated here.

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Torah and Translation

Wearing a Yarmulka in School

Rabbi Dovid Zvi Hoffman, Melamed l'Hoil Yoreh Deah 56

Translated by Adam Friedmann

Note: As seen below, the debate about wearing a kippah involves the question of the existence or non-existence of a basic halachic obligation, and the impact of cultural norms. Many contemporary authorities note that even if one were to accept the view that there is no technical obligation, cultural norms in most Jewish communities identify kippah-wearing with religious observance and vice-versa. This alone obligates one to wear a kippah. See Igrot Moshe OC 1:1, and Yechaveh Da'at 4:1.

שאלה: אי רשאי לישבע בערכאות שלהם בגילוי ראש.

תשובה: אין לי פנאי להאריך כעת... והנה בעת הזאת הרבנים היראים במדינות אונגארן מחמירין מאד בענין גלוי ראש, עיין הבירור מש"ס ופוסקים בשו"ת נחלת בנימין סי' ל'.

והנה הגר"א בהגהותיו לסי' ח' ס"ק ב' העלה שאין איסור אפילו להוציא אזכרה בג"ר אלא מידת חסידות.

ומ"ש שם בתשובת נחלת בנימין שאם בבית חנוך שמו לחוק שצעירי ישראל צריכין לישב דוקא בפריעת ראש ועושין כן על דעת אביהם וראשי העדה, זה איסור גמור משום "ובחוקותיהם לא תלכו", הנה בק"ק יראים דפפד"מ בבית החינוך שנתסד מהגאון ר' שמשון רפאל הירש זצ"ל (שאני הייתי מורה שם ב' שנים וחצי) יושבים התלמידים בשעת לימוד שאר המדעים בפריעת ראש, ורק בשעת לימוד תורה מכסים ראשם (וכן הוא המנהג בבית הספר בהאמבורג) וזה נעשה שם עפ"י תקנת הרה"ג מו"ה ש"ר הירש זצ"ל. ובפעם ראשון שבאתי לביתו של הרה"ג ש"ר הירש ככובע על ראשי, אמר לי שכאן הוא דרך ארץ להסיר הכובע מעל הראש כשבאין אל אדם חשוב, ואולי יראה מורה אחר (יש בבית החינוך שם גם הרבה מורים א"י) שאני איני מסיר הכובע מעל הראש לפני ראש בית החינוך (דירעקטאר) היה מחשב זה כאילו אני מבזה אותו.

Question: Is it permissible to take an oath in non-Jewish courts bareheaded?

Response: I do not have the time to respond at length currently... Today, amongst the Hungarian rabbis, they are extremely strict with regard to covering one's head. See the development [of this topic] from the Talmud and halachic authorities in *Nachalat Binyanim* 30.

The Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu (Kramer, a.k.a. the Vilna Gaon), in his glosses to Orach Chaim 8:2, noted that there is no prohibition even to say G-d's name bareheaded, rather it is a "custom of the pious" [to be careful about this].

And regarding what is written there in the responsum of *Nachalat Binyamin* that if a school imposes a rule that young Jews need to attend specifically bareheaded, and they do this with the consent of their parents and the heads of the community, that this is absolutely forbidden on the basis of "Do not follow in their ways," behold in the holy community of the G-d-fearing in Frankfurt am Main, in the school that was established by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (where I taught for two and a half years), the students sit bareheaded for secular studies. Only during Judaic studies do they cover their heads (and this is the practice in the school in Hamburg as well), and this is done under the direction of the great Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch zt"l. The first time I came to meet with Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch with my hat on my head, he said to me that here it is proper respect to remove one's hat when visiting an important person, and perhaps one of the other teachers (there are many non-Jewish teachers in the school) would see me with my hat on while speaking with the director of the school, and assume that I am belittling him.

Weekly Highlights: Feb. 3 – Feb. 9 / 18 Shevat – 24 Shevat

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Feb. 2-3 <i>Shabbatonim in Hamilton and at Zichron Yisroel of the AHS!</i>				
Fri. 7:45 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Co-Existence in the IDF: A Halachic Perspective	18 Maimonides Ct.	7:45 PM Oneg 8:15 PM Shiur
Derashah after musaf	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Kotel: The Challenge of Sacred Space	Zichron Yisroel	
Seudah shlishit	R' Jonathan Ziring	Religious Identity: Whose Torah Is It?	Zichron Yisroel	
Oneg Shabbat	Yaron Perez	Eretz Ysrael and the Ten Commandments	Adas Israel, Ham.	
Derashah	Adam Friedmann	Seeing the Forest By Way of the Trees	Adas Israel, Ham.	
Before minchah	Mrs. Elliezra Perez	Acquiring Eretz Yisrael In Our Day	Adas Israel, Ham.	<i>For women</i>
Seudah shlishit	Adam Friedmann	The "Eat Everything" Diet	Adas Israel, Ham.	
Before minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Daf Yomi	BAYT	<i>Rabbi's Classroom</i>
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	<i>Simcha Suite</i>
Sun. Feb. 4				
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	<i>Third floor</i>
8:45 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	<i>Hebrew</i>
Mon. Feb. 5				
8:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	The Shabbat Gourmet 1: Sushi & Rice Paper	Shomrai Shabbos	<i>For men; Third Floor</i>
Tue. Feb. 6				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The DNR in Jewish Law	Adath Israel	<i>Women; there is a fee info@adathisrael.com</i>
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Nechemiah: False Prophets	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua	129 Theodore Pl.	<i>Not this week</i>
Wed. Feb. 7				
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>Hebrew</i>
Thu. Feb 8				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: War on Binyamin	49 Michael Ct.	<i>For women</i>
Fri. Feb. 9				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Melachot of Shabbat	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<i>Advanced</i>

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM Sunday, Rabbi Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Beitzah

11:00 AM Sunday, R' Jonathan Ziring, Contemporary Halachah: Social Media

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