



Parshat Vayera 15 Cheshvan, 5775/November 8, 2014 Vol. 6 Num. 8

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Ayeh!

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Three passersby are welcomed to the tent of Avraham and Sarah, presented with water for their feet, and shown to a shady place beneath a tree. Bread and water are promised, and a much broader repast is laid before them. The appreciative wayfarers dine, and then turn to Avraham with a question: *Ayeh?* Where is Sarah, your wife? (Bereishit 18:9)

What is their purpose in asking *Ayeh*? It is not a request to meet the chef; Avraham and Yishmael also prepared the food. Further, they did not actually ask to meet her. And third, the question is unnecessary; as seen in the next biblical chapter, these are angelic beings! Why do they need to ask after Sarah's whereabouts? [Perhaps *malachim* are not omniscient, but given our first two points, they seem to be seeking something other than Sarah's GPS coordinates.]

Generations of commentators have perceived different messages within the visitors' question; see Bava Metzia 87a, Avot d'Rabbi Natan II 37, and Rashbam here for a range of approaches. However, we might gain additional insight by noting that our Torah portion includes two more *Ayeh* questions:

- After their conversation with Avraham, the visitors journey to the city of Sdom, where they find hospitality in the home of Sarah's brother Lot. The residents of the city are hostile to guests, and wish to harm them. They crowd around Lot's house, and demand, *Ayeh!* "Where are the men? Take them out, and we will 'know' them!" (Bereishit 19:5)

- The end of our portion finds Avraham and Yitzchak en route to bring an offering to G-d. After three days, they come to a mountain, and Avraham dismisses their two escorts. Avraham loads his son with the firewood, takes up the fire and knife in his own hands, and sets course up the slope. At this late stage, Yitzchak turns to his father with the question, "Here is the fire, here is the wood, but *Ayeh*, where is the lamb?" (Bereishit 22:7)

We may suggest that in all three of these cases, the query of *Ayeh* is not merely a request for information. Indeed, both the *malachim* and the people of Sdom know exactly where their subject is! But in all three instances, asking "*Ayeh*" is really asking, "Is this being playing its role?" ***Ayeh* is a summons: the time has come, destiny is here, take your place and perform your role!** [Indeed, the same may be said for many of the appearances of the *Ayeh* question in Tanach, and perhaps for all of them.]

- Climbing Mount Moriah, Yitzchak turns to his father to declare, "It is time for the lamb to play its destined role, as a gift for G-d," and indeed, Avraham responds knowingly, "G-d knows where the lamb is – my son." [See Rashi to Bereishit 22:8.]
- The villainous people of Sdom attack the home of Lot and demand, "It is time for these guests to play their destined role," to suffer abuse at our hands!
- And the *malachim* similarly address Avraham regarding Sarah. "Until now, Sarah has been the faithful follower of your prophecy, travelling from Aram to Shechem to Egypt to Elonei

Mamrei. Until now, Sarah has enabled your survival and success. Sarah gave you Hagar, and even insisted you take her as a full wife. But *Ayeh!* Where is Sarah, the woman you wedded? What she has done to this point is not the sum of her existence, this is not the person she is meant to become. It is time for Sarah to take on a new role." And so Sarah becomes the matriarch who determines the future of the Jewish people, and even the world. [This may also be linked to the change in Sarah's name; see Rashi to Bereishit 17:15.]

The *Ayeh* summons is not only a biblical call; *Ayeh* is a summons for every human being, in every age. In the absence of visiting *malachim*, though, we are left to put the question to ourselves: where are we? And like the *malachim*, we know the literal answer, but the deeper question remains: where are we meant to be? Has our time come, is our destiny at hand, are we fulfilling the role for which we were created, and for which we are uniquely suited? May we not only ask the *Ayeh* question, but through our lives may we provide its answer.

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Shemita: From the Sources to Practical Halacha

Shemita: From the Sources to Practical Halacha

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Koren Publishers (Maggid Books) and Yeshivat Har Etzion Publishers, 2008 (Hebrew, translated into English.)

About the Author

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon is the rabbi of Alon Shevut South, situated in Gush Etzion. He teaches Talmud and Jewish Law at Yeshivat Har Etzion and Migdal Oz Seminary, and lectures in communities around the world. After the Gush Katif disengagement in 2005, Rabbi Rimon founded JobKatif, an organization dedicated to helping members of Gush Katif integrate into the workforce. He has won several awards for his volunteer work with the organization.

Rabbi Rimon has also written books on Jewish Law for the Pesach Seder, the four species on Sukkot and service in the IDF. He is currently working on books about the laws of Shabbat.

About the Book

As its title suggests, this book traces the laws pertaining to shemita from its earliest sources in the Torah and Talmud, through the explanations offered by the medieval commentators, through 20th century authorities such

as Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haCohen Kook, the Chazon Ish and Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

This book is a great resource both for those looking for a quick practical answer to a shemita-related question and for those studying the material in-depth. The book begins with a concise list of the practical laws of shemita: what may be done in the garden before and during shemita, how to treat fruit grown in the shemita year, and what fruit to buy from the stores during shemita. The next section, which constitutes the majority of the book, delves into the sources and details for these laws.

While many books have been written about shemita, several features make this book unique:

- Colour - The book is printed in colour, and uses it to help contrast different opinions about an issue. For example, when describing the many reasons for observing shemita each reason is assigned its own colour. The numerous biblical sources for shemita are then quoted and the verses corresponding to each reason are written in the appropriate colour. (p.24-25) This clearly demonstrates how the different reasons for observing

shemita are grounded in biblical sources.

- Pictures - Pictures are included to help illustrate and visualize different laws. For example, the book has pictures of different fruit to show at what point they have reached one-third of their final growth, because that determines whether the fruit is considered "shemita produce". (p.178-181)
- Charts - Most chapters conclude with a one page summary in chart format. The different opinions are clearly distinguished, and the chart makes it easy to trace the contemporary legal rulings back to their origins.
- Biographies - Many rabbinic authorities, spanning a time period of more than one thousand years, are quoted in the book. Whenever the book introduces a new rabbinic authority, it includes a short biography to help the reader understand the personalities involved in the halachic process.

These features distinguish this book from the many other shemita books. They help present the material in a clear manner, which makes it informative, understandable and enjoyable for the reader.

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613 Mitzvot: #342, 408: Life of a Levi

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Bamidbar 35:2-7 instructs each of the *shevatim* [Jewish tribes] to contribute cities in their portions of the Land of Israel for the tribe of Levi; this is the 408th mitzvah in the list presented by *Sefer haChinuch*. This system offers several benefits. On the most basic level, it supports the Levites, who do not own land for themselves. As *Sefer haChinuch* (Mitzvah 408) explains, "The tribe of Levi is the choicest of the tribes, prepared for service in the House of G-d. It has no portion with Israel in the fields and vineyards – but the Levites needed cities in which to dwell, for their children and babies and beasts."

Further, this arrangement assures that the Cities of Refuge for accidental murderers will be centrally located, since those cities are selected from the Levite cities. *Sefer haChinuch* suggests that the goal of placing the murderers within the cities of the Levites was that "perhaps the sacred land of the Levites would atone for them." Additionally, it would protect the murderers: "Because the Levites are thoughtful people, versed in the levels of character and honoured wisdom, it is known that they will not reject this murderer who will take refuge there, and they will not harm him."

On a third level, dedicating cities throughout the tribes for Levites guarantees that each tribe will have Levites available to teach Torah. As *Sefer haChinuch* writes (Mitzvah 342), "This tribe was selected for Divine service, and all of their activities involved wisdom, for they were not caught up in working the land like the other *shevatim* of Israel. Regarding

them Devarim 33:10 says, 'They will teach Your laws to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel.' Because wisdom is in their midst, all Israel was continually involved with them."

In an early example of aesthetic zoning, the Torah instructs us to assign additional areas, with specific dimensions, as agricultural areas and as open space surrounding these cities. (Vayikra 25, and see Eruvin 56b-57a and Arachin 33b-34a). Mitzvah 342 prohibits changing those areas converting them for any other purpose, in order to preserve the beauty and functionality of those cities. These cities will then serve the Levites well, and also serve as a model for all Israel; indeed, Rambam rules that the prohibition against converting the agricultural areas and open space actually applies to all Israeli cities as well. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shemita v'Yovel 13:5, from Arachin 33b)

In explaining the prohibition against altering the zoning of these cities, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch makes a comment which could be applied to broader environmental concerns as well. Vayikra 25:34 warns not to sell these spaces, "because it is an eternal portion for them." Rabbi Hirsch declares, "It is specifically because these were given to them for eternal generations; therefore, no generation may alter this at will. The current generation is not the sole authority, but future generations are equal in their rights. Just as they received it from their predecessors, so they should leave it for those who will come after them."

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Biography

Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Habib

Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Habib was born in 1460 in Zamora, Spain, and is known as the compiler of *Ein Yaakov*, a collection of all the *aggadic* [ethical, non-legal] segments in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. The work was the product of his long-standing desire to develop a distinct book to advance the study of *aggada*. This was in contrast to the approach of earlier scholars such as Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi, who focused on isolating and clarifying the Talmud's purely halachic discussions and their conclusions. In truth, Ibn Habib was preceded by Rabbi Yitzchak Aboab's *Menorat HaMaor*, but he nonetheless set out to accomplish his goal.

Even in the best of conditions, compiling such a work would be a monumental undertaking. Unfortunately, Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Habib experienced extraordinary hardship, with the issuing of the Alhambra Decree of expulsion by King Ferdinand in 1492. He, among close to twenty thousand Sephardic Jews, settled in Thessaloniki, Greece, which was then under Ottoman Turkish rule. In Thessaloniki, Rabbi Ibn Habib was able to access precious copies of the Talmud and commentators from the extensive libraries of Don Yehudah Benveniste and his relative, Don Shmuel Benveniste. After a great deal of work and editing, *Ein Yaakov* was set to be printed in 1516. Ibn Habib passed away soon after the first printing of *Ein Yaakov*. Subsequent versions of the book, which is typically published in five volumes, were edited by his son, Rabbi Levi Ibn Habib. Included in the printing of the *Ein Yaakov* was a commentary which explained *aggada* in a manner that focused on the straightforward meaning of the *aggada*.

To guide the editing process, Rabbi Ibn Habib developed a system of categories through which each *aggada* text could be classified and organized. Utilizing the statements of the Mishnah's sages as his basis, Ibn Habib identified twelve key themes: the importance and nature of Torah, service of G-d, acts of kindness, justice, truth, peace, repentance, Gan Eden and Gehennom, reward and punishment, the supernatural, the Temple, and the Messiah. However, despite these categories, Rabbi Ibn Habib elected to organize the *Ein Yaakov* in accordance with the standard order of the Talmud.

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Torah and Translation

Avraham, not Avram

Rabbi Yaakov Ibn Habib

Ein Yaakov, Berachot 13b

Translated by Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

כל הקורא לאברהם אברם וכו' (ברכות יג.)

הטעם להיות שם אברהם קיים לעד, ולא כן שם ישראל. כי ברכת "אב המון גוים" הוא רמז לעתיד, כלומר "כבר גזרתי עליך שתהיה אב כל המון גוים, ולא אב לארם בלבד." וכן היה מעת שנולד יצחק. ולכן, מי שחוזר לקרוא שמו אברם הוא כמטיל ספק בקיום הבטחתו.

אבל ברכת שינוי שם יעקב לישראל עיקר רמיזתה היתה על ענין עבר והווה, כמו שאמר ליה המלאך "לא יעקב יאמר עוד וגו' כי שרית עם אלקים ועם אנשים ותוכל", לרמוז מה שנתאבק עמו ולא יכול לו, וגם שיהיה ניצול מעשו אחיו שלא יכהו, ושהש"י שמע תפילתו "הצילני נא וגו' פן יבא והכני." עם כל זה כבר נגזר עליו גלות הנאמר לאברהם "כי גר יהיה זרעך", וזה נאמר על יעקב.

וזה שמו מורה ב' ענינים: הא' מה שהיה בעת לידתו "וידו אווזת בעקב עשו". הב' דברי עשו "הכי קרא שמו יעקב ויעקבני וגו'". שנים הנה קראותיו בזמן הגלות. הא' לאחוז בעקב אויביו ולא בראשו כי לא יכול לו, הב' כי בתחבולות יעשה מלחמה כמסתיר פנים להנצל מצרות הגלות. ע"כ כשהיה יורד למצרים, שהוא תחלת הגלות, קראו הש"י "יעקב" פעמיים, לרמוז לו כי כל ימי הגלות יזכור שתי הוראות ההנה.

וגם בתחלה כששינה שמו הוא ית' הקדים ואמר "שמך יעקב, לא יקרא עוד וגו'". במ"ש "שמך יעקב" רמז לו כי עדיין ימים באים שיהיה שמו יעקב בימי הגלות, אבל לבסוף "ישראל יהיה שמך"...

All who call Avraham "Avram" transgress a command (Berachot 13a)

The reason for Avraham's name change being upheld forever, as was not the case with [Yaakov's change to] Yisrael, is because the associated blessing of "I have made you a father to many nations" (Bereishit 18:5) hints to the future, saying, "I've ordained that you shall be the father of many nations, and not the father of Aram alone." This blessing took effect upon Yitzhak's birth. Therefore, one who returns to naming him Avram is as though he suggests uncertainty within His promise.

But the crux of the blessing in the change of Yaakov's name to Yisrael is focused on the past and present. It is as the *malach* said to Yaakov after their struggle (ibid. 32:29), "Your name shall not be called Yaakov anymore... for you have fought with Elokim and with men, and you have succeeded," referring to his wrestling with Yaakov and his inability to conquer him, as well as to Yaakov's rescue from being stuck by Esav, and finally to Hashem's listening to his prayer, "Save me... lest he [Esav] strike me." (ibid. 32:12). Nonetheless, the exile foretold to Avraham had already been decreed for him, "Your descendants will be strangers," (ibid. 15:13), which was stated in reference to Yaakov.

This name indicates two points: First, that Yaakov was grasping Esav's heel at birth, "And his hand grasped the heel of Esav." (ibid. 25:25) Second, Esav's words, "Was this why you named him Yaakov? He tricked (*aku*), etc." (ibid. 27:36) These two invocations of his name refer to a time of exile. First, he will grasp onto the heels of his enemies, not the head, for he cannot win. Second, he will fight in a covert manner, like one who hides his face, to avoid the troubles of exile. Therefore, when he descended to Egypt, the first of the exiles, G-d calls him Yaakov twice, hinting that throughout his exile he should remember these two predictions.

Also, when his name was first changed, G-d opened, "Your name, Yaakov, won't be called etc." (ibid. 32:29) Saying "Your name is Yaakov" hinted that there would be days coming when his name would be Yaakov, during exile, but in the end, "Your name shall be Yisrael..."

17 Cheshvan is Monday

At the first Zionist Congress, held in Basel, Switzerland on August 29-31, 1897, Theodore Herzl publically called for the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine, with legally secured national borders. This call re-stated his position as published in *Der Judenstaat*, or "A State for the Jews", in which he expressed that the only solution to the virulent anti-Semitism Jews faced in Europe was to establish a national home for the Jewish people.

In 1906, future President of Israel Chaim Weizmann met with former British Prime Minister Arthur James Balfour to discuss the historical Jewish connection to Palestine. Weizmann explained that a Jewish land anywhere other than Palestine would not be viable, given the historical national identification with Jerusalem. Balfour recognized that if this was the Jewish consensus, then inevitably Palestine would eventually become a Jewish home.

Following the British entry into World War I in November 1914, Herbert Samuel, a Jewish member of the British

Cabinet, circulated a memorandum entitled "The Future of Palestine" wherein he stated that establishing a Jewish home in Palestine would be beneficial to British interests and that the first step would be annexation of the land by Britain. In May 1916, Britain, France and Russia signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement, in which they designated their respective mandates over the Arab provinces who had been under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

With Britain now having jurisdiction over Palestine, the doors were open to establish a Jewish home therein. Dated November 2, 1917 (17 Cheshvan), on behalf of the British Government, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour sent a letter to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, declaring the British government's support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. This letter was transferred, by Rothschild to the Zionist Federation, paving the way for the 1922 League of Nations' "Mandate for Palestine" and ultimately the establishment of the State of Israel.

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Weekly Highlights: November 8 – 14 / 15 Cheshvan – 21 Cheshvan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
Shabbat Nov. 8				
10:15 AM	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Meshech Chochmah	Clanton Park	
Before minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah: Broken Idols	BAYT	
6:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
Sun. Nov. 9				
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	<i>not this week</i>
8:45 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Halachah: Ignoring Medical Advice	BAYT	
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Kuzari	Zichron Yisroel	<i>With light breakfast</i>
10:00 AM to 11:20 AM	Mrs. Sara Munk Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Yitzchak and Rivkah Ice Bucket Tzedakah	Forest Hill Jewish Centre	<i>Midreshet Yom Rishon for women only</i>
8:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Gemara: Mind, Body, Soul	Shaarei Shomayim	<i>in the beit midrash</i>
Tues. Nov. 11				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Iyov (Job)	Shaarei Shomayim	
Wed. Nov. 12				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Jew at War, Week 4 <i>Ethnic Cleansing?</i>	Beth Emeth	
8:45 PM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Fighting a Jewish War, Week 3 <i>Is Martyrdom Better?</i>	BAYT	
Thu. Nov. 13				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Yehoshua: To Catch a Thief	49 Michael Ct. Thornhill	<i>For women</i>
Fri. Nov. 14				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Advanced Shemitah	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<i>not this week</i>

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