

Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshiyot Behar-Bechukotai

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Regular Empathy Training

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

[King David] said: There are three distinguishing marks of the [the Jewish people]. They are merciful, they are bashful, and they perform acts of kindness... Only one who has these three defining characteristics is fit to cling to this nation. (Yevamot 79a)

Our sages propound that Jews have a set of shared spiritual characteristics. Rabbi Shemuel Eidels (Maharsha, *ibid.*) suggests that these traits are genetic, inherited from Avraham. However, even if that is the case, G-d did not rely on the Jewish people to have good moral "DNA". Rather, He put them through the Egyptian bondage, which the Torah (Devarim 4:20) describes as the "iron furnace." The image implies that the Jews needed to be purified, sensitized, to forge their character.

This is evident in the number of ethical commandments that are framed with reminders that we were also slaves in Egypt. By remembering when we were downtrodden, we are prodded towards empathy for the orphan, widow, slave, and other less fortunate members of society. As Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik said:

The Egyptian experience may therefore be regarded as the fountainhead and moral inspiration for the teaching of compassion which is so pervasive in Jewish Law. It sharpened the Jew's ethical sensitivity and moral awareness. The Midrash has R. Nehemiah say this explicitly: "the Egyptian bondage was of great value for us, since it served to implant within us the qualities of kindness and mercy." (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai Ex. 13:3)

Ours is a singularly ethical culture, which expresses itself through a heightened regard for human rights and dignity. (Reflections of the Rav, pp. 190-191)

However, if experience is crucial for empathy, what happens when the Egyptian slavery is but a distant memory? On one level, it may be to avoid that very problem that we are enjoined to remember the Exodus from Egypt, both intensely on Pesach, and more superficially on a daily basis. But is there more than memory – does the Torah still mandate such experiences?

Rabbi Avraham Saba (1440-1508) argues that it does. (Tzror HaMor, Vayikra 25) He wonders why the Torah would command a Sabbatical year, Shemitah, that would forbid people to plant their fields for an entire year, leading them to the brink of destitution. Even more shockingly, once every fifty years, Shemitah is followed by Yovel, the Jubilee, causing every Jewish farmer to face this situation for two consecutive years. Perhaps one could store food for one year. However, to plant and store enough in the preceding year to last almost four years, until the new crop would grow in the year following Yovel, is nearly impossible.

While some contend that this law is meant to engender faith in G-d, Rabbi Saba takes a different approach. He notes that ordinarily, wealthy people cannot fathom the experiences of the poor. Try as they may, they cannot understand what it means to wonder where one's next meal will come from, or, more tragically, to find nothing to eat. Thus, kind and generous as they

may be, developing empathy is difficult. And without that emotion, they may not extend their hands with sufficient willingness and empathy.

To solve this, G-d instituted Shemitah, and once every fifty years, Yovel. With the approach of Yovel, the wealthy land owner will suddenly face the same doubts as his poor sharecroppers. His next meals will be in doubt; his future insecure. He will not enjoy it, but perhaps he will emerge a better person.

While Rabbi Saba does not connect Shemitah and Yovel to the ethical laws that invoke the memory of Egypt, it seems they are on the same trajectory. G-d wants Jews to be as kind and generous as possible. When our nation was first born, it shared a national trauma that would sensitize it to the suffering of others. However, every fifty years, approximately once or twice a lifetime, G-d ensured that we go through a lesser ordeal that aims at instilling the same.

[It should be noted that this does not necessarily imply that the Torah opposes capitalism – just that it needs to be kept in check, a point made by Zeev Jabotinsky here: <http://www.saveisrael.com/jabo/jabojubilee.htm> and Rabbi Alex Israel here: <http://etzion.org.il/en/utopia>]

The challenge in our age of ease and prosperity is to make sure we too can empathize with those less fortunate than ourselves.

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OUR BEIT MIDRASH

ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

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

Israeli Landmark: Peki'in **Yaron Perez**

Peki'in is located in the Upper Galil, at the foot of Mount Meron.

Ancient Settlement

Yitzchak Ben-Zvi, the second president of the State of Israel, was one of the important archaeologists to research ancient Peki'in; his picture on Israel's 100 NIS bill is accompanied by a picture of Peki'in. He contended that Jewish settlement in the area dated to our entry into the land under Joshua, and was located in a place named Tel Charashim for the iron-workers (*charashim*) who lived there. Josephus mentioned Peki'in ("Beka") in his *Wars of the Jews*; he grew up not far from there. Other sources dating to the end of the Second Temple Period mention Peki'in as the city of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah, who was a teacher of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was also a student of his, and per Kohelet Rabbah 10, he fled to a cave called "Peka". One can visit a cave by that name in the area today, and see remnants of a carob tree, and a spring, near the cave.

The Middle Ages

Druze settlement in the area began in

the 11th century, when they fled persecution in Egypt. Jews also had temporary settlements in the area, as well as a custom of visiting Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's cave for Pesach Sheni. The custom is attested in Rabbi Moshe Basula's *Book of Journeys* (pg. 17a) in 1522.

In 1765, Rabbi Simcha ben Yehoshua visited and wrote about fifty farming families living in a Jewish community called "Peki'in", in his *Ahavat Zion*. There are reports of various communities moving to the area, settling and then leaving, over the centuries thereafter – but a small Jewish community always remained beside the larger Druze community.

A synagogue, which remains standing today, was built in Peki'in in 1873; some claim it is on the site of the Beit Midrash of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah.

Modern Times

Before the State was established, Arabs in the area sought to attack the local Jews, but the Druze protected the

Jewish community. Nonetheless, all of the Jews left the area at that time. Yosef and Mazal Zinati, with their daughter Margalit, returned after the War of Independence; a family tradition claims that they descended from kohanim who had lived there in the Second Temple Period, and their family had never left. In 1955, a new community, "Peki'in haChadashah", was established nearby with the support of President Yitzchak Ben-Tzvi.

In 2007, a quarrel over establishment of an antenna in Peki'in haChadashah catalyzed riots by local youth. They attacked Jewish homes and kidnapped a female police officer. This caused some of the local Jews to leave. Margalit Zinati remains, though; she has opened a Visitors Centre to teach about the history of Jewish settlement in the area. Margalit lit a bonfire at the national ceremony this past Yom ha'Atzmaut, representing our ancient heritage in the land.

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The Zionist Idea: The Centrality of Nationalism **Adam Friedmann**

"Our state, the State of Israel, is the foundation of G-d's throne in the world; its whole desire is that G-d be one and His Name be one." This description was penned by Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook in one of his spiritual diaries. (Notebook 1:186) While Rabbi Kook wrote before the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, his thinking has had a profound influence on religious Zionist leaders in Israel who used (and use) it to shape their world view. Following in his father's footsteps, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook stressed the supreme importance, and, indeed, sanctity, of the state and government per se as embodying and actualizing the process of the messianic redemption.

This line of reasoning was quite tenable for the early religious Zionists both before and after the founding of the state. Their major point of connection with mainstream Zionism was the desire to repopulate and resettle the land. The secular Zionists viewed this plan in pragmatic terms, while their religious counterparts attached messianic significance to the work. During the early period of the State, which prioritized the expansion and consolidation of Jewish settlement in Israel, this shared value brought religious and secular Zionists into close concert with one another.

However, as the State matured, new political and demographic challenges arose which conflicted with the settlement plan. In addition, a new generation of secular Israelis were less moved by the deep desire to settle the land which had captivated the hearts of their parents. The result

was an ideological and political rift between the heirs of the secular and religious Zionist movements. For many, this rift became painfully apparent for the first time in the execution of the Disengagement Plan of 2005. The Israeli government reversed course on the initiative to settle parts of the Gaza Strip. While the withdrawal from the Sinai in 1982 had been traumatic, for many people this event represented the first blatant anti-messianic/redemptive action that the state had committed.

The result was a notable shift in the attitudes of the religious Zionist community towards the State. Those rabbinic voices which maintained the pre-Disengagement emphasis on the State as a totally holy divine tool were marginalized, while those who were more skeptical of the State were empowered. [See the piece by journalist Yair Sheleg at <https://bit.ly/2I1m7Rs>.] At the philosophical level, this action by the State requires a retooling of the religious Zionist perspective of the State. The simplest solution might be to distinguish between the apparatus of the State per se and government which runs it. The existence of a sovereign Jewish country in Israel can very well be viewed as a redemptive and messianic reality, even if the views of a particular sitting government don't reflect those values. Indeed, one wonders if Rabbi Kook would have made his comments regarding particular administrations whose vision he could not share.

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Biography

Rabbi Tzvi H. Chajes

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Chajes (1805-1855), was a leading Galician Talmud scholar. He was a student of many great scholars, most notably Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margulies. While most of the Galician rabbis of his time opposed any accommodation or embrace of modernity, Rabbi Chajes was unique. Leaders like Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Chatam Sofer) went to extreme lengths to oppose the *haskalah* and declared *chadash assur min hatorah* [new things are forbidden by biblical law], but Rabbi Chajes accepted many elements of modern culture. He was educated in modern and classical languages, geography, history, and philosophy. According to some, he received a doctorate, making him the only person to publish comments in the standard Vilna Talmud Bavli and to hold a doctorate. He also embraced the emancipation of European Jewry, although others, such as Rabbi Sofer had been more hesitant.

Rabbi Chajes was a prolific author, and he wrote on a wide range of topics. Some of his writing dealt with traditional topics, as in his commentary to the Talmud. Many of his works focused on the halachic process, highlighting the mistakes he saw being made by the emerging Reform movement. Though he opposed the *haskalah*, he did study using the tools identified with that movement, subjecting Torah to academic and historical analysis. He was closely connected with scholars such as Nachman Krochmal and Solomon Leib Rapoport.

Bruria David Hutner (the daughter of Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner) wrote her dissertation examining Rabbi Chajes's life and thought. Her thesis is evident from its title - "The Dual Role of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes: Traditionalist and Maskil." (<http://bit.ly/2eg55Er>) She argues that while he defended, and was clearly faithful to, the traditional world, he did not realize how much he had been influenced by the *haskalah*. However, to this author, this claim is insufficiently substantiated. Certainly, being able to use the best of the world in our study of Torah and pursuit of truth is a strong part of our tradition. As Rambam said: take the truth from he who says it.

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Torah and Translation

Jerusalem: A City United

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Chajes, Commentary to Niddah 34a

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

בירושלמי ב"ק פ' מרובה גרסינן "כעיר שחוברה לה יחדו" – עיר שמחברת את ישראל זה לזה. אבל בירושלמי חגיגה פ' חומר בקודש דרשו "כעיר שחוברה לה יחדו" – שהכל נעשו חברים בשעת הרגל. וכבר התעורר הרב יפה מראה על השינוי הלה.

ונ"ל דשניהם ענין אחד הם, דכבר כתב הרמב"ם (מורה נבוכים ג' מג) וז"ל: "אבל ימים טובים המה כלם לשמחה ולקבוץ שיש בהם הנאה שבני אדם צריכין עליהם ברוב, ויש מהם תועלת בענין האהבה שצריכה שתהיה בין בני אדם בקבוצים המדיני." ועוד שם וז"ל: "אבל תועלת ימים טובים ידוע למה שיגיע לאדם תועלת מן הקבוץ ההוא והתחדש התורה בהפעולות ההוא, והתאהב בני אדם וחברתם קצתם לקצתם," ע"ש. וכבר אמרו חז"ל סנהדרין פ' חלק "גדולה לגימה שמקרבת את הרחוקים... ומשרה שכנינו על נביאי הבעל."

הד"ד להיפוך, גדול הפירוד במה שאדם מונע עצמו לאכול אצל ישראל חברו, ובפרט עת רעה שאינו נאמן אצלו על המעשרות ועל הטהרות. ולא לחנם אמר ר' עקיבא כשהיה עם הארץ "מי יתן לי תלמיד חכם ואנשכנו כחמור!" והיה עיקר הסיבה לעליית רגל משום לחבר את לבות ישראל זה לזה, אבל עדיין לא תושג המטרה אם לא יהיו נאמנים זה לזה לטהרות.

וראו חז"ל עצות מרחוק להשבת המונע שלא יבא השטן לרקד ביניהם הימים הקדושים הללו לגרום שנהא ופירוד הלבבות. ועשאו כל ישראל חברים בשעת הרגל. ואף עמי הארץ נאמנים אז על יינם ועל שמנם. ומפני זה הרשות לחבר ועם הארץ לאכול יחד לחם ולהיות יחד בסעודת מרעים, ועל זה תגדל האהבה ויתחברו הלבבות זה לזה.

In Talmud Yerushalmi Bava Kama (7:7) we learn, "[A built-up Jerusalem] is as a city united together" – the city which joins Israel together." But in Talmud Yerushalmi Chagigah (3:6) we learn, "[A built-up Jerusalem] is as a city united together" – for all are turned into *chaverim* [trusted associates, regarding tithes and ritual purity] at the time of the festival." The *Yefeh Mareh* already noted this difference.

It appears to me that both statements [the unity of Jerusalem and the *chaver* status of holidays] are the same. Rambam (Guide of the Perplexed 3:43) wrote, "But the festivals are all for joy and for gatherings which provide the benefit that people need in their masses, and they also benefit by causing the love required between people in national gatherings." He also wrote there, "But the benefit of festivals is known, in a person's benefit from that gathering and the renewal of Torah in those activities, and the love between people and the unity of some of them with others of them." And our Sages said (Sanhedrin 103b), "A meal [offered to guests] is great, for it draws the distant near... and it causes the Shechinah to be manifest [even] upon the prophets of the Baal."

This also teaches the opposite: Division is great when a person abstains from eating with another Jew, and the moment is especially bad when he is not trusted regarding tithes and purity. It was not for naught that Rabbi Akiva said, when he was an *am ha'aretz*, "Who would give me a Torah scholar, and I would bite him like a donkey!" (Pesachim 49b) The essential reason for holiday pilgrimages was to join the hearts of Israel, but that goal would not be achieved if they would not be mutually trusted regarding purity.

The sages devised far-thinking plans to eliminate this obstacle, lest the Satan come to dance among them on these sacred days, causing enmity and division of hearts. They made all Israel as *chaverim* in the time of the festival, and even *amei ha'aretz* [people who are normally presumed not to tithe or observe the rules of purity] are credible at that time for their wine and their oil. Because of this, *chaver* and *am ha'aretz* could eat bread together and join together in a meal of friends, and so increase love and join hearts to each other.

The Torah commands that we eat the korban pesach in a particular way: “Do not eat it raw, or boiled in water, but fire-roasted.” *Sefer haChinuch* counts this as the Torah’s seventh mitzvah, and presents two reasons for making sure the korban is fully roasted:

1. Classically, only royalty roasted meat. Peasants ate boiled meat, to preserve the fat and sate their appetites.
2. Roasting over a flame is quicker than boiling in a pot. The Jews ate this korban in haste, and we mark their haste by cooking with the quick, roasting method. [See also Rama, Torat ha’Olah 3:53.]

In a separate mitzvah, all Jews are instructed to give certain parts of their slaughtered animals to the kohanim – the foreleg, jaw and abomasum – and according to the talmudic

view of Rav Chisda (Chullin 132b), these, too, must be roasted. However, a kohen who does not like roast is free to transfer these gifts to another kohen; for the korban pesach, there is no alternative option for its consumption. (Divrei Yatziv Orach Chaim 204)

The Rambam and Raavad disagreed (Hilchot Korban Pesach 10:11) as to how the roasting was performed. The Rambam wrote that they roasted the entire animal, including the prohibited *gid hanasheh*. The Raavad dissented sharply, “Should I merit to eat the korban pesach, and he would bring this before me, I would smash it down on the ground before him!” This unresolved disagreement is one of the arguments against bringing the korban pesach in our own day.

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Weekly Highlights: May 12 – May 18 / 27 Iyar – 4 Sivan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
May 12				
After Hashkamah	Adam Friedmann	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
Before Avot	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi’s Classroom
After minchah	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. May 13 Yom Yerushalayim				
8:45 AM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Hebrew
Mon. May 14				
8:30 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Psak of Israel’s Chief Rabbis 3 R’ Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog	Shomrai Shabbos	Third Floor; For men
Tues. May 15				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Nechemiah: A New Era	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua	129 Theodore Pl.	On Hiatus
8:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	From 10 Dibrot to 613 Mitzvot?	BAYT	Thornhill B’Yachad Program
Wed. May 16				
10:00 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Celebrating 70, Week 4: Election of PM Begin	Beth Emeth	<i>torontotorah.com/celebrating</i>
12:30 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	The Ethical Challenge 2: Time Management	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	Contemporary Issues	Shaarei Tefillah	New!
8:00 PM	Yaron Perez	הפרשה ואני	Shaarei Shomayim	
Thu. May 17				
9:30 AM	R’ Moshe Yeres	Muktzeh	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Shemuel	49 Michael Ct.	Not this week

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

- 10:00 AM Sunday, Rabbi Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Beitzah**
- 11:00 AM Sunday, Adam Friedmann, Contemporary Halachah: Minhagim of Shavuot**
- 8:30 AM Monday, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, Topic TBD**
- 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**