



This week's issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Rabbi Dr. Moshe and Esty Yeres for the yahrtzeit of Mrs. Shirley Yeres, Chaya Shandel bat Alexander haLevi z"l

The Pun and the Primordial

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

At the start of the Jewish nation's fortieth year in the wilderness, they again protested their desert predicament. "The nation's spirit became short, due to their travels," we are told, and they rejected the Divine gift of manna. The Divine reaction was harsh; G-d sent poisonous serpents, which began to bite and kill the wayward Jews. The nation admitted their sin, and called upon Moshe to pray to G-d on their behalf. Moshe interceded, and G-d told him, "Make a serpent, and place it atop a pole. All those who are bitten should look upon it, and live." Moshe formed a snake of *nechoshet* [a copper alloy, either brass or bronze] and brought the plague to an end. (Bamidbar 21:4-9)

This story introduces obvious problems of theology, but a midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 31:8) seizes upon an apparently minor detail to make a major theological statement.

Our midrash cites four cases in which G-d instructs a human being "*Aseh lecha*," "Make for yourself." In three out of the four – Noach's boat of gopher wood; Joshua's circumcision knives of stone; Moshe's trumpets of silver – G-d specifies the material to use. In our case, though, no material is specified. [Our midrash omits *Aseh lecha* instructions that appear in Yirmiyahu 27:2 and Yechezkel 12:3. Perhaps this is because those items are not truly "for yourself"; they are only prophetic props, and have no further function.] And so our midrash asks: How did Moshe know to use *nechoshet*?

Medieval commentators noted the same problem, and offered a range of solutions:

- Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra suggests that G-d told Moshe to use *nechoshet*, but the text did not record it.
- Ramban offers that *nechoshet* would be a particularly good material for simulating a serpent.
- Rabbi Chizkiyah ben Manoach (*Chizkuni*) contends that *nechoshet* was a practical choice, due to its visibility from afar.

Our midrash provides a different approach, though: A pun.

Rabbi Yudin explains in our midrash, citing Rabbi Eivo: "[Moshe] said: If I would make it of gold, the term for one [*nachash*] would not flow into the term for the other [*zahav*]. If I would make it of silver, the term for one [*nachash*] would not flow into the term for the other [*kesef*]. I will make it of *nechoshet*, language flowing into language."

In other words: Moshe used a pun to determine that he should use *nechoshet* to form the serpent.

Of course, the use of the *nachash* in this story is itself a pun. The Hebrew word *nachash* refers not only to a serpent, but also to secret knowledge (see Bereishit 44:5 and Vayikra 19:26) – as seen in the Garden of Eden, and as seen with this serpent which conveyed the Divine cure. Moshe, then, layered pun upon pun.

While the midrash's acknowledgement of a biblical pun is interesting, its next step is profound. Rabbi Eivo adds, "From here we see that the Torah was given in the sacred tongue." Rabbi Pinchas and Rabbi Chizkiyah then cite Rabbi Simon, "Just as the Torah was given in the sacred tongue, so the world was created with the sacred tongue."

The association between serpent and copper alloy is fundamental to their natures, and it is expressed in the Torah's Hebrew words for both of them, because Hebrew is the language of Torah and of Creation. [See, too, Bereishit Rabbah 17:4 and 18:4, and Shabbat 104a.] In other words: The Pentateuchal pun is pre-ordained, primordial.

What is the point of linking Hebrew with Creation? Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi (Kuzari II 67-68) explains that this is evidence of the elevated character of the Hebrew language. However, one might also suggest that this link teaches the importance of the Jew, speaker of Hebrew, in the plan of Divine Creation.

Reading the Torah plainly, I could have assumed that Jews were the beneficiaries of a handful of superlative ancestors and serendipitous incidents. If not for the daring of Avraham and Sarah, we might have remained in Aram; if not for Eliezer's prayer at the well, we might have been a one-generation wonder. This midrash argues for Jewish exceptionalism, claiming that Jews are no product of fortune; rather, the Jew is hardwired into the universe, his language the code of Creation, her destiny the primordial plan.

This perspective on the role of the Jew is at once daunting and inspiring. It demands that we view our next move as more than the expression of personal whim, and as necessary for the success of the Divine will. The universe, crafted with our tongue, is playing our song. Moshe's decision to fashion the *nachash* of *nechoshet* teaches us that not only is Hebrew a tool of G-d – but so are we.

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OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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***Ma'archei Lev*
Professor Ze'ev Lev
Mossad HaRav Kook, Jerusalem 1995**

About the Author

Ze'ev Lev was born in Vienna in 1922. He escaped Europe during the Holocaust and arrived in Canada. He earned a degree in physics from Queen's University, and then earned both a masters degree and doctorate from Columbia University. He moved to Israel where he was a professor at Hebrew University and performed research which was instrumental in creating the MRI machine. He also founded the Jerusalem College of Technology (also known as *Machon Lev*), which combines Torah study with secular studies.

About the Book

As technology developed rapidly in the 20th century, electrical appliances and gadgets became standard in all households. These innovations had serious implications in many areas of Jewish Law, especially Shabbat. *Ma'archei Lev* addresses issues regarding using electrical appliances on Shabbat.

The book begins with a chapter discussing several basic principles of electricity. Understanding these principles is essential to understanding

the central concepts discussed in the book. He then deals with the fundamental question of why it is prohibited to close a circuit on Shabbat. There are two main opinions on the matter. Rabbi Yitzchak Shmelkes, author of responsa *Beit Yitzchak*, was the first to address the problem of using electricity on Shabbat and said the prohibition falls under the category of *molid*. This is a rabbinic prohibition against closing a circuit on Shabbat, because it creates a flow of current, similar to the prohibition against making clothes fragrant on *Yom Tov*. Both are instances of creating something new on Shabbat and *Yom Tov* respectively. Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz, author of *Chazon Ish*, disagreed and said that opening and closing a circuit on Shabbat violates biblical prohibitions under the categories of building and destroying on Shabbat. Professor Lev analyzes these two opinions and discusses the assumptions behind and implications of these two schools of thought. The following chapters deal with more specific issues such as using timers, fax machines, computers and robots on Shabbat. The last chapter in the book is not specifically related to Shabbat, and discusses the microwave and Jewish Law.

Ma'archei Lev presents a very thorough and detailed analysis of the issues as it traces them back to their Talmudic sources. For example, Professor Lev spends two chapters discussing the use of timers for electrical appliances on Shabbat. In the first chapter he explores several talmudic principles relating to the status of indirect actions in areas such as murder and torts, and their implications for indirect actions on Shabbat. In the next chapter, he analyzes seven different responsa on the matter and how each one understands and uses the principles laid out in the previous chapter to arrive at their own conclusions.

Perfect Match

Professor Lev's combination of scientific expertise and vast Torah knowledge made him a perfect candidate to write a book on this topic. This book represents his own ideas along with ideas from some of the great halachic authorities of in the 20th century. He had close relationships with many great authorities, such as Rabbi Yitzchak haLevi Herzog (Chief Rabbi of Israel) and Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, with whom he discussed many of the issues in the book.

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**613 Mitzvot: #445, 446
Only in Jerusalem!**

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

We have already learned that the Torah includes four separate instructions requiring us to bring our offerings only in the Beit haMikdash. (Toronto Torah 6:35) As we have noted, Sefer haChinuch offers two lessons in this emphasis upon location:

- To teach that the justification for killing animals, even for worship, is only valid in a highly circumscribed context;
- To teach the Divine selection and elevation of the site of the Beit haMikdash.

The Torah also presents two mitzvot requiring us to consume the permitted portions of korbanot only in designated sites:

- Lower-level offerings (*kodashim kalim*), including the first-born animal (which is singled out in Mitzvah 445), must be consumed inside the walls of Jerusalem.
- Higher-level offerings (*kodshei kodashim*), such as sin-offerings, must be consumed in the *azarah* room of the Beit haMikdash. (Mitzvah 446)

These mitzvot are expressed in Devarim 12:17, "You may not eat in your gates... the firstborn of your cattle and your sheep, and any vowed offering, etc." The Talmud (Makkot 17a) studies each word of this verse, applying the law to a diverse array of korbanot. Indeed, even performing the rites of the korban while merely *planning* to consume it in the wrong space will disqualify it. (Mitzvah 144)

In addition to the lessons cited above, Sefer haChinuch (446) explains that being confined to a particular space helps the person consuming the korban to focus on the ritual goal of the offering, rather than fall into the trap of viewing it as a meal.

The wording of the biblical text here is odd; rather than instruct, "**You may not eat** [*lo tochal*]", it says, literally, "**You will not be able to eat** [*lo tuchal le'echoh*]." [Indeed, this anomaly is used to explain similar biblical language of "You will not be able" elsewhere to mean a prohibition of "Do not"; cf. Sifri Devarim 72 and Shaarei Teshuvah I 5.]

The Radomsker Rebbe explained that this wording provides an additional lesson embedded in this mitzvah: "When a person eats in Jerusalem, or from the table of the *tzaddik* [righteous person of special standing], which is holy, then he perceives a good taste in eating, because sanctity is manifest in this food. Then he goes home, and he cannot eat in holiness and purity as he did in Jerusalem, and the taste of the food lacks the taste he experienced in Jerusalem, for it is not of that degree of holiness. Thus the text says, 'You will not be able to eat in your gates, etc.'... One cannot grasp, in his home, that great sanctity. Therefore, one should always desire to return to Jerusalem." (Tiferet Shlomo to Parshat Reeh)

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Biography

Rabbi Natan Gestetner

Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Rabbi Natan Gestetner was born on March 8, 1932 in Győr, Hungary to a family whose ancestry included noted figures such as Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Chatam Sofer*). In his youth he learned in a number of yeshivot, including the Pupa beit midrash led by Rabbi Yosef Greenwald. During the first decade and a half of Rabbi Gestetner's life he moved from yeshiva to yeshiva. This constant movement was due, in part, to the unstable conditions in Europe leading up to the outbreak of World War II. One of the few survivors of his family, Rabbi Gestetner traveled to modern day Slovakia to learn in the yeshiva of Rabbi Moshe Nuschloss.

In 1949, Rabbi Gestetner made aliyah and settled in Jerusalem, eventually being appointed to teach in the Yeshiva of Erloi. In 1965, Rabbi Gestetner was chosen to be the Rabbi of the Agudat Yisrael community in Bnei Brak. In this community, Rabbi Gestetner established Yeshivat Panim Meiro, which he led. In addition to serving as Rosh Yeshiva of Panim Meiro, Rabbi Gestetner was also a member of Rabbi Shmuel Wosner's Beit Din Tzedek. Rabbi Gestetner passed away on the 14th of Kislev, 2010 in Bnei Brak.

Aside from the various leadership positions that he held in the community, Rabbi Gestetner wrote a great deal. His responsa fill fifteen volumes and deal with topics across the spectrum of Jewish law. In addition to his responsa, Rabbi Gestetner also wrote commentaries on the Torah, Talmud, and various other topics. Some of Rabbi Gestetner's responsa include answers to questions like:

- Does traveling in the Channel Tunnel ("Chunnel") between England and France warrant *Birkat HaGomel*? (7:Orach Chaim 10)
- Is there a mitzvah to know the signs of kashrut for animals you don't intend to eat? (11:Yoreh Deah 82)
- What do you do when an invalid sefer torah is mixed in with valid sifrei torah and it isn't clear which is which? (10:Yoreh Deah 69)
- A doctor operating on an elderly man noticed that he didn't have a brit milah, should he give the man a brit without asking his permission? (14:56)

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Torah and Translation

Erasing G-d's Name on a Computer Screen

L'horot Natan Vol. 12 Yoreh Deah 86:6-7

Translated by Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

ו) אלא דהיה מקום לדון להתירא בנ"ד, היות דליכא כתיבה, דהא לא מצינו כתיבה אלא בדיו, או בדרך חק תוכות או חק יריכות, שיש ממש באותיות, אבל בנ"ד אין על המסך שום ממשות אלא אור בעלמא, יתכן דבזה ליכא איסור מחיקת השם.

אולם יפה העיר מע"כ דלענין איסור מחיקת השם לא בעינן דוקא שיהא עליו דין כתב, דהרי הלאו ד"לא תעשו כן לד' אלקיכם" נאמר בכל גוונא שחייבין לאבד עבודה זרה, והרי בעבודה זרה כתב הרמב"ם בספר המצוות (עשין קפ"ה) שציונו לאבד ע"ז בכל מיני איבוד והשחתה והכונה שלא נניח להם רושם. וא"כ אם נכתב עבודה זרה על מסך הקומפיוטר ודאי דאיכא מצוה לאבדו ולהשחיתו, וא"כ לעומת זה בשם קודש אסור לאבדו. עכ"ד...

ז) אלא דלכאורה יש מקום לדון להיתרא עפ"י המבואר בכסף משנה (פ"ז דעכו"ם הי"א) בשם הרמ"ך ז"ל, דהטעם דצל השריגים והעלים של אשרה מותר לישב תחתיה משום דדבר שאין בו ממש הוא, עיי"ש. וברמב"ם שם (ה"י) כתב דשלהבת של ע"ז מותרת מפני שאין בה ממש עיי"ש. ומעתה יתכן דגם בנדון דידן, כיון דאותיות הללו הנראות על מסך הקומפיוטר הלא אין בהן ממש ואינן אלא בגדר צל, ליכא בהן איסור מחיקה, דיתכן דגם העשה של "ואבדתם את שמם" ליכא בכהאי גוונא דכיון דאין בו ממש נחשב כמאן דליתא. והרמב"ם בספר המצוות עשין קפ"א כתב "שציונו לאבד ע"ז ולא נניח להם רושם." אפשר דצל אינו בגדר רושם, כיון שאין בו ממש.

6) However, there could be room to rule leniently in our case given that there is no [halachic] writing for we only find [a halachic concept of] writing when there is either ink or physical engraving of the letter or its outline, such that there is tangibility to the letters. In our case, however, since there is nothing tangible on the screen, it is just light, it is possible to say that there is no prohibition of erasing G-d's name.

However, Your Honour cogently noted: The prohibition against erasing the Name doesn't require that there be true, halachic writing. This is [clear] from the fact that the prohibition is stated in all situations in which there is the corresponding requirement to destroy idols. Regarding idols, Rambam (Sefer HaMitzvot, Aseh 185) writes that we are commanded to destroy them in all manner of destruction and eradication, with the intent being to not leave any remnants behind. Given this fact, if [something communicating] idol worship were written on the computer screen, surely there would be a mitzvah to destroy and eradicate it. As such, there should be a parallel prohibition to destroy G-d's name...

7) However, it appears that there is room to rule leniently according to what is clear from the Kesef Mishnah (Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 7:11) in the name of Rabbi Moshe HaKohen [of Lunel] that the reason it is permissible to sit beneath the branches and leaves of an *asheirah* [a worshipped tree] is that there is no tangible physical benefit. And Rambam there (ibid. 7:10) writes that benefit from a flame of idol worship is permissible since it has no physicality. Now, it is possible to say that in our case as well, the letters on the computer screen don't have any physicality to them and are, therefore, in the category of a "shadow". [As such,] there is no prohibition against erasing them, and it is possible that there would be no positive mitzvah of "And you shall destroy their name" [regarding idolatry] in such a scenario, for since it is not tangible, it is viewed as though it doesn't exist. Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvot (Aseh 185) writes that we are commanded to destroy idol worship and not leave any remnant, but is possible that a shadow isn't in the category of "remnant", since it isn't physical.

11 Tammuz is Sunday

Rabbi Yosef Karo (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 576:4) teaches that a community should observe a fast day if walls and/or buildings collapse in a city due to a natural disaster. He specifies that the walls that fell must be strong and free of anything that could have contributed to their falling, such as a nearby river or ground erosion. He specifically lists earthquakes and tornadoes as potential causes for which one would need to fast.

In his Kaf HaChaim commentary to that passage (576:26), Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sofer makes a striking declaration. "Our sages did not make this statement regarding the Holy City of Jerusalem, since no buildings fall in Jerusalem." To prove this, he cites an example. On 11 Tammuz, 5687 (July 11, 1927), a great mudslide affected Jerusalem and surrounding areas. Buildings sustained damage and even

collapsed. However, no damage was sustained at all within Jerusalem itself. This was considered proof that Hashem guards Israel and, according to the Kaf HaChaim, even the rationalists of the day considered the occurrence to be wondrous and an act of Divine protection.

According to Seismological Research Letters 85:4 (2014) the mudslide was caused by a 6.25 magnitude Earthquake which occurred near Jericho. While it mentions that there were buildings that collapsed and there were a number of deaths in Jerusalem, it appears that there was minimal damage in the Old City itself. According to the article, the British Mandate made efforts to secure lightly damaged buildings using iron rods, which are visible to this day. (<http://url.geoscienceworld.org/content/85/4/912.full.pdf>) May we merit seeing revealed miracles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, speedily, in our day!

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Weekly Highlights: June 27 – July 3 / 10 Tammuz – 16 Tammuz
Many of our classes are now on hiatus, but opportunities remain!

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת June 26-27				
After hashkamah	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Meshech Chochmah	Clanton Park	<i>Not this week</i>
Derashah	Yisroel Meir Rosezweig	The Richness of Life	Clanton Park	
Before Pirkei Avot	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
7:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Rav Kook and the Art of Torah War	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:50 PM	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Pirkei Avot	Clanton Park	
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah: Of Mountains and Trees	BAYT	
Sun. June 28				
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachic Issues Travel on a Fast Day	BAYT	
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Kuzari	Zichron Yisroel	<i>With light breakfast</i>
10:00 AM	R' Aaron Greenberg	Olam Haba, Mashiah, and Gan Eden	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<i>University boys</i>
Mon. June 29				
6:00 PM	EVENING OF TRIBUTE at Shaarei Shomayim in honour of Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Rabbi Netanel Javasky, Rabbi Josh Gutenberg and our graduating Chaverim To register: canada@yu.edu / 416-783-6960			
Wed. July 1				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Jewish Medical Ethics 101	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<i>Not this week</i>
Fri. July 3				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Advanced Shemittah: Prozbul	Yeshivat Or Chaim	

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