

Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Toldot

29 Cheshvan, 5778/November 18, 2017

Vol. 9 Num. 11

**This issue of Toronto Torah is sponsored by Esther and Craig Guttmann and Family
in honour of the yahrtzeit of Shimon Berglas שמעון אריה בן חיים ז"ל**

I Don't Know

Yaron Perez

"And Yitzchak sent Yaakov, and he went to Padan Aram, to Lavan son of Betuel the Aramean, brother of Rivkah, [who was the] **mother of Yaakov and Esav.**" (Bereishit 28:5) Of course, any reader of the preceding chapter knows that Rivkah was the mother of Yaakov and Esav; troubled by this redundant text, Rashi commented, "I don't know what this teaches us." But what does Rashi mean to say? And given the number of later commentators who offered justifications for the text (see Ramban, Radak and Bechor Shor *ibid.*), we must ask: why didn't Rashi perceive the layers of meaning which later generations would see here?

Rabbi Shabtai Bass, in his Sifte Chachamim commentary on Rashi, wrote, "Some ask: What does Rashi mean to inform us, by saying that he doesn't know? If he doesn't know, let him be silent! But one could suggest that Rashi knew that there were various ways to justify the text, but he did not know which approach could accurately reflect the simple meaning of the text."

Rabbi Yehudah Leon Ashkenazi (also known by the sobriquet "Manitou") sought to clarify Rashi's intent based on a historiosophical approach. In his view, Rashi knew the message of the text, but he found it contradicted the reality of his own life. Therefore, Rashi did not know what to write here.

The Repentance of Esav

Parshat Chayei Sarah (Bereishit 25:9) recorded Abraham's burial, saying, "And his sons Yitzchak and Yishmael

buried him." Rashi, citing the Talmud (Bava Batra 16b), noted that the text put Yitzchak before his older brother; he wrote, "We see here that Yishmael repented, and put Yitzchak first. This is the 'good old age' stated regarding Avraham (Bereishit 25:8)."

In the phrase "mother of Yaakov and Esav," too, Yaakov precedes Esav. It would appear that this teaches us that Esav had repented, understanding that the blessing truly belonged to Yaakov. This would also explain why Esav now took his parents' wishes into consideration in marrying the daughter of Yishmael, as opposed to the daughters of Canaan. And on this Rashi commented, "What this text wishes to teach us cannot be! Therefore, I don't know what it could mean."

But why couldn't Rashi believe that Esav had repented, in the fashion of his uncle Yishmael?

Yaakov/Esav vs. Yitzchak/Yishmael

According to Rashi on the verse "The son of this maid will not inherit with my son, Yitzchak, (Bereishit 21:10)", the struggle between Yishmael and Yitzchak is regarding inheriting the land. In a quarrel regarding inheritance, a battle for physical territory, Yishmael could repent and recognize Yitzchak's right to Eretz Yisrael. There are other lands in which to settle, and the Ishmaelite heritage would endure. This repentance will be realized on the day when Yishmael's descendants recognize the Land of Israel as the property of the Children of Israel – and based on the talmudic passage cited by Rashi above, this will happen in the place of

Avraham's burial, in Chevron. When Yishmael puts Yitzchak before him in Chevron, this will be a sign of his repentance.

On the other hand, Rabbi Ashkenazi contended that the struggle between Yaakov and Esav is regarding the birthright and the blessing, and the very title of "Israel". This is a spiritual battle to determine which ideology will emerge dominant. Esav seems himself as the "true Jew", and rejects the chosenness of Yaakov. With the exodus from Egypt, the struggle between Esav and Yaakov is resolved via the Heavenly court; G-d declares, "My son, My firstborn, is Israel." (Shemot 4:22) Rashi comments there, "Here G-d put His stamp on the sale of the birthright which Yaakov had taken from Esav." But for Esav to personally acknowledge Yaakov and his descendants as "Israel" would mean the end of his existence; perhaps he would simply become part of the nation of Israel.

This brings Rabbi Ashkenazi to his explanation of Rashi's "I don't know." Rashi lived in an oppressive Christian world, at the start of the Crusades, when the Christian community saw itself as the "Chosen People" and the Jews suffered under their power. Therefore, Rashi wrote in a veiled way, "I don't know what this teaches **us!**" Meaning, based on what he saw in his own day, Rashi could not understand how the message of Torah relates to our future.

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הורשתם את הארץ וישבתם בה (במדבר לו) Marking the State of Israel's 70th Year!

Israeli Landmarks: Megiddo

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

The Tel Megiddo site was once an ancient city located in the Lower Galil. In biblical times, those who occupied Megiddo held incredible power over the Via Maris, the main route between Egypt and Mesopotamia, which the Egyptians called the Way of the Sea.

In two places (Melachim II 23:29-30 and Divrei HaYamim II 35:20-25), Tanach tells us of King Yoshiyahu's death at Megiddo. Pharaoh Necho wanted to take his army to Carchemish to join his allies, the Assyrians. This, however, required him to pass through the territory of the Kingdom of Yehudah. King Yoshiyahu refused, instead engaging the Egyptians in battle, and falling at Megiddo. This story is also recorded in Josephus and the Greek 1 Esdras.

The Talmud (Ta'anit 22b) records that Yoshiyahu had made a religious error in choosing to fight. The Torah (Vayikra 26:6) states that if the Jews follow G-d, He will ensure that "a sword shall not go through [their] land." Yoshiyahu

assumed this meant that foreign armies would not pass through, even without intent for war with the Jews, when in truth it meant that the Jews would not have to engage in war. Thus, as Yoshiyahu had instituted religious reforms for G-d, he thought he would be protected. However, he erred and was punished for not consulting with Yirmiyahu.

Megiddo is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an archaeological attraction that is open year-round. There is a museum which uses models to recreate the original structures that stood at the site, and presents informative films.

Archaeological excavation has uncovered about 26 layers of settlements dating back to the Chalcolithic period, and the first four layers have been identified. The hilltop was a Canaanite city, an Egyptian fortress, a chariot city during Biblical times and a prominent Assyrian and Persian city. At its prime, Megiddo was

ruled by King Shlomo in the 10th century BCE. Visitors can see the remains of Shlomo's gate, and what is believed to have been his stables. The Ivory Palace is another major structure in Megiddo; it was here that Canaanite treasure was found, including valuable ivory and jewelry. In the Middle Bronze Age the Canaanites fortified the hilltop, and a gate remains. From the 3rd millennium BCE you can see an altar ten meters in diameter, with a staircase leading up towards it. An Iron Age water system is also evident from the 9th Century BCE, when the city was ruled by Achav. It is possible to walk through the tunnel of the water system, which would have supplied residents of Megiddo with water from the nearby spring. (Adapted from <https://www.touristisrael.com/megiddo/9448/>)

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The Zionist Idea: Rabbi Kook on Violence

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Since the dawn of the modern Zionist movement, one of the most complex and sensitive issues has been the question of using physical force – be it against a foreign colonial power such as the British Empire, or local enemies such as hostile Arabs in and around Israel.

On the one hand, the return to Zion was seen by many as a sign of the final redemption, the beginning of a world in which, "Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war." (Yeshayahu 2:4) On the other hand, as the Zionist project was being realized, it became clear that a military clash with the Jewish settlement's neighbours was unavoidable. The passing years proved that this bloody struggle was not only necessary, but even worse – seemingly unending. The old blessing/curse given by Yitzchak to Esav in our parshah, "By your sword you shall live", seemed to come back and haunt Yaakov's children.

One of the greatest thinkers of the Religious Zionist community, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook – the first Chief Rabbi of the Mandate – was deeply troubled by these developments. He strongly believed that the absence of Israel from the international political stage for so many generations, although forced on us, had also been driven by an internal desire, a rejection of the violence needed to rule a country in the ancient world. Thus, "We were waiting until the fortunate time would arrive when it would be possible to run a kingdom without wickedness and barbarism... and indeed the time has arrived..." (Orot, p. 14)

However, reality did not lend itself easily to these elevated aspirations, as a certain amount of military force was needed to protect the Jews who had returned to their home. Under these circumstances, Rabbi Kook used our parshah's description of Yaakov's birth to demonstrate the correct attitude towards a Jewish army. (Midbar Shur 29; see also Rabbi Tzvi Tau's Emunat Iteinu IV pp. 55-92)

The heel represents what is most fundamental to the person, his foundational perspective. What is held in one's hand, in contrast, is external to the person and can be held or thrown away at will. Thus, Rabbi Kook explained that the Torah teaches that Esav's fundamental traits, inseparable from his personality, are strange and foreign to Yaakov. Sheer brutality and physical force are basic facts of life for Esav, but alien to Yaakov. Nonetheless, Yaakov can hold these abilities of Esav "in his hand", i.e. as external properties. When the goal for which they were needed is achieved, Yaakov must be able to throw away the sword, washing his hands clean.

Living in an imperfect world, we must know how to wear Esav's clothes when needed, but we should never forget our true nature, as the sons of the "innocent tent dweller."

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Biography

Don Isaac Abarbanel

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Don Isaac Abarbanel was born in 1437 in Lisbon, Portugal. The Abarbanel family had lived on the Iberian Peninsula since the destruction of the Second Temple. There, they became an influential family in the Jewish community and amongst the Portuguese monarchy. Don Isaac Abarbanel's father, Yehudah, was a treasurer to King Alfonso V, a position that Don Isaac Abarbanel himself filled after his father's passing. He also became a close council to King Alfonso V; he wrote that the King relied upon his judgment.

Don Isaac Abarbanel's good fortune changed with the passing of King Alfonso V and the ascension of his son, John II, to the throne. Don Isaac Abarbanel was accused of taking part in a plot to usurp the new King's throne and had to flee Portugal for his life. He went to Toledo, Spain where he remained until 1492, the year of the Expulsion of Jews from Spain by order of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. He went to great lengths in his diplomatic and financial attempts to prevent the Expulsion. However, he was ultimately unsuccessful. The rest of Don Isaac Abarbanel's life is defined by exile, moving from location to location. Eventually, his travels led him around the coastline of Italy, ending in Venice, where he passed away in 1508.

After fleeing from Portugal, Don Isaac Abarbanel began writing his commentaries to Tanach. His style of writing is unique in a number of ways. Unlike many other Rishonim, "the Abarbanel", as he is generally known, did not write in a terse manner, preferring instead to explain his ideas at length. Many of his works are organized in a very specific, clear manner: At the beginning of many of his works, the Abarbanel lists questions and difficulties that he has with the text at hand. These questions guide his commentary throughout. Whenever he has answered a question he makes note of this, allowing the reader to maintain context and clarity.

The Abarbanel sought a balance between clarifying the literal intent of the source material and tapping into the deeper lessons contained within. In a number of places, most notably his comments on the Passover Haggadah, one can find his life experiences woven into his comments.

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Torah and Translation

Religion and Politics Don't Mix

Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary to Zecharyah 3

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

והנה קראה "ימינו" את זרע יהושע, רוצה לומר מתתיהו כהן גדול ובניו בני חשמונאי, שהם היו מזרעו של יהושע הכהן הגדול, כי למעלתם וגבורתם המשילם כאילו היו יד ימינו של הכהן הקדוש ההוא. והשטן היה אנטיכוכוס רשע וכל חיל מוקדון שהיו עומדים עליו לשטנו מדרך ד' ולהביאו לעבוד עבודה זרה ולחלל תורת ד', כמו שאמר יוסף בן גוריון...

עוד זכר הנביא שראה את יהושע לבוש בגדים צואים. ולא אמר זה על יהושע עצמו כי נפשו הטהורה לא נגעה בדבר טומאה, אבל ראה זרע יהושע והם הבנים אשר יצאו ונמשכו אחר כך מבני חשמונאי, שהחזיקו במלכות ונקראו "מלכי יהודה" והיו מלכים וכהנים גדולים יחד. והנה המלכות והשררות היו לפני ד' יתברך בגדים צואים להם ובערכם, כי הבגדים הנקיים להם הם בגדי הכהונה כפי משפחתם. אמנם בגדי השררות והמלכות ובגדי נקם ושפיכות דמים שלקחו להם היו בלי ספק בערכם "בגדים צואים", וכאילו אמר שמצד אחד היו לבושים בגדים צואים במה שנעשו מלכים ולא היו מזרע דוד, ולכן היו בגדי מלכותם צואים ויוציאם מדרך השורה והאמת, ומצד אחד היו עומדים לפני המלאך והוא רמז אל עבודת בית המקדש והכנסם לפני לפני.

ולכן היה מצוה את העומדים לפני לאמר הסירו הבגדים הצואים מעלי, רוצה לומר שבני יהודה לא יקבלו עליהם מלכות הכהנים ויסירו מהם הבגדים הצואים שהוא רמז אל המלכות, כי כהנים הם ולא מלכים, וכאילו אמר ד' אל יהושע ואל זרעו "אל תאמר בלבבך שהקלותיך ועברתיך במה שצויתי להסיר מעליך המלכות, אין הדבר כן, אבל עשיתי עמך חסד גדול שהעברתי מעליך עונך, כי המלכות אינו בערכך כי אם משא כבד ועון פלילי, וישאר לך להלביש אותך מחלצות והם בגדי כהונה הראויים לתת לך."

They are kohanim, not kings. It was as though G-d had told Yehoshua and his descendants, "Do not think that I have lessened you and deposed you by telling you to divest yourselves of monarchy. It is not so; I have performed great kindness with you in removing your sins from you, for monarchy is not worthy of your level. It is a great burden and a criminal sin. What remains for you is to clothe yourselves in [fresh] clothing, the garments of priesthood which suit you."

[This is commentary to Zecharyah 3:1-4: And he showed me Yehoshua, the High Priest, standing before a malach of G-d, and the Satan stood on his right to obstruct him. And G-d said to the Satan, "G-d rebukes you, Satan, and G-d rebukes you, the One who has chosen Jerusalem! Is this not a brand rescued from the flames?" And Yehoshua was clothed in filthy clothing, and standing before the malach. And [G-d] declared to those standing before Him, "Remove the filthy clothing from him!" And He told him, "Behold, I have removed your sin from you, and clothed you in [fresh] clothing.]

He called Yehoshua's descendants, meaning Matityahu the High Priest and his sons, the Hasmoneans, the descendants of Yehoshua the High Priest, "his right". In their stature and might, he compared them to the right hand of that holy priest. And the Satan represented wicked Antiochus and the Macedonian forces who stood against [Yehoshua], to obstruct him from the path of G-d and to bring him to worship idolatry and to desecrate the Torah of G-d, as recorded by Josephus...

The prophet also said that he saw Yehoshua clothed in filthy clothing. He did not say this of Yehoshua himself, whose spirit was pure and who never touched anything impure. But he saw Yehoshua's descendants, the children who came from the descendants of the Hasmoneans, who took the throne and were called 'Kings of Judea' and served as kings and high priests simultaneously. To G-d, monarchy and authority were filthy clothes for them and their level; clean clothing, for them, would be the clothing of the kohanim, their family. In truth, clothing of authority and monarchy and vengeance and bloodshed which they had taken would be "filthy clothing" on their level... and in part they stood before the malach, meaning they served in the Beit haMikdash and entered its innermost areas.

Therefore, He instructed those who stood before Him to remove Yehoshua's filthy clothing, meaning that the descendants of Yehudah should not accept the reign of the kohanim, and should remove the filthy clothes of monarchy from them.

(continued from last week)

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (Halakhic Man, pg. 64) contended that one must learn about G-d's universe in order to emulate G-d. He wrote, "We can know G-d's ways only through studying the cosmos, for it is in the cosmos that there stand revealed before us the glorious and resplendent attributes of action... In order to implement the ethical ideal we must fix upon the whole of being and cognize it." Rabbi Soloveitchik saw within "walking in G-d's ways" the imperative to create. He wrote (ibid., pp. 100-101), "If the Torah then chose to relate to man the tale of creation,

we may clearly derive one law from this manner of procedure – viz, that man is obligated to engage in creation and the renewal of the cosmos."

Rabbi Eliezer of Metz (Yereim 408) agreed that the command to "walk in G-d's ways" is a mitzvah, but took it in a different direction. He contended this is a command to observe each of the Torah's mitzvot. Even though each mitzvah is obligatory due to its independent instruction, this mitzvah adds a collective imperative, and a layer of reward for fulfilling G-d's instruction.

Weekly Highlights: Nov. 18 – Nov. 24 / 29 Cheshvan – 6 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
Nov. 17-18				
After hashkamah	Adam Friedmann	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
8:50 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Pre-Shacharit Parshah	BAYT	Turk Bais Medrash
Before minchah	R' Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gem. Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Motzaei, 6:30 PM	Yaron Perez	Parent-Child Learning	RINX, 65 Orfus Rd.	Note change in location
Sun. Nov. 19 Rosh Chodesh Kislev				
9:00 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Hebrew
9:00 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	Third Floor
10:00 AM to 11:20 AM	Mrs. Shira Lipner R' Jonathan Ziring	Bringing Beauty to our Lives Are Beautiful People Good?	Midreshet Yom Rishon Kehilat Shaarei Torah	<i>For women; 2640 Bayview</i> Refreshments served
Tue. Nov. 21				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Nechemiah 1: The Prayer	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua: After Jericho	129 Theodore Pl.	For men
8:00 PM	Entire Beit Midrash	How to Write a Dvar Torah	BAYT	Week 2 of 4
Wed. Nov. 22				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Mental Health in Judaism Week 4: Depression	Beth Emeth	To register: <i>torontotorah.com/mh</i>
12:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	The Ethical Challenge 2: Expatriate Taxation	Zeifmans LLP 201 Bridgeland Ave	Lunch provided <i>RSVP rk@zeifmans.ca</i>
2:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Exploring Bamidbar	32 Timberlane Ave.	For women
8:00 PM	Adam Friedmann	Why do we do that?	Shaarei Tefillah	
8:00 PM	Yaron Perez	הפרשה ואני	Shaarei Shomayim	In Easy Hebrew
Thu. Nov. 23				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Michah's Idol	49 Michael Ct.	For women
Fri. Nov. 24				
10:30 AM	Yaakov Rand	Melachot of Shabbat	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

11 AM Sunday, Adam Friedmann, Contemporary Halachah

8:30 AM Monday, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, Nefesh haChaim

8:30 AM Friday, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, The Book of Yeshayah

For University Women, at Ulpanat Orot

9:30-11:30 AM Monday, Mrs. Ellieza Perez, From Rachel Imeinu to Racheli Frenkel

9:30-11:30 AM Tuesday, Mrs. Ora Ziring, Shabbat

9:30-11:30 AM Wednesday, Mrs. Ora Ziring, Contemporary Halachah

9:30-11:30 AM Thursday, Mrs. Ellieza Perez, Parshah in the Eyes of Chassidut