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Why did the Pharaoh not know Yosef?

Emanuel Elstein

One of the parent organizations of our Beit Midrash is Torah MiTzion. This week we feature an article by Emanuel Elstein, CFO of Torah MiTzion.

In the opening chapter of the book of Shemot (1:8), we read that a new king arose in Egypt, "who did not know Yosef." How is it possible that this king did not know Yosef? Our Sages explained that the king certainly knew of Yosef, but acted as if he did not know him; he became suspicious of the loyalty of Yosef and his family. But even this is hard to explain. What caused the king to view the children of Israel as a threat to Egyptian security?

Our Sages gave a theological answer - the children of Israel began to assimilate, and so their slavery in Egypt, beginning with the king's suspicion, was a Divine punishment. But it is possible to add a more *realpolitik* answer as well.

Our parshah opens with Yaakov's request not to be buried in Egypt. Why was that so critical for him? Moreover, why was Pharaoh opposed to Yaakov's seemingly modest request, such that Yosef needed to beg for permission to go? (Bereishit 50:4-5)

In Pharaoh's mind, Yosef's family had joined the Egyptian nobility. Indeed, when Yaakov died, he was treated as royalty; embalming in Egypt was not a practical means of preservation, but rather a religious ritual designed to ensure the existence of the dead in the netherworld. The Egyptians seemed to

be claiming Yaakov as one of their own; they adopted Yaakov and made him an Egyptian national hero. Rashi even explains that they imputed to him the prosperity of Egypt since his arrival. From this perspective, the request to bury Yaakov in Canaan amounted to a slap in the face of the entire Egyptian nation.

It seems that this is when Pharaoh began to doubt Yosef's loyalty to Egypt. Therefore, when the brothers went to Canaan to bury Yaakov, they had to leave their children and cattle in Egypt. Pharaoh was concerned that they would use their father's funeral to escape back to Canaan.

However, if that is the case, why did Yaakov put his family in this situation? Why insist on being buried in Israel, and risk the distrust it would cause? I would like to suggest that Yaakov, knowing the dangers of being a small minority in a dominant culture, already saw the specter of assimilation hovering over his family. He feared that after his death he would become part of the Egyptian pantheon (or as Rashi defines it: he was afraid they would turn him into an idol). With Yaakov part of their Egyptian heritage, it would be so much easier for his descendants to assimilate into society and lose their own identity as Hebrews.

Our Sages tell us that the redemption came about because the Jews did not change their names, clothing, or language - but they almost did. Egypt was a melting pot. We have already seen how Yosef was able to take on an Egyptian identity and integrate into

Egyptian society. Yaakov feared that this process would spiral out of control.

Yaakov ensured that he would not be physically attached to Egyptian soil and thereby adopted by the Egyptian nation. On the contrary - his tomb in *Me'arat Hamachpelah* would become a magnet pulling his descendants back to Israel.

We opened by asking what led to the turnabout in Yosef's popularity. Perhaps the trigger was Yaakov's request to be buried in Canaan. Pharaoh correctly interpreted this request as a rejection of Egypt and its culture.

Yosef's economic policy was appreciated by the masses at the time. But what did the people think when Yosef's loyalty became suspect? It was Yosef the Hebrew who introduced mass slavery into Egypt and forced the Egyptians to move from one corner of Egypt to the other, while his own family enjoyed economic freedom. Perhaps it was not so hard for the king to mobilize the masses against the children of Israel after all. Perhaps they were able to rationalize enslaving *Am Yisrael* as a way to retrieve all that had been taken from them.

Being unwilling to reject our identity, we were unable to be totally accepted into Egyptian society. Remaining the perennial outsider, our loyalty was never totally trusted. It was only a matter of time before a new Pharaoh would arise "who did not know Yosef".

emanuel@torahmitzion.org

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***The Juggler and the King*
Rabbi Aharon Feldman
Feldheim 1991**

Background

Aggadah generally refers to rabbinic statements that are not oriented toward conveying halachic lessons. The aggadic passages in the Talmud remain, to many, at best a curious oddity, and at worst a confusing and sometimes worrying set of jarring statements and images. The types of passages classified as Aggadah vary from ethical pronouncements to tales of rabbis, and even to tales of fantastic characters and scenes in the manner of myth or legend. To varying degrees, passages in these various styles leave the reader perplexed. One sense is that our Sages have an important message to convey, but also that it is carefully hidden so that only those capable of breaking through the puzzling presentation can reveal it.

It is to this end that the Vilna Gaon (GR" A) wrote a commentary to two particularly cryptic aggadic passages: The aggadot of Rabbah bar bar Chanah in Bava Batra (73a), and the riddles of the Elders of Athens in Bechorot (8b).

The Vilna Gaon's commentary is removed from much of the general public both in terms of its terse style and the relevance which the concepts and constructs in which he deals have for the modern reader. It is to address these issues that Rabbi Aharon Feldman rendered an English version of the Vilna Gaon's commentary which is accessible and meaningful to the contemporary reader.

Content, Structure, and Style

The book includes an introductory section which discusses the study of Aggadah in general and gives the reader some background in the scope and purpose of these esoteric sections of Talmudic literature. Following this, there are separate units in the book for each of the passages explained by the Vilna Gaon.

Drawing on disparate sources, the Vilna Gaon presents the passages as carefully constructed analogies, and provides the keys for explaining their meanings. Rabbi Feldman notes that in the course of his explanations the Vilna Gaon finds within these passages discussions of the fundamental issues of Jewish thought.

The commentary spans many topics including Man's purpose in life, his relationship to G-d, the evil inclination, perspectives on the course of history, and the centrality of Torah study. Rabbi Feldman is sensitive to the Vilna Gaon's treatment of these issues, and highlights them as they emerge in the course of his own translation. In his English rendition, he presents the aggadic passages sentence by sentence and then provides an elucidation which incorporates the Vilna Gaon's comments and his own extensions of them.

Final Thoughts

For one with little experience in the world of Aggadah this volume can serve as a valuable introduction to aggadic interpretation. The more seasoned reader can appreciate the Vilna Gaon's methodology and the precision with which he unlocks the codes of passages considered. Overall the book is also a window into the theology of our sages, a factor which makes it fascinating and informative in its own right.

afriedmann@torontotorah.com

Israel's Chief Rabbis: *Rabbi Ovadia Hedaya*

***Rabbi (Chacham) Ovadia Hedaya*
27 Kislev 5650 (1889) – 20 Shevat 5729 (1969)
Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Petah Tikva, 1939-1951**

Life

Rabbi Ovadia Hedaya was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1899; at the age of 10, he made aliyah with his family to Jerusalem. His father, the Kabbalist Solomon Hedaya, became the head of the Sephardic Beit Din of Jerusalem, and Rosh Yeshiva of the historic, kabbalistic Yeshivat Beit-El in the Old City.

Already in his youth, Rabbi Hedaya began to learn the fundamentals of Kabbalah with kabbalists hired by his father, as well as in Yeshivat Beit-El. He fled to Aleppo to avoid being drafted into the Ottoman forces in Eretz Yisrael; upon his return in 1923, he was appointed to teach in Yeshivat Porat Yosef in the Old City. In 1925, he was appointed as a judge in the Sephardic Beit Din of Jerusalem, and in 1939 he became Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Petach Tikvah. In 1951, Rabbi Hedaya returned to Jerusalem, where he was appointed as a judge on the chief Beit Din of the city; eventually he became the head of the court.

Yeshivat Beit-El was closed in 1948, when the Jordanians captured the Old City. In 1957, Rabbi Hedaya opened it anew in the western part of the city, and he led the yeshiva. Rabbi Hedaya stood as a candidate for Sephardic Chief Rabbi in 1964, but Rabbi Yitzchak Nissim was selected.

Legacy

Rabbi Hedaya was known as an expert Kabbalist, as well as a great Sephardic halachic authority. He wrote many books, but his best-known and most celebrated work was his eight

volume collection of responsa, *Yaskil Avdi*, including halachic rulings on topics ranging from everyday Jewish life to national policy. *Yaskil Avdi* merited letters of approval from the greatest sages of the time, including Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, and in 1968 it was recognized with the Israel Prize for Torah Literature.

Rabbi Hedaya's approach to halachic rulings includes Kabbalah in halachic calculations, following the school of his father's mentor, Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (*Ben Ish Chai*). Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu would pick up where he left off; Rabbi Ovadia Yosef also saw Rabbi Hedaya as a significant mentor, but he charted a different halachic path.

In Rabbi Hedaya's view, popular practice is one of the parameters taken into consideration by halachah. This was a contributing factor when Rabbi Hedaya broke with other Sephardic authorities, permitting the use of human hair wigs. (*Yaskil Avdi* 7:Even haEzer 16) However, where Rabbi Hedaya saw concern for foreign influences he was uncompromising. For example, he prohibited placing flowers on a casket as a non-Jewish practice, and its beautification as demonstrating lack of faith in Divine judgment of the deceased. (ibid. 4:Yoreh Deah 25) Regarding the State of Israel, Rabbi Hedaya aligned himself with rabbis who saw significance in the establishment of the State, and he recognized the authority of its institutions even when operated by non-observant Jews. (ibid. 6:Choshen Mishpat 28) For more on his thought, see Ariel Picar, *Psikato shel haRav Ovadia Yosef l'nochach temurot hazman*.

yperez@torontotorah.com

Biography
Rabbi Shlomo Zalman
Auerbach
Rabbi Josh Gutenberg

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was one of the great halachic authorities of the 20th century. He was born into a rabbinic family in Jerusalem in 1910. As a teenager, he studied in Yeshivat Eitz Chaim, headed by Rabbi Isser Zalman Melzer. After he married, he studied in Midrash Bnei Tzion, a kollel dedicated to studying the laws relevant to the land of Israel, headed by Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank.

In 1949, Rabbi Auerbach became Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Kol Torah, where he remained for 46 years until his death. Despite receiving prestigious offers to serve as Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem and as a judge in the top rabbinical court, Rabbi Auerbach refused to accept any position beyond his role at Yeshivat Kol Torah.

Rabbi Auerbach published his first major work, titled *Me'orei Eish*, when he was 25. The book discusses, at length, the use of electricity as it pertains to Jewish law. He received approbations from many leading authorities, including Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook and Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzenski. Other books that he authored include *Minchat Shlomo*, a collection of responsa, and *Ma'adanei Eretz*, which deals with the laws of *shemita* and tithes. His oral rulings regarding the laws of Shabbat and medicine also form the core of several important books written by his students. These books include *Shemirat Shabbat keHilchatah*, written by Rabbi Yehoshua Neuwirth, and *Nishmat Avraham*, written by Rabbi Dr. Avraham Sofer Abraham.

Rabbi Auerbach was meticulous in studying modern technology and science before offering rulings on these matters. For example, he had doctors and scientists perform experiments to help him determine the exact moment a person is considered dead, and the minimum temperature at which cooking on Shabbat is prohibited.

Rabbi Auerbach passed away in 1995. Over 250,000 people attended his funeral, demonstrating the tremendous impact he had upon the wide spectrum of Jews living in Israel and abroad.

jbgutenberg@gmail.com

Torah and Translation
Prayer After the Doctors Give Up
R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Halichot Shlomo III 8 fn 56
Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

הדריך רבינו שלא להרבות בתפלת רבים בפרסום וכו' אם כבר נתייאשו הרופאים מלרפאות את החולה בדרכי הטבע, אפילו הוא גברא רבה (וגם ישקלו היטב אם לשנות את שמו), כי אם לא ייענו בתפלתם ולא יתרפא, יש לחוש לרפיון ח"ו בעיני אמונה. והורה לשואלים שבכה"ג יתפללו "שייטב לחולה וייטב למשפחתו" ולא יבקשו דוקא על רפואתו, וד' הוא הטוב בעיניו יעשה.

וכ"כ בגליון רעק"א (או"ח סי' רל) בשם ס' חסידים סי' תשצ"ה וז"ל, אל יתפלל אדם לבקש דבר שאינו כפי הטבע. ואף שהיכולת ביד הקב"ה... ואסור להתפלל שיעשה לו הקב"ה נס בשינוי עולם כגון שיוציא אילן זה פירות קודם זמנו. ס"ח סי' תשצ"ה:

ועיין מש"כ רבנו במנחת שלמה (צא כד) בענין הטיפול בחולים משותקים וכו' "הענין של חיים, אין לנו שום קנה מידה כמה למדוד את יוקרם וחשיבותם אפילו לא בתורה ומצוות, שהרי מחללין את השבת גם על זקן חולה מוכה שחין אף על פי שהוא חרש ושוטה גמור, ואינו יכול לעשות שום מצוה וחיייו הם רק למשא וסבל גדול על משפחתו וגורם להם ביטול תורה ומצוות, ונוסף לצערם הגדול הרי הם אזלי ומדלדלי, ואפ"ה מצוה בגדולי ישראל להשתדל ולעסוק בהצלתו ולחלל עליו את השבת." וכשנתאספו פעם לתפלה עבור חולה במצב בזה הקדים רבנו ואמר: עלינו לדעת שאע"פ שמאמינים אנו בתחית המתים שתהיה בעת שיעלה רצון מאת הבורא ית"ש, אעפ"כ אין אנו מבקשים שיהיה הדבר דוקא עתה. וכיוון שלפי דעת הרופאים רפואת החולה עכשיו היא מעין תחית המתים לכן נקרא פרק תהלים אחד בלבד ונכוין שיהיה לטובת החולה... אבל מ"מ גם במצב זה לא יסיר ח"ו בטחונו בד' שיחוס וירחם עליו ועדיין יש תקוה שירפאה...

Our master [Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach] counseled not to increase public communal prayer, etc., where the doctors had already abandoned hope of healing the ill person naturally, even where it was a great figure (and they should also weigh carefully whether to change his name). If their prayers would not be answered and the patient would not be healed, there would be concern, G-d forbid, for weakness of faith. And he instructed those who asked that in such cases they should pray "that He help the patient and help his family", and that they not ask for healing, specifically, and G-d will do that which is good in His eyes.

And so is written in Rabbi Akiva Eiger's comments (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 230), citing Sefer Chasidim 795, "One should not pray, asking for that which is not natural, even though G-d can do this... And one may not pray for G-d to perform a miracle on his behalf, changing the world, such as causing this tree to produce fruit before its time."

And see what our master wrote (Minchat Shlomo 91:24) regarding caring for ill people who are paralyzed, etc. "Regarding life, we have no measuring stick to gauge its value and importance even without Torah and commandments. We violate Shabbat even for an elderly, ill, boils-ridden person, even if he is deaf and mute and entirely insane, and he can perform no commandment, and his life is only a burden and great suffering for his family, and he takes them away from Torah study and other commandments, and in addition to their great pain they are deteriorating, and yet there is a mitzvah for the greatest among Israel to work to save him, and to violate Shabbat on his behalf." And [yet], when they gathered once to pray for an ill person in such a condition, our master began by saying: We must know that although we believe that the resurrection of the dead will happen when G-d wills it, still, we do not ask for this to happen right now. Since the doctors think that healing this patient now would be a sort of resurrection of the dead, we shall recite only one paragraph of Tehillim, and intend that it should benefit the patient... But still, even in this position, one should never remove, G-d forbid, his faith in G-d to have mercy on him. There still is hope that He will heal him...

The Torah prohibits those who are *tamei* [ritually impure] from entering or remaining in the Beit haMikdash, the “Camp of the Shechinah”; Sefer haChinuch explained this in Mitzvot 362 and 363. Additionally, Devarim 23:11 requires those who are *tamei* to leave the “Camp of Levi”, which in Israel is the Temple Mount; this is Mitzvah 565.

Different types of *tumah* are subject to different rules:

- One who is *tamei* from exposure to death is only required to remain outside the Beit haMikdash proper; this is learned from the way Moshe took Yosef’s bones with him, despite living in the Camp of Levi (Pesachim 67a).
- One who is *tamei* due to biological discharge [*keri*, *zivah*, *dam niddah*] remains outside of the Temple Mount.

- One who is *tamei* due to *tzaraat* is excluded from the entire city of Jerusalem.

According to Sefer haChinuch (362), one who is *tamei* is not able to relate to the holiness of the site. He writes, “*Tumah* weakens the intellect, confusing it and separating it from the celestial, complete Intellect until a person is purified... Therefore, one who is contaminated by *tumah* should not be in the holy and pure place where the spirit of G-d is manifest.”

Regarding the question of entering the Temple Mount today, see Toronto Torah 5:26 at <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/809817>.

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Weekly Highlights: Jan 14 — Jan 20 / 16 Tevet — 22 Tevet

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
Jan. 14				
After hashkama	Adam Friedmann	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
Before minchah	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi’s Classroom
After minchah	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Chonyo’s Temple	BAYT	Simcha Suite
6:00 PM	Yaron Perez	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
Sun. Jan. 15				
8:45 AM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Hebrew
8:45 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Halachah: Treating Terrorists	BAYT	CME-Approved; Open to laypeople
8:00 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Why Learn Yehoshua?	Clanton Park	
Mon. Jan. 16				
8:30 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Halachah & Modernity: Week 2: Minority Rights	Shomrai Shabbos	Men
8:30 PM	Adam Friedmann	Gemara Arvei Pesachim	Clanton Park	Men
Tue. Jan. 17				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Ezra: The First Succot	Shaarei Shomayim	
8:00 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Jewish Music in Halachah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Wed. Jan. 18				
10:00 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Science and Torah 2: Copernicus and the Jews	Beth Emeth	Register at torontotorah.com/science
2:30 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Narratives of Vayikra	carollesser@rogers.com	
8:00 PM	Adam Friedmann	Why do we do...?	Shaarei Tefillah	
8:00 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Religious Tolerance in a Jewish State	KST 2640 Bayview	
8:30 PM	Yaron Perez	Parshah: הפרשה ואני	Shaarei Shomayim	Hebrew
Thu. Jan. 19				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Post-Midian	49 Michael Ct.	Women
Fri. Jan. 20				
10:30 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Introduction to Ribbit	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

Our Women’s Beit Midrash for University Students at Ulpanat Orot offers:
Monday 9:30 AM to Noon, Middot haNefesh through Chassidut, Mrs. Ellieza Perez
Tuesday 9:30 AM to Noon, Gemara Chullin / Hilchot Kashrut, Mrs. Ora Ziring
Wednesday 9:30 AM to Noon, Tanach, Mrs. Ora Ziring
Thursday 9:30 AM to Noon, Netivot Shalom on the Parshah, Mrs. Ellieza Perez