



To sponsor an issue of Toronto Torah for \$180, please contact 647-234-7299 or email info@torontotorah.com

Moshe's Secret Identity

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

In 1951, a lawsuit by Detective Comics against Fawcett Publications, over copyright infringement with its Captain Marvel character, reached the United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit. In its decision, the court defined a superhero as having three key elements: Mission, Powers and Identity.

By this set of criteria, Moshe Rabbeinu was a superhero. His mission was to bring the Jews out of Egypt, to Sinai, and to their land. Moshe was given miraculous powers. And even without a codename and costume, Moshe did maintain a superhero's secret identity, as seen in Parshat Vaera.

The secret identity

Scholars of comic books discuss the purpose of secret identities. Beyond protecting loved ones from harm, the secret identity is a tool:

- It is a mask, affording the hero a respite from being heroic;
- It is a divider, allowing her to develop multiple sides of herself independently;
- It is a shield, enabling her to avoid persecution for being different.

However, Danny Fingeroth, author of *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics, and the Creation of the Superhero*, suggests that the secret identity may be the hero's true nature. Isolating a part of himself from conflict, heroics and the public eye, keeps the hero's personal character pure.

This privacy, which Michah 6:8 would name *tzniut*, may be at the heart of the second account of Moshe's development, in Parshat Vaera.

Moshe 1.0 – Shemot 2:1-6:13

An anonymous Levite man and woman conceive a child. When the child is too

old to remain hidden from the Egyptians, his mother puts him in a basket in a river, while his anonymous sister stands guard. The Pharaoh's anonymous daughter saves the baby, and names him Moshe.

The baby is raised in the palace. One day, he intervenes to save an anonymous Jew from an equally anonymous Egyptian, killing the latter. On the following day he disrupts a fight between two anonymous Jews, but his identity as the killer of the Egyptian becomes known. Moshe flees to Midian, where he is identified as "an Egyptian."

Decades later, Moshe encounters G-d at the Burning Bush, and G-d charges him to take the Jews out of Egypt. Despite his repeated refusals, Moshe goes to Pharaoh, armed with miracles and accompanied by his brother and prophet, Aharon. Pharaoh reacts with increased brutality to the Jews, and Moshe protests to G-d.

Moshe 2.0 – Shemot 6:14-7:13

Yaakov's eldest son, Reuven, produced four sons, whom we name. We then name Shimon's six sons. We then detail Levi's sons and their families, ultimately yielding Moshe and his extended family. G-d picks Moshe to take the Jews out of Egypt, and he refuses. G-d assigns Aharon to be his prophet, and empowers the pair to perform miracles to impress Pharaoh. They visit Pharaoh and perform the miracles, and Pharaoh rejects Moshe's message.

The lesson of the two accounts

Perhaps the first account is Moshe's public face, the heroic story which the Jews and Egyptians will know. This is the Moshe who will lead the Jews through religious ecstasy and distance from G-d, who will inspire them to brave

hunger and war and fear and mutiny and Divine threats of eradication. He is larger than life, framed by miracles and heroism. And in this story, the other figures have no names; they are just part of the Moshe Story.

The second account is of a Jewish boy with a family that includes many people we will meet later in the Torah – Elazar, Korach, Nadav, Avihu, Eltzafan, Pinchas, etc. The legendary events of Moshe's youth are played down; the story dedicates its space to the names of Moshe's family, the people who raised him and surrounded him. Moshe is a human being, and even his conversation with G-d is humble and stripped of drama.

This second account is Moshe's secret identity, which the world will not see. This is Moshe's private life; it is *tzanua*, stored away to preserve the purity of Moshe's roots and his character, untouched by the violence and conflict that absorb his public life. Unlike his identity as the killer of the Egyptian assailant, this identity will be kept private.

There are other ways to explain the two biblical accounts of Moshe's origin, but this lesson carries special power in our day. Our world exposes our identities, on-line and off-line, at work and in shul and in school. Our most popular modes of on-line entertainment demand that we log in and share our names and identities, often with others we have never met in person. Perhaps it would be wise for us to ask ourselves: Can we keep something back? Do we have something *tzanua*, a secret identity that the world cannot touch and abrade and change? Should we?

torczyner@torontotorah.com

OUR BEIT MIDRASH

- ROSH BEIT MIDRASH** RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER
AVREICHIM RABBI DAVID ELY GRUNDLAND, RABBI JOSH GUTENBERG, YISROEL MEIR ROSENZWEIG
COMMUNITY MAGGIDEI SHIUR RABBI ELAN MAZER, RABBI BARUCH WEINTRAUB
CHAVERIM DANIEL GEMARA, SHMUEL GIBLON, MEIR GRUNWALD, BJ KOROBKIN, RYAN JENAH, JOEL JESIN, SHIMMY JESIN, AVI KANNER, YISHAI KURTZ, AKIVA MARESKY, MITCHELL PERLMUTTER, ARYEH ROSEN, DANIEL SAFRAN, JESSE SHKEDY, KOBY SPIEGEL, EFRON STURMWIND



**YESHIVA UNIVERSITY
TORAH MITZION
BEIT MIDRASH**

**We are grateful to
Continental Press 905-660-0311**

The Shabbes Goy

Jacob Katz

JPS, 1989, translated from Hebrew

About the Author

Jacob Katz (1904-1998) was born in Hungary. During his childhood, he studied in several yeshivot and at the university in Frankfurt. In 1936, he moved to Israel where he taught history in religious high schools. He began teaching at Hebrew University in 1950, and in 1969 he was appointed rector at the university.

Katz was a pioneer for using rabbinical sources for historical and sociological research. His works explore the relationship between Jews and non-Jews and Jewish sociology in different eras. For his contributions to the fields of Jewish history and sociology, he won the Israel Prize in 1980.

About this Book

The titular *Shabbes Goy* refers to a non-Jew who performs work for a Jew on Shabbat. Even though non-Jews are not obligated to observe Shabbat, our sages forbid a Jew from asking a non-Jew to perform work for them on Shabbat and also forbid a Jew from benefitting from a non-Jew's work performed on Shabbat. This book traces the development of the laws relating to

the *Shabbes Goy* from the talmudic era until modern times.

Katz attributes the development of these laws to different factors. The Jews' economic practices changed throughout the years and each new enterprise brought along a new set of questions. Some of the issues raised were whether it was permitted to ride a ship on Shabbat operated by non-Jews, rent out fields to non-Jews on Shabbat and have a joint business venture with non-Jews who would operate the business on Shabbat. Another critical factor, starting in the 19th century, was the declining number of Jews who observed Shabbat in many European communities. In a chapter titled "Sabbath Observers as a Minority", Katz notes opposite trends taken by the rabbis to respond to this phenomenon. Some rabbis took a lenient approach in allowing non-Jews to perform certain actions for their Jewish neighbours as a means to encourage more Jews to remain Shabbat observant. However, other rabbis were more stringent in these cases in order to protect and ensure a full and proper Shabbat observance.

In addition to exploring why the laws developed, Katz also explains how the laws developed. Some laws developed

in the scholarly world, where the rabbis applied talmudic principles to the realities of their day and offered rulings based on their analysis of the sources. Other laws developed based on the practices of the laypeople. The rabbis would then, post-facto, either acknowledge legitimacy in the practice or deem it forbidden and try to root out the practice.

Each chapter deals with the *Shabbes Goy* in a specific region and time period. Together, the book paints a complete picture of the development of these laws and the role the *Shabbes Goy* has played throughout Jewish history.

Who should read this Book?

This book is intended for the serious student interested in the history of *halachah*. Most of the historical information is gleaned from responsa written during the different periods, but only short quotations from these responsa are included in the book. In order to fully appreciate and understand this work, the reader will be well served to refer to the primary sources quoted in the book.

jgutenberg@torontotorah.com

**613 Mitzvot: #420:
Reciting Shema**

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Devarim 6:6-7 declares, "And these words, which I instruct you today, shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your children [*v'shinantam l'vanecha*] and you shall speak of them, when you sit in your house and when you travel on the road, and when you lie down and when you rise." Further along, Devarim 11:18-19 instructs, "And you shall place these words of Mine upon your hearts and upon your souls, and you shall tie them as a sign upon your hands and as *totafot* between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your sons [*v'limadtem otam et beneichem*], to speak of them, when you sit in your houses and when you travel on the road, and when you lie down and when you rise." These passages include three unique mitzvot: reciting Shema twice each day, donning tefillin, and studying Torah.

To fulfill the mitzvah of reciting Shema, we read the following biblical sections: Devarim 6:4-9, Devarim 11:13-21, and Bamidbar 15:37-41. The third of the sections, which primarily describes the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, does not include a commandment to recite it daily, but it refers to G-d as our redeemer from Egypt, and we are taught to mention our departure from Egypt daily. [See *Sefer haChinuch* Mitzvah 21 and *Tzlach* Berachot 12b.]

Rambam (Aseh 10) and *Sefer haChinuch* count the mitzvah of reciting Shema as one biblical mitzvah, despite the three separate paragraphs and despite the fact that it is recited twice each day. *Sefer haChinuch* writes at length regarding the important role of this mitzvah:

"So that His nation will accept His reign and His unity every day and night, every day of their lives. Because a person is material, seduced by the frivolities of this world and drawn after his desires, he must have a perpetual reminder of the reign of Heaven, to guard himself from sin..."

And He instructed us to mention it at these two times [morning and evening], regularly, and with full concentration. We are to do it once in the day, to affect our deeds of the day. When one remembers the unity of G-d, His reign, His supervision and His omnipotence in the morning, and he recognizes that G-d's eyes watch all of his ways, counting all of his steps, and nothing is invisible to Him, and one cannot conceal any of his thoughts from G-d, then this thought and declaration will protect him all day. And the declaration at night will also protect him all night. And because the foundation of this mitzvah is that which we have just said, therefore the sages required that we perform this mitzvah with concentration, saying that one who does not concentrate for this mitzvah has not fulfilled his obligation. One does not remember anything unless he places his focus upon it."

There is some debate regarding which aspects of this mitzvah are biblical, and which are rabbinic; see *Pri Chadash* to *Orach Chaim* 67 for a full discussion.

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Biography

Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer was born in Shnipsisok, outside of Vilna, in 1837. He is most commonly known as one of the primary students of the *mussar* [ethical instruction] giant, Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin Salanter. A renowned scholar from a young age, Rabbi Blazer became the Chief Rabbi of St. Petersburg, Russia at the age of 25. This post earned Rabbi Blazer his commonly used diminutive nickname, R' Itzele Peterburger. His scholarship is immortalized in a two-part collection of responsa, *Pri Yitzchak*.

Rabbi Blazer was known for more than his scholarship; his piety remains perhaps his most lasting legacy. From his writings and stories told about him, it is clear that Rabbi Blazer fixated upon the *Yamim Noraim* [High Holy Days], and he yearned for this time all year long. Once the period arrived, he was profoundly focused on introspection and self-improvement, even going so far as to accept a *ta'anit dibbur* – a fast from speech – for the month of *Elul*.

Rabbi Blazer was responsible for bringing Rabbi Salanter's writings to print. The work composed of these writings is titled *Or Yisrael*, and it has since become an essential text of *mussar*. *Or Yisrael* is accompanied by a collection of essays by Rabbi Blazer, entitled, *Kochvei Or*. These essays are explorations of key themes that Rabbi Salanter expressed in his teachings and writings.

Some of the main themes of Rabbi Blazer's teachings include repentance, honest assessment of one's actions in the context of Divine judgment, fear of G-d, and the severity of wrongdoing, especially neglect of Torah study. Rabbi Blazer, like his teacher Rabbi Salanter, draws primarily from talmudic source material, deriving practical teachings that frame proper ethical thought and behavior.

In the later years of his life, Rabbi Blazer moved to Kovno, Lithuania and taught in the Kovno Kollel. From there he moved on to teaching at the Slabodka Yeshiva, led by Rabbi Natan Tzvi Finkel. Finally, in 1904, Rabbi Blazer made aliyah; he lived in Jerusalem until his death in 1907.

yrosenzweig@torontotorah.com

Torah and Translation

“As though it was new”

Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, *Kochvei Or* 8

Translated by Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

בגמ' (ברכות ה') לעולם ירגיו אדם יצר טוב על יצר הרע. נצחו מוטב, ואם לאו - יעסוק בתורה, נצחו מוטב ואם לאו - יקרא ק"ש כו'.

בגמ' (ב"ב ט"ז) ברא הקב"ה יצה"ר, ברא לו תורה תבלין, [ואמרו עוד] תורה בעידנא דעסיק בה אגוני ומצלי [מיצה"ר סוטה כ"א ע"ש]...

והנה הטור בהל' קריאת שמע (סי' ס"א) כתב, "ויקראנה ביראה ובכוונה. כתב רב עמרם, לשויה אינש לקריאת שמע בכל זמן דקרי לה כפרוטגמא חדשה. פירוש פרוטגמא כתב המלך על בני מדינתו, שק"ש הוא פרוטגמא דקב"ה כו'." והב"י כתב, "ויקראנה... כלומר שלא תהיה בעיניו שכבר שמע אותו הרבה פעמים שאינו חביב אצלו. וכך אמרו חז"ל (פסיקתא זוטרתיא ואתחנן ו') 'בכל יום יהיו בעיניך כחדשים'."

הדבר הזה, שיהי' בכל יום כחדשים, יש להסביר בדרך השכל. על כל אדם לשמור חוקי המדינה, ומאז יצא חוק חדש ונכתב בספר המשפטים החובה על כל אדם לנצור אותם, כל זמן שלא ישתנה ולא יתחלף החוק. אולם החוב אשר מוטל לשמור תמיד הוא רק מכח הפעם הראשון, וזהו החוק לשמור כל זמן שלא ישתנה, אבל רצון המחוקק הוא לא תמיד, כי הלא אדם הוא ויתנתם...

לא כן התורה הקדושה. לא רק מאשר לפני אלפים שנה נצטוונו לשמור תמיד, אך התורה היא רצונו של הקב"ה, ורצונו הוא בכל רגע שנשמור התורה...

הוא הדבר, אשר בכל יום ויום יהיו בעיניך כחדשים, כי רצונו הלא הוא כל יום ויום, וממילא [צריך] שיהי' חביב אצלנו כשעה ראשונה!

The Talmud (Berachot 5a) teaches that a person should always stir up the good inclination over the bad inclination. If this succeeds, good. If not, he should toil in Torah. If this succeeds, good. If not, he should recite Shema.

The Talmud (Bava Batra 16a) teaches that the Holy One Blessed is He created an inclination toward evil and created for it the Torah as an antidote. [They said further that] at the moment when one toils in Torah, it protects and saves [from the Evil Inclination, see Sotah 21a....]

Behold, the Tur (Laws of Reciting Shema, 61) writes, "[One should] recite it in reverence and with concentration. Rav Amram wrote, 'A person should make Shema, each time he reads it, as though it was a new *protogamy*.' A *protogamy* is a decree of the king upon his kingdom. So, too, Shema is the *protogamy* of the Holy One Blessed is He etc." The Beit Yosef writes, "One should read it... meaning, one shouldn't view it as though he has already heard it many times, so that he does not cherish it. So the Sages taught, 'Every day they should be as new in your eyes.' (Pesikta Zutrata Vetchanan 6)."

This concept of the words being new each day can be explained rationally. Every person is obligated to observe the civil laws of their country. When a new law is established and added to the law books, a person is required to follow these laws as long as they aren't changed or switched. However, this requirement is based upon the initial institution of law, and this [particular] law that must be observed as long as it isn't altered. However, the will of the legislator is not eternal for he is a human and [is inherently expected] to change his mind...

This is not the case regarding the holy Torah. The fact that we are commanded to observe it always is not only because it was commanded more than 2,000 years ago. Rather, the Torah is the will of the Holy One Blessed is He, and His will at all times is that we uphold the Torah...

This is the same point as the idea that every day they should be as new in your eyes. This Divine will is [constant] each day, and therefore [it is necessary that] they should be as beloved as at the first moment!

This Week in Israeli History: 28 Tevet, 1996 Elections for the Palestinian Authority

Rabbi David Ely Grundland

28 Tevet is Monday

There was an air of apprehensive anticipation in Israel and beyond on 28 Tevet (January 20), 1996, as Palestinians went to the polls to elect their leadership democratically.

Some expressed cautious optimism, hoping that this would be the impetus of evolution from a “political discourse” of clan-based factionalism to an actual political dynamic. In this new environment, individuals would be given a platform from which to express their political views. This real political discourse would enable new voices to compete with calls for armed revolution, and the pursuit of the Palestinian national interests would follow political measures. With a new system in place, those who defined themselves by “armed struggle against the occupation” would be unable to continue with such ideologies and would be directed into the political discourse. Some even suggested that elections

would reverse the attitude of victimization, empowering the people to take a greater role in their own political sovereignty.

Unfortunately, there were impediments to the restructuring and the realization of those optimistic hopes:

- Yassar Arafat, head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), was in charge of the proceedings. He was accused of violating election laws, including jailing and intimidating activists and ignoring primary results, instead placing his own supporters on the ballots. (Arafat ultimately won the election with over 75% of the vote.)
- Hamas boycotted the elections, removing themselves and their supporters from the process entirely.

The elections were not substantive in shifting Palestinian politics. Unfortunately, the resulting political process has benefited neither Arab society nor the State of Israel.

dgrundland@torontotorah.com

Weekly Highlights: Jan. 17 – Jan. 23 / 26 Tevet – 3 Shevat

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Jan. 16-17				
Fri. 9:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Moshe's Greatest Enemy	Village Shul	
10:30 AM	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Meshech Chochmah	Clanton Park	
11:10 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Miriam the Fearless	Village Shul	
Before minchah	R' Josh Gutenberg	Daf Yomi	BAYT	<i>Rabbi's Classroom</i>
After minchah	R' Josh Gutenberg	Causing a Jew to Sin?	BAYT	<i>West Wing Library</i>
Seudah shlishit	R' Mordechai Torczyner	How to save our children: Lessons of Moshe's boat	Village Shul	
7:00 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
Sun. Jan. 18				
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Kuzari	Zichron Yisroel	
8:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Gemara: Mind, Body, Soul	Shaarei Shomayim	
Tues. Jan. 20				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Iyov (Job): Bildad's First Speech	Shaarei Shomayim	
8:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Relationship Advice from the Prophets	The Village Shul	Week 2 of 2
8:45 PM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Intro to Introductions: Biblical Commentators	BAYT	Week 2 of 4
Wed. Jan. 21 Rosh Chodesh Shevat				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	History of Jewish Publishing Great Forgeries	Beth Emeth	Week 3 of 4
Thu. Jan. 22				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Yehoshua: War for Givon	49 Michael Ct. Thornhill	For Women Only
Fri. Jan. 23				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Advanced Shemitah	Yeshivat Or Chaim	

We are funded by the Toronto community. To become a supporting member for \$36 per year, or to make a general donation, please email info@torontotorah.com or go to <http://www.torontotorah.com/give-a-gift>. Thank you for your continued partnership.