

# Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vaera

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## Shema, Hallel, and the House of Israel

Russell Levy

In Hallel, which we will soon recite on Rosh Chodesh, we juxtapose two descriptions of the Jewish people: Immediately after declaring that **Yisrael** trusts in Hashem, we affirm that Hashem blesses the Jewish people, now labeled as **Beit Yisrael** (the House of Israel). What is the difference between these two terms?

Further, the term 'Beit Yisrael' is used with this meaning in only one other place in all of Tehillim, in a psalm with almost the same structure as the one in Hallel. There, the Psalmist proclaimed, "*Beit Yisrael Barchu et Hashem*", The House of Israel shall bless Hashem." How does one bless Hashem, and why is the task of blessing Hashem entrusted to Beit Yisrael instead of Yisrael?

The key to the first question lies with the dual meaning of the word Yisrael. A midrash on one of the most familiar passages in the Torah, the Shema, explains that Yisrael refers to our forefather and our struggle to emulate his righteous ways, as well as to klal Yisrael, our collective nation. (See Psikta Zutrita Vaetchanan

10a and Bereishit Rabbah Vayechi 98.)

It is possible that when David haMelech distinguishes between Yisrael and Beit Yisrael, he is referring to these two aspects of the word. As individuals, Yisrael, we trust in Hashem. As a nation, Beit Yisrael, we bless Hashem and Hashem blesses us. However, our second question remains: Why may we only bless the Holy One as a nation, and not as individuals?

The answer to this question may lie in a greater comprehension of our ability to bless Hashem. R' Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains: While the Omnipotent blesses us and grants us success in this world, it is impossible for us, mere mortals, to reciprocate. Our blessing to Him is in our dedication to allow His will to be fulfilled, via our obedience to His commandments. Through this, we do indeed give something to Him, accomplishing His goals for man.

With this understanding, the use of Beit Yisrael becomes clear. As individuals, we trust that Hashem will assist and protect us, and we declare that He is the Eternal. However, His

will is not only for each individual to practice Judaism, and so we cannot fully bless Him as individuals. We are called to transform ourselves from *kulam kedoshim*, holy individuals, to an *am kadosh*, a holy nation. We must transcend simple obedience and realize our greater purpose in the world, as we declare three times a day in Aleinu:

לתקן עולם במלכות ש-די...ויקבלו כולם את עול  
מלכותך ותמלוך עליהם לעולם ועד

To perfect the universe through the Almighty's sovereignty... and they shall all accept the yoke of Your sovereignty, and You shall reign over them speedily for all eternity.

To achieve this, we cannot simply be individually dedicated to His service; we must also, as a united community, as a united nation, dedicate our interlinked lives to Him. This cannot be achieved fully through the individual Yisrael: the individual can put his faith in Hashem, but the individual's dedication is insufficient. It is only through unity, through *achdut*, as *beit yisrael*, that we can truly bless Hashem.

When we honestly can exclaim, "The entire House of Israel blesses Hashem," when we are finally truly one nation dedicated to the one, true G-d, then, *bayom hahu*, on that day, *yiyhe Hashem echad ushmo echad*, Hashem will be One, and His name will be One. On that day, we, both as individuals and as a nation, will be able to accept the greatest *brachah* from Hashem, the coming of the Mashiach and the rebuilding of the Beit haMikdash.

### Parshah Questions

R' Meir Lipschitz

Answers are provided on the back page.

- Where in Parshat Vaera can a reference to Tchiyat HaMeitim be found? (Sanhedrin 90b)
- How are the words "*v'ani aksheh et lev Paroh*" to be understood? (Rashi, Ramban Sforno to Vaera 7:3)
- Why does Moshe label himself *aral sefata'im* (of uncircumcised lips)? (Rashi, Ramban to Vaera 6:12, Drashot Haran Drush Shlishi)
- Why is Moshe labelled *aral sefata'im* twice (6:12 and 6:30)? (Ramban and Ohr Hachaim to Vaera 6:30)
- For children: Why did Aharon, and not Moshe, bring about the first three plagues? (Rashi to 7:19, 8:12)

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In the opinion of some commentators, the name that captures the essence of the second Book of the Torah is “*Sefer HaEmunah*” (the Book of Faith). The first issue which Moshe Rabbeinu addressed to the Almighty, when HaShem appeared to him for the first time, revolved about faith. Moshe proclaimed, “They (*Bnei Yisrael*) will not believe me” (*Shmot* 4:1). *Chazal* say that HaShem resented Moshe’s assumption that the people will not have faith. Hashem responded, “you have accused the innocent! My people are descendents of Men of Faith”. Moshe Rabbeinu anticipated that the people would ask him questions like how long they will be in the desert and how long it will take to conquer the land. This was legitimate and to be expected. When someone tells you, “leave your home,” you ask, “Why? When will I reach my destination?” Moshe knew that he could offer *Bnei Yisrael* no specific answers since the information was not disclosed to him. Yet, they didn’t ask questions. They believed, as the Torah testifies, “*Vayikdu Vayishtachu*” (they bowed their heads and worshipped) (*Shmot*

4:31).

In the *mussaf* of Rosh Hashanah, we recite the verse:

כה אמר ה' זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת  
כלולתיך לכתך אחרי במדבר (ירמיהו ב,ב)

Thus said the L-rd, I remember for you the kindness of your youth, your bridal love in which you followed Me into the wilderness, a land not sown! (*Yirmiah* 2:2). HaShem never forgot the “*chesed ne’uraich!*” This verse teaches us that the Jew who has faith bestows [*Kaviyachol*] “chesed” upon HaShem. What faith did the Jews display in Egypt? They displayed great faith in following Moshe! That is why hundreds of years later, Hashem reveals to His Prophet *Yirmiah*, “I have not forgotten it!”

Faith is the central motif of *yetziat mitzraim*. The faith of the people reached its zenith at *Yam Suf*. Why does the Torah consider this act of faith to be of greater magnitude than that of their faith in *Mitzraim* itself? At *Yam Suf* it says, “*Vaya’aminu baHashem u’biMoshe Avdo*” (and they believed in Hashem and His servant Moshe) (*Shmot*, 14:31). In Egypt, they witnessed the intervention of HaShem, and the supernatural events, and they acted with obedience, following all the

instructions given by G-d through Moshe and Aharon. But something was missing in Egypt. There they only witnessed “*Etzbah Elokim*” (HaShem’s Finger); they didn’t understand the magnitude of the events, the emergence of the covenantal community for the future. They understood the “*Hotzeiti*” (the taking out), each individual and his personal relief from the suffering of “*Shibud Mitzrayim*.” They did not yet appreciate the “*V’goalti*”, the existential freedom and redemption.

We can understand why *Bnei Yisrael* did not recite the “*shirah*” (song of deliverance) on the very night of “*Yetziat Mitzraim?*” Why did Moshe wait seven days until “*Kriat Yam Suf?*” Apparently, they were not yet inspired! Moshe Rabbeinu may have been ready; but he couldn’t sing the “*shirah*” alone, without the people. Alone, he has no power. *Bnei Yisrael* didn’t fully grasp the significance of the “*nes*” (miracle) and that is why they weren’t ready. Although one recites the blessing of “*HaGomel*” when one experiences salvation, this blessing, however, is not “*shirah*.” In *Mitzraim* they saw “*etzbah Elokim*” when witnessing the ten plagues. But at *Yam Suf* they saw “*yad Hashem*” equivalent to fifty plagues. At *Yam Suf* they beheld great visions. They sang of the “*Beit Hamikdash*” and of “*Machon L’shivticha*” (the Messianic hope). They understood that it will be a long history, but one of eschatological fulfillment. At *Yam Suf*, they were inspired when they beheld the beauty of the future. None of this took place in *Mitzraim*. *Chazal* tell us that even a maidservant reached the spiritual level of “*nevuah*” (prophecy). At *Yam Suf* they all reached the pinnacle of total “*Emunah*”, and were ready to recite the “*Shira*”.

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## 613 Mitzvot: Mitzvah 74 Hearing disputes before all litigants

Parshat Mishpatim presents a series of six mitzvot regarding fair conduct of trials in *beit din*. The first of these, mitzvah 74, warns judges to wait until all litigants are present before hearing the claims of an individual side. The gravity of bias is such that the judge does not have any leeway; he must wait until all are present.

The *Minchat Chinuch* explained that this law applies to arbitration hearings as well, writing, “If litigants accept women or ineligible judges properly to serve as judges, these judges are instructed not to hear a claim” without the other present. The same rule applies to non-Jews, as well, as part of their Noachide obligation to create proper courts.

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# Ha'Am V'Ha'Aretz

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank

R' Mordechai Torczyner

## Torah in Translation

### Yarmulka

Responsa Har Tzvi 1:3

Is an uncovered head prohibited by law, or is this only a matter of special piety?

The authorities have disagreed in this matter. The Darchei Moshe cited the Rif that one may not travel with an uncovered head, but the Maharshah opined that this is not prohibited by law.

The Artzot haChaim cited Sanhedrin 101b: "It is written, 'He [Yeravam ben Nevat] raised his hand against the king.' Rav Nachman explained: This means he removed his tefillin before the king." Rashi explained, 'In removing his tefillin, Yeravam uncovered his head, and this was disgraceful before the king.' He added that this would also be disgraceful before a talmid chacham, and so may be seen in the Rambam's Hilchot Talmud Torah (5:6), where he wrote that one may not remove his tefillin before his rebbe. The Kesef Mishneh wrote that the Rambam deduced this from that gemara.

The Maharshah believed that this is not legally prohibited, following his explanation of that passage of gemara. He wrote that Rashi's comment should be erased; it seems that the issue of an uncovered head did not appear in his edition at all.

This also appears to be the view of Rav Yaakov Emden, who wrote in his siddur, "After hearing four iterations of kaddish one may remove his tefillin. It is not appropriate to remove them in shul, based on the gemara in Sanhedrin... How much more so, then, in removing the awe of the monarchy of Heaven in the house of the King!... At least, he should not remove them before the Aron Kodesh." His omission [of the issue of a revealed head] indicates that the essential prohibition is in removing tefillin, and so showing disrespect to the king, but there is no cause to mention the matter of an uncovered head...

[It might be possible to explain Rashi's version of the passage with Yeravam] based on a midrash in Vayyikra that Gd did not burden Israel with the requirement of reciting Shema with a covered head. This seems to support the Maharshah's view that there is no prohibition in having an uncovered head. However, the Yeshuot Yaakov explains that this... is only because we assume that one who recites Shema is

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank was born in 1873, in Kovno, Lithuania, into a rabbinic, Zionist family. He learned in Slobodka and Telz, under Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor as well as Rav Eliezer Gordon, until his family moved to Hadera, in what was then Palestine, in the early 1890's.

The young Rav Frank continued his studies in Yerushalayim, learning in chavruta with Rav Yechiel Michel Tukaczinski, whose works include the classic Geshet haChaim. He became close with the giants of Torah in the land, growing under the tutelage of Rav Shmuel Salant, Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskind and Rav Kook; his brother-in-law was Rav Aryeh Levin. Rav Salant soon appointed Rav Frank to positions of halachic authority in Yerushalayim, and in 1907 he became a judge on the Beit Din of Yerushalayim. In 1918 he became the Av Beit Din, and he served in that capacity for the next forty years. He also held positions of civic leadership and communal service during World War I. In the ensuing years he aided the Haganah in defending the Jews of Yerushalayim; his home served as an ammunition repository.

In his role as head of the Beit Din, Rav Frank invited Rav Kook to become the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Yerushalayim in 1919. Rav Kook served in that capacity until his death in 1935, at which time Rav Frank himself ascended to that position.

Rav Frank dealt with life-and-death situations in his position of halachic leadership. During the War of Independence he permitted the production of armoured vehicles on Shabbat to save Gush Etzion, and he permitted kitniyot for Pesach in 1948, at a

already wearing tefillin. Berachot 14a says that one who recites Shema without tefillin is testifying falsely [to the mitzvah of tefillin]. Since tefillin are on his head, he is not obligated to further cover his head; tefillin themselves testify that the Name of Gd is upon him.

Based on this, we could say that one who wears tefillin need not cover his head further, and so Yeravam, upon removing his tefillin, had an entirely uncovered head. This was the start of his rebellion. If so, then there is no proof from this midrash that one may leave his head uncovered [when not wearing tefillin]...

time of famine in Yerushalayim. He insisted that yeshiva students be left to learn Torah and not drafted, so that their study would protect and aid the fighters.

Rav Frank was in the middle of every major national issue during the early years of the State. He vehemently supported the formation of the State of Israel, with the insistence that Torah be primary in the government of the nation. He worked with religious kibbutzim to preserve halachah as they managed their farms, and he was in the middle of the battles over the drafting of women into the army. He pressed for the Torah observant community to maintain ties with the secular community, and not to segregate themselves in separate worlds and sub-communities. Rav Frank endorsed the *heter mechirah*, but supported farmers who chose not to rely on it.

The responsa of Rav Frank cover issues of relevance to world Jewry down to our own day, including the kashrut of gelatin, consumption of *kitniyot* derivatives on Pesach and the use of an electric menorah, and he was involved in trying to find ways to aid *agunot*.

Rav Frank passed away just before Chanukah in 1960. He left behind many published works, including several volumes of responsa, commentary to Chumash, Gemara, Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, and specific works on many areas of Judaism and Jewish practice. His grandchildren and great-grandchildren include roshei yeshiva throughout Israel, as well as at Yeshiva University. [torczyner@torontotorah.com](mailto:torczyner@torontotorah.com)

for this case is different. Wearing tefillin is like covering one's head, and this is not called an "uncovered" head.

Rav Shlomo Kluger distinguished between two kinds of uncovering. We say that one may not travel four cubits with an uncovered head, indicating that one may walk less than four cubits thus, but that's regarding a partial uncovering. In such a state, one may travel less than four cubits. With an entirely uncovered head, though, the law would prohibit walking even less than four cubits.

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## Where in Parshat Vaera can a reference to Techiyat HaMeitim be found? (Sanhedrin 90b)

- In the opening of this week's parshah (6:4) Hashem describes His covenant with the forefathers, in which He promised them the land of Canaan. R' Simai understands that our forefathers, themselves, will live in a time in which this covenant will be fulfilled. This can only take place if there will be techiyat hameitim.

## How are the words *v'ani aksheh et lev paro* to be understood (Vaera 7:3)?

- **Rashi** explains that Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that He would be able to perform miracles for the Jewish people. Hashem was justified in doing so because Pharaoh had already been wicked and would not do teshuvah.
- **Ramban** notes that although G-d mentioned that He will harden Pharaoh's heart before the plagues began, Pharaoh resisted on his own through the first five. It was that stubbornness which warranted Hashem hardening his heart for the second half of the makot. Similarly, **Rambam** explains in Hilchot Teshuvah (6:3) that man is generally given the opportunity by G-d to do teshuvah, but when the sin is of an extreme nature, as was Pharaoh's,

the only punishment can be death. Therefore, G-d prevents those who are deserving of death from doing Teshuvah so they can be punished as they deserve.

- **Sforno** suggests that had Hashem not hardened Pharaoh's heart he would have surely let the people go in less than ten plagues. However, this release would not have been an acknowledgement of G-d, but a desire to end the suffering. Thus, Pharaoh is given the strength to overcome the physical suffering so that the Egyptian people will witness G-d through the performance of the all ten plagues, and then they would be able to do true Teshuva.

## Why does Moshe label himself *aral sefata'im* (of uncircumcised lips)?

- **Rashi** translates this phrase literally, saying that Moshe had 'sealed lips', lacking oratory skills.
- **Ramban** suggests that the pasuk means to convey that Moshe felt he wouldn't be able to convince the people with nice and comforting speech; it is not that Moshe was physically impaired. This approach is supported by the **Ran** in his Drashot (Drush Shlishi): The Gemara notes (Sotah 12b) that when Moshe is found in the Nile he is referred to as a both a 'youth' and an 'infant'. In attempting to answer this seeming contradiction, one approach taken is to suggest that Moshe was indeed an infant,

but his speech was impaired and he sounded like an older youth. This opinion is rejected by R' Nechemiah, who challenges, "If this is true, you have turned Moshe into a blemished person!" Thus, we see that physically Moshe's ability to speak was not impaired.

## Why is Moshe labelled *aral sefata'im* twice (6:12 and 6:30)?

- **Ramban** suggests that a person lacking this skill is especially unfit to speak before the king.
- **Ohr HaChaim** points out that on the first occasion, Hashem told Moshe that Aharon would speak to the Jews on his behalf. On the second occasion, Hashem tells Moshe that he must go to Pharaoh himself, and Moshe again objects that he is unable.

## For children: Why did Aharon, and not Moshe, bring about the first three plagues?

- **Rashi (7:19, 8:12)** explains that it would not have been proper for Moshe to cause plagues involving the components of nature that saved his life. The first two plagues (blood and frogs) used the water, which saved Moshe as an infant. The third plague of kinim involved the ground, which buried the Egyptian that Moshe killed.

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## Schedule for the Week of January 1, 25 Tevet

### Sunday, January 2

9:15AM Itamar Zolberg: Parshah & Issues b'Ivrit, Zichron Yisrael: *Cancelled This Week*

### Monday, January 3

8:45PM R' Meir Lipschitz: Gemara Beitzah Chaburah, Shaarei Shomayim

### Tuesday, January 4

1:10PM Russell Levy, Masechet Pesachim (advanced), Wolfond Center *Lunch served, followed by mincha*

1:30PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Yonah, at Shaarei Shomayim, with Mekorot: Introduction to Yonah

8:00PM Dovid Zirkind: Interactive Parshah Discussion, Westmount Learning Centre

8:30PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Minchat Chinuch at Clanton Park: Buy Chametz in order to destroy it

### Wednesday, January 5

9:15AM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Hosheia, 239 Franklin *Women Babysitting provided - Of Jews and Doves*

### Thursday, January 6

8:00PM R' Netanel Javasky: Landmark Halachic Responsa, Bnai Torah

**Tuesday-Friday 6:00 AM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, BAYT, Daf Yomi

## Join us for our upcoming Community Beit Midrash Programs:

Sunday, January 9 at Bnai Torah: Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Do They Celebrate Tu b'Shevat in Argentina?

Sunday, January 23 at Forest Hill Jewish Centre: R' Azarya Berzon, Deals Under False Pretenses: A Study in Business Ethics