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Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

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**This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Rochel and Jeffrey Silver
in honour of the recent birthdays of Jeffrey's parents, Leona and Label Silver ז"ל**

Gratitude to Egypt?

Yaron Perez

"Tell Aharon: Take your staff, and extend your arm upon the waters of Egypt, upon their rivers, upon their canals, etc." (Shemot 7:19) Rashi explains, citing a midrash, "Because the river protected Moshe, it was not struck by his hand in the plagues of Blood and Frogs; it was struck by Aharon's hand." This is perplexing; of what value is gratitude toward an inanimate object?

Devarim 23:20 adds to our confusion, commanding, "You shall not reject the Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land." The Talmud (Bava Kama 92b) explains, "Do not cast a stone into the cistern from which you drank." And explaining this mitzvah, Rambam writes (Moreh Nevuchim 3:42), "So regarding anyone you needed once, and anyone from whom you benefited, who now encounters trouble. Even though he then harmed you, you must remember that which came first... See that we learn several good traits from these mitzvot."

It appears that Rambam seeks to see the good in the Egyptian, despite all of their evils. But how can one be grateful to Egypt, and neither reject nor hate them, after all the ways they harmed us? Should we ignore the fact that they threw our sons into the river, because they gave us a home during a famine? Further, it appears that all of their supposed kindness to the Jewish people in the days of Yosef was only in order to reap the financial benefits of his presence and leadership. When they no longer needed the Children of Israel, and Yosef had passed away,

they began to oppress and enslave us. So why should we display gratitude?

We may suggest an answer. The Torah states that "a new king arose in Egypt, who did not know Yosef." (Shemot 1:8) On this, Rashi explains that the king knew all about Yosef, but "he acted as though he did not know Yosef." Building on the same idea, a midrash (Midrash HaGadol, Parshat Shemot) states, "He knew, but he did not look at this; he hid [Yosef's] benevolence, and in the end he hid G-d's benevolence." Expanding upon this midrash, Rabbi Shemuel Ashkenazi wrote in his 16th century commentary *Yefeh Toar*, "All who deny the benevolence of others, will in the end deny the benevolence of G-d." Pharaoh began by denying the benevolence of Yosef, and he issued decrees against his descendants; in our parshah, we see that Pharaoh comes to deny Divine authority and benevolence as well.

In principle, recognizing the aid of others and responding with gratitude is a fundamental aspect of being a moral person, and it catalyzes wondrous changes in the soul of both the speaker and the original benefactor. Nonetheless, human beings do find it difficult to express gratitude from the depths of their hearts, and to respond to those around them in kind. Indeed, Sefer haChinuch (Mitzvah 33) sees the mitzvah of honouring one's parents as a training ground meant to help us learn gratitude, precisely because it is so commonly ignored: "Among the roots of this mitzvah is the fact that one should recognize the benefit done for him by

others, and return the favour, and not be disgusting, distant and ungrateful. This is a wicked trait, entirely revolting, before G-d and Man." Pharaoh exhibits an extreme example of the challenge of developing a sense of gratitude, and this flaw led to his demise. We must learn to be different.

Therefore, when we express gratitude to Egypt, benefiting the undeserving Egyptians is not the ultimate goal; our gratitude to the inanimate river, too, is not for the sake of the insensate river. The central purpose is to train our own character. As long as our character, and particularly our gratitude, grows and strengthens, we will develop a more grateful response to those around us, to our parents, and ultimately to G-d. As Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler wrote (Michtav mei'Eliyahu 3), "One must make every effort to acquire this trait fully, for through it he will learn to recognize the great kindness of G-d with all Creation, and so he will draw close to G-d... For gratitude to Man and gratitude to G-d share a common root. If the trait of gratitude to others is flawed, then he will not recognize the generosity of G-d."

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Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?
Ed. Rabbi Dr. J. J. Schacter Aronson (1997)

The Question

Almost two millennia ago, the great sage Rabbi Yishmael was asked by his nephew, "I have studied the entire Torah; may I learn Greek wisdom?" Rabbi Yishmael replied that one ought to study Torah day and night, and therefore he could only study Greek wisdom at a time that was neither. (Menachot 99b) On the other hand, talmudic sages debated philosophy with non-Jewish philosophers. (Avodah Zarah 17b, for example)

Later in Jewish history, Rambam displayed deep knowledge of Greek and Arab philosophy. However, he also wrote, "Regarding any idea which could cause a person to uproot one of the principles of Torah, we are prohibited from bringing it into our hearts or turning our attention to it." (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 2:3)

In our own day, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, himself a holder of a PhD in English literature, told the following story: "A would-be philosopher who had attended Rav [Yosef Dov] Soloveitchik's *shiur* once turned to him for counsel as

to whether he should pursue graduate studies in the field – and in a denominational university, at that. The Rav responded that airplanes are known to crash and yet people fly. The questioner subsequently confided that several years later he woke up one morning with an urge to call the Rav to tell him that the plane had just crashed, as indeed it thunderously had." (*Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures*, pg. 284)

A Jewish community which pledges fealty to Torah and sends its youth to university must ask the question: Are we living a single, unified Jewish life? Are we in danger of crashing?

The Answer

Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures seeks to answer this question, by demonstrating the complexity of our tradition's reaction to non-Jewish culture. As Rabbi Dr. J. J. Schacter writes in his introduction, "[T]he attitude of Jews throughout history to Gentile learning and culture is not monolithic and unidimensional and cannot be reduced to any simplistic, facile generalization." He cites a letter from Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, *av beit din* of Telz before World War II, regarding general studies: "[I]t is impossible to establish firm rulings

with regard to them as [one can do] in the halakic portions, that is, to issue a ruling applicable to all. They depend very much upon the temperament of the individual person and upon his unique mode [of life], and also depend upon the conditions of time, place, circumstance and environment."

To demonstrate this point, *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures* presents three essays written by ordained rabbis with extensive credentials in both Torah and the academic study of Jewish history and philosophy. Gerald Blidstein speaks to the talmudic attitude to non-Jewish knowledge and culture; David Berger discusses the period from the close of the Gaonic Era up to the Enlightenment; and Shnayer Z. Leiman adds the developments of the past few centuries. Finally, the book concludes with an essay by Rabbi Lichtenstein, exploring the threats and benefits of engagement with general culture. All of the articles are multi-faceted, thoroughly sourced, and clearly argued.

To this reviewer, these essays are essential for the university-educated, Torah-studying Jew who wishes to thoughtfully navigate Jewish life today.

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Israel's Chief Rabbis: Rabbi David Stav

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Rabbi David Stav
b. 1960
Chief Rabbi of Shoham

Biography

Born in Jerusalem in 1960, Rabbi David Stav studied at Yeshivot Netiv Meir and Mercaz HaRav, where he learned with Rabbi Avraham Shapira, whom he considers his primary teacher. He served in the Tank Unit in the IDF. Later he was ordained as a Dayan (religious judge).

Rabbi Stav has been a Community Rabbi in Israel (in Bnei Darom), as well as in Antwerp, Belgium. He taught in Yeshivat Or Etzion, and later co-founded and served as co-Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Orot Shaul. He has also served as the Rabbi of Maaleh, the religious film school. He ran an unsuccessful campaign for Chief Rabbi of Israel in 2013. He currently serves, in addition to his role in Shoham, as Chairman of Tzohar, a rabbinical group in Israel, and as co-chancellor of Ohr Torah Stone.

Activism

Rabbi Stav has been devoted to making the Israeli rabbinate more accessible to the average Israeli. Many have complained of the stringency and insensitivity of the Israeli rabbinate. As marriage and conversion are under the auspices of the rabbinate, it is hard for any Jew, religious or secular to avoid the rabbinate. Thus, Tzohar was founded to try to make religiosity more appealing by providing rabbinical services to all, by rabbis devoted to being more sensitive and inclusive. It was to further these goals that Rabbi Stav ran his

unsuccessful campaign for Chief Rabbi of Israel. Tzohar was specifically founded as a response to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin by a religious Jew, as that increased animosity towards the religious community.

He has pushed for more leniency in the areas of conversion and kashrut. He encourages establishing kashrut standards without stringencies he considers unnecessary, and he established an alternative kashrut certification when the Israeli rabbinate refused to certify institutions using the *heter mechira* during *Shemitah*. He has lobbied for the appointment of rabbinical judges who will take a harder line against men who refuse to grant their wives *gittin* (bills of divorce). In 2015, he set up a new court for conversion, along with Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch. He has pushed for sensitivity towards the LGBT community, while reiterating that the sins involved are serious biblical obligations. He is also known to have progressive views on women's issues. Many of his positions have generated controversy, as was evidenced in the opposition by many to his run for Chief Rabbi.

Interest in the World

Rabbi Stav's best-known book focuses on the Laws of Vacation, where he reveals an appreciation for culture, music, art, and relaxation. He combines philosophical insights on the value of these things, with halachic discussions to ensure that people engage only in permitted activities. He encourages people to be well-read and engaged in politics and other important non-Torah matters.

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Biography
Rabbi David Nieto
 Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Rabbi David Nieto, arguably one of the most intriguing rabbinic figures of his time, was born in Venice in 1654. His father, Pinchas Nieto, an honored businessman, was a scion to a family of Spanish crypto-Jews. After serving for some time as the Rabbi of Livorno, Italy – where he wrote a book named “Paschologia”, dealing with the yearly calendar – he was summoned in 1702 to serve as Rabbi for the Portuguese community in London.

Two years after coming to London, Rabbi Nieto published another book – this time dealing with questions of Divine providence and nature. Nature, he claimed, was but a thin veil for Divine actions. The work became highly contested, as Rabbi Nieto was accused by others of being a secret follower of Baruch Spinoza, identifying Nature with G-d. In fact, the opposite was the truth – Spinoza argued that there is no G-d but only Nature, while Rabbi Nieto taught that there is no Nature but only G-d.

As the controversy heated up, the sides agreed to accept the judgment of then-Hamburg Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi (Chacham Tzvi), a prominent Jewish authority of the time. After hearing the arguments, Rabbi Ashkenazi ruled in favor of Rabbi Nieto, acquitting him of any blame – and furthermore praising his teachings. The answer is recorded as the 18th responsum in Rabbi Ashkenazi’s famous Shu”t Chacham Tzvi. About a decade later Rabbi Nieto paid this back and supported Rabbi Ashkenazi, who had to flee his post in Amsterdam after a fierce dispute which broke out between him and local supporters of the false Messiah Shabbtai Tzvi. Rabbi Nieto hosted him in London, offering him a public position.

Rabbi Nieto was deeply involved in helping forced converts from Portugal to return to their Jewish roots. As many of them had great doubts regarding their ancestors’ faith, Rabbi Nieto found it necessary to write a book which would address their questions, mainly regarding the authority of our Sages. The book, nicknamed “the second Kuzari” after Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi’s famous book, became a basic text for teaching the Jewish faith, and remains so today.

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Torah and Translation
The Place of General Studies
 Rabbi David Nieto, Kuzari Sheni IV
 Translated by Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

אמר הכוזרי: שמעה אזני ותבן לה שיש בינינו שתי כתות מנגדות זו לזו על דבר החכמות שקורין “חצוניות”. זאת אומרת שאברהם אבינו עליו השלום היה בקי בהן בכלליהן ובפרטיהן ובכל חילוקיהן ושהחל ליסדן... וזאת אומרת שלא באלה חלק יעקב כי הבל המה, מחשבות אדם ותחבולותיו. ולפי דעתי זאת היא הסברא הנבחרת, כי הנני רואה... אמר רבי עקיבא אף הקורא בספרים החצונים אין לו חלק לעולם הבא... והרב רבי עובדיה מברטניורה פירש “ספרים חיצונים” כגון ספרי ארסטו היוני וחביריו... ובסוף מסכת סוטה אמרו “ארור אדם שילמד את בנו חכמת יונית...” והרב הגדול הרשב”א ז”ל עם שלשים ושמנה חכמים גזרו חרם בברצילונא על הלומד ומלמד ספרי היונים אשר חיברו בחכמת הטבע וחכמת האלוקות, בין בלשונם בין שהועתקו ללשון אחר, ככתוב בשו”ת שלו. הרי לך בגזרת עירין ובמאמר קדישין ראשונים ואחרונים שאסור ללמוד וללמד חכמה יונית.

אמר החבר: אני אשיבך מלין על ראשון ראשון ועל אחרון אחרון. דע אדני המלך, שחלילה חלילה לחכמי ישראל לברוח ולהבריא את עם ישראל מהחכמות הצריכות לשוב העולם, שהם ז”ל לא אסרו אלא ספרים המביאים לידי מינות או זנות, או בטלה המביאה לידי שעמום. אדרבא החכמות מצור ישראל ונקרו וממי יהודה יצאו כאשר אוכיח בע”ה... ועל הקורא בספרים החיצונים שפירש הרב ברטנורא ז”ל שהם ספרי ארסטו וחביריו בקשתי לו חבר ולא מצאתי, שהרי רש”י ז”ל לא פירש אלא ספרי מינים. ועל מה שאמרו “ארור אדם שילמד את בנו חכמה יונית” היינו שהיו מדברים ברמיזות כמו שפירשו רש”י... ועל החרם שהטילו הרשב”א והחכמים הבאים על החתום, יש לך לדעת שגזרו שלא ללמד וללמוד לפחות מן כ”ה שנה, ושאלות וקללות החרם לא ימשכו אלא חמשים שנה ובסופם יהיו שביתין ושביתין לא שרירין ולא קיימין... וזוהי גם כן סברת הרמב”ם ז”ל שכתב בפי’ המשנה דאסור לקרות בשבת אפילו בדברי חכמות, הא בחול מותר, והביאו מוהר”א קארו בבית יוסף ובשלחן ערוך, הנה הנם גדולי וגאוני עולם שלא הבינו “ספרים החצונים” כר”ע מברטניורה...

to anyone younger than twenty-five. Also, the curses of the ban will only stand for fifty years, and then will be null and void, and not in force... Rambam also holds [that learning philosophy was not banned], for he wrote in his commentary on the Mishnah that on Shabbat one is not allowed to read philosophy – so on weekdays it is allowed. This was brought by Rabbi Karo in his Beit Yosef and Shulchan Aruch. Hence, the greatest and most wise of the [Jewish] world did not explain “external books” in the same way as Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura.

The Kuzari [king] said: My ear has heard and understood that we have among us two groups, disputing regarding the wisdoms which are called ‘external’. One says that Avraham Avinu was expert in their rules and details and all their divisions, and he was the one to establish them... And the other group says that these wisdoms are not of Yaakov’s portion, for they are futile, the thoughts of man. And I think the latter is correct, for I see... Rabbi Akiva saying, “He who reads external books has no share in the world to come”... And Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura explained “external books” as books by Aristotle the Greek and his companions... And in the end of tractate Sotah they said, “Cursed be the man who will teach his son Greek wisdom.” And the great Rabbi the Rashba z”l, together with thirty-eight wise men, issued a ban in Barcelona on anyone learning or teaching the books written by the Greeks in physics or metaphysics, in their original language or in translation, as recorded in his responsa. So, in the decree of the holy ones [lit. angels] and statement of early and recent holy men, it is forbidden to learn and teach Greek wisdom.

The Sage said: I will answer your questions according to their order. Know, my king, that G-d forbid that the sages of Israel would distance their nation from the wisdoms needed to settle the world. For they did not ban but books which lead to heresy or lewdness, or idleness which leads to boredom. Rather, the wisdoms were chiseled from the Rock of Israel and from the waters of Judah sprang forth, as I will prove, G-d willing... And regarding [the ban on] reading “external books”, which was explained by the Bartenura as applying to Aristotle’s books and his companions – I searched for a similar commentary and could not find one, for Rashi had explained it as books of heresy alone. And regarding, “Cursed be the man who will teach his son Greek wisdom,” this means talking in riddles, as explained by Rashi... And regarding the ban put by Rashba and the other sages who signed on, you should know they only forbade teaching

The 613 Mitzvot: #570—Promiscuity

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The Torah presents multiple prohibitions against classes of sexual misconduct. Among them, Vayikra 19:29 prohibits *zenut*, which is a broad term for sexual immorality, and Devarim 23:18 prohibits men and women from acting as a *kadesh* or *kedeishah*, terms associated with promiscuity. The difference between these prohibitions is unclear.

Per Rambam (Lo Taaseh 355), these two verses present a single prohibition against intercourse without a *ketubah* and halachic marriage. This leads Sefer haChinuch to codify a single, joint prohibition as the Torah's 570th mitzvah.

According to Ramban, these two verses describe separate prohibitions. Vayikra 19:29 prohibits a sexual relationship

where marriage is halachically impossible, as in a case of incest or adultery (Hasagot to Lo Taaseh 355); Devarim 23:18 prohibits making one's self available for promiscuous relations (Commentary to Devarim 23:18).

One ramification of this debate is the Torah's concept of a *pilegish* (concubine), which involves a relationship without the benefit of *ketubah*. According to Rambam, this would violate Vayikra 19:29 and Devarim 23:18, and it is permitted only for a king. According to Ramban, a faithful *pilegish* relationship would violate neither verse, and would actually be permitted for any Jew. For more, see Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ishut 1:4 and Hilchot Melachim 4:4, and She'eilat Yaavetz 2:15.

Weekly Highlights: Jan. 28 — Feb. 3 / 1 Shevat — 7 Shevat

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
Jan. 27-28	Rosh Chodesh			
After hashkamah	Adam Friedmann	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
Before minchah	R' Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Stones of the Temple Mount	BAYT	Simcha Suite
6:45 PM	Yaron Perez	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	Last week!
Sun. Jan. 29				
8:45 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Hebrew
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	Third floor
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Book of Shemuel II	Associated North	Hebrew; Room 206
10:00 AM to 11:20 AM	Ms. Miriam Bessin R' Jonathan Ziring	The Plagues of Bo The Nile is Mine	Shaarei Tefillah 3600 Bathurst	Midreshet Yom Rishon for Women
Mon. Jan. 30				
8:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Halachah & Modernity 4: Karaites & Ethiopian Jews	Shomrai Shabbos	Men
8:30 PM	Adam Friedmann	Gemara Arvei Pesachim	Clanton Park	Men
Tue. Jan. 31				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Judaism and LGBT	Adath Israel	Women; there is a fee info@adathisrael.com
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Ezra: Samaritan Overtures	Shaarei Shomayim	
Wed. Feb. 1				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Science and Torah 4: The Talmud's Pharmacy	Beth Emeth	Register at torontotorah.com/science
2:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Narratives of Vayikra	carolleser@rogers.com	
8:00 PM	Adam Friedmann	Is Judaism Inherently Zionist?	KST 2640 Bayview	
8:30 PM	Yaron Perez	Parshah: הפרשה ואני	Shaarei Shomayim	Hebrew
Thu. Feb. 2				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Yotam's Rebuke	101 Tangreen	Women
Fri. Feb. 3				
10:30 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	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, Hilchot Bein Adam laChaveiro, Mrs. Ora Ziring

Thursday 9:30 AM to Noon, Netivot Shalom on the Parshah, Mrs. Ellieza Perez