

# Toronto Torah

**Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov**

Parshat Shemot

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**This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Golda Brown and Harry Krakowsky  
for the yahrtzeit of Harry's father Joe Krakowsky, Yosef ben Moishe z"l**

## He Saw No One

**Rabbi Jonathan Ziring**

"And he looked this way and that, and he saw there was no person, and he struck the Egyptian and hid him in sand." (Shemot 2:12)

The Torah first introduces Moshe the adult as going out to see his brothers' oppression. Aside from seeing their general enslavement, he witnesses a Jew being attacked by an Egyptian taskmaster. Taking matters into his own hands, he strikes the Egyptian, killing him. However, before he does that, he looks both ways. What was he looking for?

One could assume that he was ensuring there would be no witnesses to his act of vigilante justice. Rashi, citing a midrash, suggests that he was looking into the future to ascertain that this Egyptian would have no worthy descendants for which it would be worth sparing his life. Others simply suggest that he looked to see if anyone was present, but discovered that he was the only one on the scene. (See, perhaps, Pesikta Zutrata, which suggests that all were busy working.)

However, several commentaries assume Moshe was looking to see if those who were present would intervene. Rabbi Azarya Piccio (*Binah l'itim*) argues that Moshe was shocked when he saw Jews present who remained passive, and he wondered how they could be so insensitive. Moshe received his answer the next day. When he saw the Jews fighting each other, he realized that the years of oppression had worn away their moral sensitivities, and they now lived

in the dog-eat-dog "State of Nature". Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (Shemot 2:3) implies a similar direction. He argues that G-d ordained that Moshe grow up in the palace because the indignity and oppression of slavery deadens one's ability to react to anything. To lead, Moshe needed to maintain his ability to feel and act.

Another direction seems to be presented by Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenberg (*HaK'tav V'haKabbalah*). He simply says that Moshe saw that there was "no man among men", meaning no one who cared to help a fellow Jew. Perhaps Moshe was witnessing the "bystander effect" or "responsibility diffusion", terms made famous by psychologists after the infamous Kitty Genovese case. As the story is told (though the details have since been challenged), thirty-seven or thirty-eight people saw or heard Genovese being murdered, but no one did anything. Psychologists John Darley and Bibb Latané argued that people refrained from intervening because they assumed that if so many people were there, they didn't have to take personal responsibility. By diffusing responsibility, all remained passive. The murderer himself assumed this as well. When asked how he had the audacity to kill Genovese publicly, with no fear of being stopped, he said, "I knew they wouldn't do anything; people never do." It is not that people are apathetic per se. It is that they shy away from acting when they can assuage feelings of guilt by assuming someone else will take care of it.

However, a leader cannot be this way. It

is important to note that this is the first story the Torah tells about the mature Moshe, which implies that it is critical for understanding why G-d chose him to lead. A leader must feel that he is personally responsible. To paraphrase Pirkei Avot, "even when there are other people, endeavor to be a man." The second story and third stories we learn about the mature Moshe reinforce this. Moshe alone attempted to make peace among warring Jews, and Moshe alone defended the daughters of Yitro.

However, it not just Moshe's ability to stand up for what is right that made him a leader. He inspired others to do so as well. In the aftermath of the tragedy of the Golden Calf, he rallies all those who "are for G-d" to him. The willingness of the tribe of Levi to stand up for G-d, even when it meant turning on their own relatives, made them worthy of being the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people. (See Devarim 33:9 with Rashi.)

The true challenge of leading a moral and religious life is accepting responsibility, even when we have every reason to diffuse it, or to find other reasons to explain why we need not stand up for what is right. And that is not an easy task.

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

**Ralbag's Commentary to the Torah Academic edition, ed. Rabbis Baruch Braner, Eli Freiman, Carmiel Cohen Maaliyot (in progress)**

**About the Author**

Born in 1288, Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (Ralbag) lived in communities around Provence and passed away in 1344. He studied Tanach, Talmud and philosophy, as well as mathematics and astronomy. He spent ten years writing a commentary to Tanach and his major philosophical work, *Milchamot Hashem* ("The Wars of G-d"). He also wrote other philosophical texts, based on the ideas of Aristotle and Plato.

Ralbag's commentary was among the first Hebrew books published with the early printing press, which testifies to the great interest in his writing. His books were widespread in his time, but his commentary's exclusion from the early *Mikraot Gedolot* may have caused its subsequent drop in popularity. The current generation has seen new editions, including this one produced by rabbinic researchers at *Machon*

*Maaliyot*, which is associated with Yeshivat Birkat Moshe in Maaleh Adumim.

**Ralbag's Goal**

In an introduction to his commentary, Ralbag explains that a person's purpose is to achieve perfection. To help the person on this path, the Creator has given the person an able body, and Divine guidance via the Torah; Ralbag's goal is to explain that guidance.

As part of his mission, Ralbag seeks to make the Oral Torah more accessible to the human intellect. Specifically, he tries to demonstrate the logical and textual roots in the Written Torah for the laws presented by the Sages.

**Ralbag's Style**

Ralbag's approach is founded on a simple read of the text, although he also includes his philosophical outlook where warranted, such as in the passages on the Garden of Eden. Ralbag also refers the reader to his *Milchamot Hashem*.

The format of Ralbag's commentary is unique. He divides the Torah into units, and for each unit he offers three levels of commentary:

- Explanation of the Words: A short explanation of a word or words;
- Explanation of the Unit: A broader explanation of the narrative;
- Benefits: What we can learn from the unit, on three levels: Ideas, Traits and Mitzvot.

**This Edition**

This is not the only modern edition. There are many manuscripts of Ralbag's commentary, and the editors of this version seek to sift through the multiple texts and variations and identify an accurate edition for the reader. Additionally, the editors add a layer of additional information, identifying Ralbag's sources as well as comparing Ralbag's approach with ideas found elsewhere.

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**Israel's Chief Rabbis: *Rabbi Shlomo Aharonson***

**Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

**Rabbi Shlomo haKohen Aharonson  
Elul 5623 (1863) – 20 Adar II 5695 (1935)  
First Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, 1923-1935**

**Life**

Rabbi Shlomo haKohen Aharonson was born into a rabbinic family in 1863; he was educated by his father, who led a community in the Mohilev region of White Russia (today's Belarus). He demonstrated brilliance at a young age, offering public Talmud lectures at the age of 15; despite planning to become a businessman, he was recruited to lead a community at the age of 24.

Rabbi Aharonson was known for worldliness and an activist approach; as Rabbi of Nizhyn, Ukraine, he personally halted a pogrom with a direct address to the anti-Semitic mob. At the age of 43, he became Rabbi of Kiev, where he played a leading role in formulating the defense of Mendel Beilis against a 1913 blood libel for "ritual murder". His activism continued with efforts on behalf of Jewish refugees in Kiev during World War I.

The rise of Communism drove Rabbi Aharonson to flee to Germany in 1921; he became Rabbi of a community of former Russians in Berlin. Again, he was known as a leader; *Igrot Kodesh* of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe (vol. 14 #5167) includes a letter from the Rebbe, soliciting his help.

In 1923, the residents of Tel Aviv recruited Rabbi Aharonson to serve as their first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, alongside Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Uziel. There Rabbi Aharonson established an organization named *Achdut Yisrael* ("The Unity of Israel"), and he promoted both religious life and good relations between the secular and religious community. He served in Tel Aviv until his passing in 1935.

**Legacy**

Rabbi Aharonson engaged with Zionism from a young age, joining the *Chibat Zion* movement, befriending Shalom Aleichem and corresponding with Achad Ha'Am and Max Lilienblum. He was a fixture at Zionist conferences, and he published articles in defense of the First Zionist Congress against the attacks of religious Jews. Once in Israel, he became part of the board of Mizrahi.

Long before his arrival in Tel Aviv, Rabbi Aharonson was already a correspondent of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook. Upon being invited to take the Chief Rabbinate of Tel Aviv, he wrote to Rabbi Kook, "I have long gazed from afar upon the deeds of my friend, the honoured Gaon, and his sacred work... And my spirit has longed to ascend to the land and to take part in this sacred work, in the path blazed by the honoured Gaon... And now the day for which I had hoped has come, for I have been selected as Chief Rabbi of Yafu and Tel Aviv." [For more, see <http://www.beit-harav.org.il/images/my/my113.pdf>.]

Rabbi Aharonson made a lasting mark in shaping communal Jewish life during Israel's formative decades. Integrating Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities in the young city of Tel Aviv, maintaining cordial relations while opposing the possibility of Shabbat desecration at the first Maccabiya in 1932, and guiding the nearby Rodges Kibbutz (today's Kibbutz Yavneh) regarding milking their cows on Shabbat, Rabbi Aharonson was a role model for future rabbis. For more information, see *HaChacham haMufla* by Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Alfasi.

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**Biography**  
**Rabbi Shlomo Yosef**  
**Zevin**

Adam Friedmann

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin was born near Minsk to a Chassidic family. His father, Aharon Mordechai, was a community Rabbi. His father sent him to study in the Mir Yeshiva in Poland, where he was the study partner of Rabbi Yaakov Yechiel Wienberg, who would later author Responsa *Seridei Eish*. After his time in the Mir, Shlomo Yosef travelled to Babruysk, Belarus to study with Rabbi Shemaryahu Noach Schneerson, who was then the leader of the Kopust branch of Chabad chassidut. Rabbi Schneerson ordained Shlomo Yosef, as did Rabbi Yosef Rosen of Minsk (the *Rogatchover Gaon*), and Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, author of the *Aruch Hashulchan*.

The first part of Rabbi Zevin's rabbinic career was served in Soviet-controlled areas of Eastern Europe. He held the position of Rabbi in several towns. He was active in the underground battle, led by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the Rebbe of Chabad, to maintain Jewish observance under Soviet rule. He was also active in the Jewish press, editing several journals for Orthodox Jews dealing with Torah topics and current events. His efforts led to his incarceration by the Communist authorities.

In 1935 Rabbi Zevin made *aliyah*, settling for a short time in Tel Aviv and then in Jerusalem. An ardent religious Zionist, and by this point a recognized scholar and authority, Rabbi Zevin was invited to join the advisory council of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, a position he would leave but later resume at the recommendation of Rabbi Shlomo Goren, then Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel.

During his time in Israel, Rabbi Zevin was involved in many projects to advance Torah literature. His personal bibliography includes works which demonstrate his mastery of talmudic analysis, and his lifelong devotion to Chabad Chassidut. In 1942 he founded the *Talmudic Encyclopedia* project together with Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan. The project, still ongoing, is developing a systematic and in-depth presentation of all Talmudic topics. He received the Israel Prize for Rabbinic Literature, and twice received the Rabbi Kook prize for the same in recognition of his accomplishments.

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**Torah and Translation**  
**Remove your Shoes!**

**Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, L'Torah ul'Moadim pg. 97**

Translated by Adam Friedmann

”של נעליך מעל רגליך כי המקום אשר אתה עומד שם אדמת קודש הוא.”

תעודת הנעליים - לשמור על הרגלים שלא ינגפו בקוצים וברקנים בדרך הילוכם ולא יתבלבו במים וכל מיני דברים מאוסים המצויים בדרכים. ואף במובן המוסרי, הרגליים הן המדרגות התחתונות שבאדם בפרט ובעולם בכלל. המחשבה והשכל ושאר החושים המעולים בראש ובמוח. אבל לא תמיד בני אדם עסוקים בחכמה ובמושכלות. יש והם יורדים מטה מטה, עסוקים בבל עניני עולם הזה, ובנקל אפשר שמה להיפגש עם מזיקים ואבני נגף ולהתלכלך בכל מיני כיעור ומיאוס.

ועל כך כתוב: ”רגליה ירדות מות” ועל כך אמרו: ”נחש כרוך על עקבו.” ולכן נחוץ לאדם נעליים, שיחצצו ויפסיקו בין הרגליים להמזיקים והטיט וישמרו על טהרתם ונקיותם של הרגליים. הנעלים הם לבוש הרגל, לבושים גסים, שיוכלו לשמש להגנה ושמירה מעולה. כלומר: אין האדם צריך להתדבק בגופו ממש בכל הענינים החמרניים שהוא עסוק בהם, אלא יותר שיהיה כמו הפסק לבוש בינו לבנים, וישמר שלא יזוק ושלא יתלכלך...

במה דברים אמורים? כשעוסק בחול ובחולין. שם הנזק מצוי. אבל במקדש היו הכהנים עובדים יחפים. שם אין צורך בלבושים. ובמדרש אמרו: ”של נעליך מעל רגליך”, כל מקום שהשכינה מצויה אסור בנעילת הסנדל, וכן ביהושע: ’של נעליך’, וכן הכהנים לא שמשו במקדש אלא יחפים. במקום שהשכינה היא בגילוי, והמקום הוא ”אדמת קודש”, שם אין צורך בלבושי הגנה ושמירה. ”של נעליך... כי המקום אשר אתה עומד עליו אדמת קודש הוא.”

“Remove your shoes from upon your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” (Shemot 3:5)

The purpose of shoes – is to guard the feet so they are not injured by thorns and nettles as they walk, and so that they do not become dirtied by water or other disgusting things which are found on the streets. In the spiritual sense as well, feet represent the lowest elements of both the particular and universal man. Thoughts, the intellect, and the other elevated senses – are in the head or the brain. But people do not always engage in wisdom and ideas. At times they descend and involve themselves with all the matters of this world. There it is easy to encounter damaging forces and obstacles, and to become dirtied by all manner of ugly and disgusting things.

Therefore, the verse says “Her feet go down to death” (Mishlei 5:5), and this is why the Sages said, “If there is a snake wound around one’s ankle.” (Berachot 30b) Therefore, a person requires shoes which will separate between the feet and the damaging forces and mud, and maintain the purity and cleanliness of the feet. The shoes are the clothing of the feet, thick clothing which can effect greater protection and defense. That is to say: A person need not actually enmesh his body with all the physical matters with which he deals, rather he should take care that there be something like a barrier of clothing between him and them, which will guard him so that he is not injured or dirtied...

When do we say this? When dealing with the everyday and mundane. There injury is to be found. But in the Temple the Kohanim would serve barefoot. In that place there was no need for clothing. A midrash says, “Remove your shoes from upon your feet” - Wherever one finds the Divine Presence it is forbidden to wear shoes. This was the case with Joshua: ‘Remove your shoes’ (Yehoshua 5:15), and similarly the Kohanim serve only barefoot.” (Shemot Rabbah 2) Wherever the Divine Presence is revealed, and the place is therefore “holy ground”, in that place there is no need for protective and defensive clothing. “Remove your shoes... for the place where you stand is holy ground.”

Devarim 23:16-17 is part of a long passage of laws governing Jewish life in their new land. Moshe commands, “You shall not turn over a slave to his master, if he flees to you from his master. He shall dwell in your midst, in the place he will choose in one of your gates, where it is good for you; you shall not abuse him.”

This seems to be a law protecting slaves from mistreatment, but we have already seen numerous laws protecting slaves

from harm. Also, the text emphasizes the place to which the slave flees, in which he will live. The Talmud (Gittin 45a, Ketuvot 110b) explains that this law is actually about the special character of our new land. If a non-Jewish slave flees “to you”, meaning to Israel, “He shall dwell in your midst” in Israel; you shall not compel him to leave this holy land. Sefer haChinuch lists this as the Torah’s 568<sup>th</sup> mitzvah. Further, Mitzvah 569 requires that we protect him from harm.

**Weekly Highlights: Jan 21 – Jan 27 / 23 Tevet – 29 Tevet**

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
<b>שבתה Jan. 20-21 Shabbatonim at Shaarei Tefillah and Zichron Yisroel!</b>				
<b>Fri. 8:00 PM</b>	<b>R’ Mordechai Torczyner</b>	<b>Agnon: The Banished One Chasidim vs. Mitnagdim</b>	<b>201 Franklin Ave. w/Zichron Yisroel</b>	<b>7:45 Oneg Begins 8:15 Shiur</b>
<b>After musaf</b>	<b>R’ Jonathan Ziring</b>	<b>Agnon: Symbolic Names</b>	<b>Zichron Yisroel</b>	<b>300 Atkinson Ave.</b>
<b>Before musaf</b>	<b>Yaron Perez</b>	<b>Where there is no Mentsch</b>	<b>Shaarei Tefillah</b>	<b>Derashah</b>
<b>After minchah</b>	<b>Adam Friedmann</b>	<b>Pharaoh &amp; the Midwives</b>	<b>Shaarei Tefillah</b>	<b>Seudah shlishit</b>
<b>After hashkamah</b>	Adam Friedmann	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
<b>Before minchah</b>	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	<b>Rabbi’s Classroom</b>
<b>After minchah</b>	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Chonyo’s Temple	BAYT	<b>Simcha Suite</b>
<b>6:30 PM</b>	Yaron Perez	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
<b>Sun. Jan. 22</b>				
<b>8:45 AM</b>	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	<b>Hebrew</b>
<b>8:45 AM</b>	R’ Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	<b>Third floor</b>
<b>9:15 AM</b>	R’ Shalom Krell	Book of Shemuel II	Associated North	<b>Hebrew; Room 206</b>
<b>Mon. Jan. 23</b>				
<b>8:30 PM</b>	<b>R’ Mordechai Torczyner</b>	<b>Halachah &amp; Modernity 3: Patient Autonomy</b>	<b>Shomrai Shabbos</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>8:30 PM</b>	Adam Friedmann	Gemara Arvei Pesachim	Clanton Park	<b>Men</b>
<b>Tue. Jan. 24</b>				
<b>1:30 PM</b>	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Ezra: Building & Singing	Shaarei Shomayim	
<b>Wed. Jan. 25</b>				
<b>10:00 AM</b>	<b>R’ Mordechai Torczyner</b>	<b>Science and Torah 3: 5777 or 13 Billion?</b>	<b>Beth Emeth</b>	<b>Register at <a href="http://torontotorah.com/science">torontotorah.com/science</a></b>
<b>2:30 PM</b>	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Narratives of Vayikra	carolleser@rogers.com	
<b>8:00 PM</b>	Adam Friedmann	Why do we do...?	Shaarei Tefillah	
<b>8:00 PM</b>	<b>R’ Jonathan Ziring</b>	<b>New Directions of Israeli Political Thought</b>	<b>KST 2640 Bayview</b>	
<b>8:30 PM</b>	Yaron Perez	<b>Parshah: הפרשה ואני</b>	Shaarei Shomayim	<b>Hebrew</b>
<b>Thu. Jan. 26</b>				
<b>1:30 PM</b>	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Avimelech Strikes	101 Tangreen	<b>Women</b>
<b>Fri. Jan. 27</b>				
<b>10:30 AM</b>	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Introduction to Ribbit	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<b>Advanced</b>

**Our Women’s Beit Midrash for University Students at Ulpanat Orot offers:**  
**Monday 9:30 AM to Noon, Middot haNefesh through Chassidut, Mrs. Elliezra 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. Elliezra Perez**