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Avraham 1, Angels o

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Forty days atop Sinai communing with G-d, without the complaints of his nation, might seem like an ideal vacation for Moshe Rabbeinu – but according to various midrashim, it was anything but. In mild versions of the story, the heavenly population of *malachim* ["angels"] wished to deny Moshe the Torah; per some texts, they attempted to kill him. (Shabbat 88b; Shemot Rabbah 28:1; Devarim Rabbah, Haazinu)

In one midrash, G-d protected Moshe by resorting to *Mission Impossible* tactics, altering Moshe's face to appear like that of Avraham. (Shemot Rabbah 28:1) Hashem then pointed to Moshe/Avraham and demanded of the *malachim*, "Are you not ashamed before him? Is he not the one to whom you traveled, in whose home you ate?" The *malachim* were humbled. Hashem informed Moshe, "You are receiving the Torah only in Avraham's merit."

But this account is odd – why should the *malachim* be humbled? First, they didn't actually *need* food. Second, why would eating in Avraham's home demonstrate that humans deserve to receive the Torah? We might gain insight into this midrash by looking at the nature of *malachim*.

As depicted by our Sages, *malachim* are heavenly creatures, for whom physical exertion is foreign:

- Two of the *malachim* who visit Avraham are Michael and Gavriel. (Bereishit Rabbah 48:9) The Talmud says that Michael always arrives at his destination, however distant, with a single motion, and Gavriel

arrives with two such motions. (Berachot 4b)

- Yechezkel 1:7 describes *malachim* as having a single, straight leg; the Sages explain that they lack knees, and so they never sit down and rest. (Bereishit Rabbah 65:21; but see Shemot Rabbah 25:2)
- In certain situations, the Sages rule that halachah does not require exceptionally burdensome activities; their language is, "The Torah was not given to the ministering *malachim*," for whom these activities would be effortless. (See Minchat Asher 1:41)

Contrast this with Avraham's intense sacrifice of energy in hosting the *malachim*. He sees the *malachim* and he **runs** to greet them. He **rushes** into the tent, to Sarah, and to her he says, "**Hurry!**" He **runs** to the cattle, and picks a fine animal which he gives to Yishmael to prepare, and then he **rushes** to prepare it himself. [Yishmael prepares additional animals.] He brings the cream and milk himself, places it before them, and serves the visitors personally. Indeed, the Talmud observes that Hashem rewarded Avraham directly for all that he did personally for the *malachim*. (Bava Metzia 86b)

At first read, *malachim* seem superior to us, heavenly Mounties who parachute in with a Divine message or perform a heroic deed commissioned by G-d, and then disappear until next called upon. They wield inexhaustible resources, and exalt G-d with spiritual certainty. The biblical depiction of *malachim* as honoured citizens of G-d's kingdom carries forth to popular culture, as in Milton's description of Heaven as a

place "where sceptered angels held their residence, and sat as princes, whom the supreme King exalted to such power, and gave to rule, each in his hierarchy, the orders bright."

But our midrash paints *malachim* as deficient, specifically **because** they cannot sacrifice as Avraham did – for sacrifice is what makes us worthy of the Divine covenant. Torah is about *korban*, offering our resources to G-d; *chesed* – offering our resources to others; and *medinah* – channeling our resources, energies and connections to build a Jewish nation in a Jewish land. A *malach* could mimic these activities, but would not pay Avraham's price to do it. This is what Hashem points out to the *malachim* on Har Sinai, and this is what puts the *malachim* to shame.

Of course, it would be insufficient for us to rely on Avraham to be our champion. John Henry may outrace a steam-powered hammer, and Garry Kasparov may defeat a computer at chess, but these examples don't testify to the stamina or brilliance of any other human being, only to the potential we can mine. If we are to be worthy of our Torah, it will come by proving that the *malach* is no match for our sacrifice, too. Do the *malachim* feel ashamed before us, as they did before Avraham?

As we see *malachim* communicate Divine messages, produce wells out of nowhere, and wrestle with our ancestors, let's keep in mind the message of our midrash. Avraham hurried. Avraham ran. Avraham gave. And it is within us to do the same.

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Summary

This chapter begins by telling us that Hashem was angry that Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zavdi, the son of Zerach, from the tribe of Yehudah, had illegally taken spoils of the battle with Yericho. (7:1)

Yehoshua then sends men to spy out the city of Ay (7:2), who return to tell him that only 2000 or 3000 men will be required to conquer the Ayans. (7:3) Unfortunately, the warriors of Ay overpower the 3000 men who come to attack them, killing 36, and chasing the others away, and weakening the morale of the Jewish nation. (7:5) Yehoshua and the Elders mourn over this (7:6), and Yehoshua asks Hashem how he could do this to the nation – wouldn't it have been better to leave them on the other side of the Jordan, and not be killed? What will happen to G-d's Name once the other Canaanite nations hear of this, and attack and kill the Jews? (7:7-9)

Hashem explains that this took place because of the sin committed by the people (see below for a discussion of this), and until they fix this problem,

they will be unable to proceed with their conquest of the land. (7:11-12) Hashem tells the nation that He will help them unearth the sinner in their midst, by selecting a tribe, then families, then an individual by passing them in front of the Aron, which will identify the sinner, who is to be executed as punishment. (Based on Radak to 7:13-15)

When this is carried out, Achan is revealed to be the sinner. (7:16-18) He then admits his crime to Yehoshua and the nation, saying that he coveted specific items from the battle's spoils, and hid them underneath his tent. (7:20-21) Yehoshua then sends men to bring him the items from Achan's hiding place. (7:22-23) The nation then accompanies Achan, his family, and all of his possessions (including the stolen ones) to Emek Achor, where they are stoned and burned, and memorialized by a tall pile of stones, and G-d's anger subsides. (7:24-26)

A Lesson

This story, while tragic, leaves us with a very powerful message. Despite Achan being named as the only

individual who sinned, the Jewish nation bears full responsibility for each element of the crime that they did not properly prevent, nor did they rebuke the sinner. By not making sure that no one would take from the loot of Yericho, the people demonstrated to one another that directly opposing G-d, who had specifically warned them about this when they entered Yericho (6:17-19), was something that could be taken lightly. For this reason, G-d accuses the nation of taking from the forbidden spoils, stealing, denying their crime, and placing the goods among their own possessions, as if they had done it themselves. Also because of this, the nation is punished when they set out to conquer Ay, and many "innocent" members of the nation are killed. (Ralbag, Toelet 11)

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Law of the Land: Modern Shemitat Kesafim

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Every seven years, *shemitat* demands two sets of laws. First, agriculture is mostly forbidden. Second, creditors must release their debtors from their monetary obligations. (Devarim 15:2) According to halachah, these laws are only binding on a biblical level when the Yovel applies (Rambam, Hilchot Shemitat v'Yovel 9:2); nowadays, it does not. The Talmud records that when people began to refrain from lending money in anticipation of *shemitat*, due to fear that they would not be repaid, Hillel enacted a *prozbul*, a mechanism by which the court would become the creditor and the debts could be enforced. This law is only effective when *shemitat* is rabbinic. [See summary in Rambam ibid 16.] Due to this law, for the most part, *shemitat kesafim* is not practiced today to its full extent – most loans are protected by *prozbul* and collected. Some authorities, such as Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeschutz (Tumin to Choshen Mishpat 67) argue that one should at least forgive some debt as a *zecher* – a commemoration of the literal fulfillment of the mitzvah.

In recent years, several attempts have been made to make the laws relevant again. Rabbi Yoel bin Nun, for example, argues that in the modern Israeli economy, with wealth disparity growing at alarming rates, we should encourage people to wipe out loans. *Prozbul* is an option, but one always has the option not taking advantage of it. He encourages companies such as the electric and gas companies to do the same, and the government to dedicate money to helping people buried under debt (<https://bit.ly/2CtmEM8>). Such a law has indeed been put forth in the Knesset (<https://bit.ly/2R3Y3S6>).

Others, however, argue that *shemitat kesafim* was instituted by the Torah not to help the general poor, but rather to help farmers who were keeping the agricultural laws and were

thus risking impoverishment (or at least lack of income for two years). Thus, they argue, when most of society is not agricultural, and many farmers plant using the *heter mechirah*, there is no reason to not take advantage of *prozbul*. (See <https://bit.ly/2Exly4s>). This argument is based on the understanding of Chizkuni, Bechor Shor, and Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffman.

Yet others have argued that Rabbi bin Nun's notion is utopian. They note that the Talmud believes that paying back loans is a mitzvah (Bava Batra 174a) – and so arguing to wipe away loans when there is no formal obligation is in tension with other Torah values. Thus, they argue to wait until the laws of *shemitat kesafim* come into biblical effect (<https://bit.ly/2CWqL4e>). Others have argued for circumventing the law by making long term loans (http://tora.us.fm/tryg/mamr/jmitt_xovot_jc.html). Yet others have argued for finding new ways of channelling the spirit of *shemitat*, without literally applying it (<https://bit.ly/2J9uBHs>).

What is clear is that making Torah law relevant to modern times is a challenge worth thinking about creatively, and many thinkers in Israel are doing just that. For more on this, see my shiur at <https://bit.ly/2S4QcFm>.

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Biography
Rabbi Yitzchak
Zilberstein
Rabbi Elihu Abbe

"I want to praise the IDF, I really want to commend it for providing the opportunity for 40 soldiers to come and take part in the shiur," Kikar Shabbos News quotes Rabbi [Yitzchak] Zilberstein saying. When one of the participants said, "It is like this every year," the rav responded, "And they aren't entitled to praise every year?"

Rabbi Zilberstein explains the army gives 100 soldiers each year but this year only 40, citing it was most likely not possible to send more. The rav added that not only are the refreshments sent for the soldiers edible, they are 'mehudar' and sent specially for the shiur participants. He is quoted adding the military receives meat with the best hechsher in the world. (Yeshiva World News, April 2016)

Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, one of the rabbinic leaders of the Chareidi community of Bnei Brak, has captivated a wide spectrum of Jews with his pleasant, positive, and loving demeanor, and his enjoyable shiurim and divrei Torah. He has written numerous books containing stories and ideas on the weekly Torah portion, as well as discussions of practical, interesting questions of Jewish law.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein was born in 1934 in Poland. He learned from Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky and Rabbi Aryeh Levin, and ultimately married Rabbi Aryeh Levin's granddaughter, Aliza Shoshana Elyashiv, daughter of Rabbi Yosef Sholom Elyashiv. After his wife's passing in 1999, he remarried to Toby Tiberger.

Rabbi Zilberstein served as a Rosh Yeshiva in Switzerland, then as a Rabbi in Holon, and is currently the head of the rabbinical court of the Ramat Elchanan neighborhood in Bnei Brak. As Rabbi in Holon he presented shiurim on medical halachah, attended by both religious and secular doctors. He is currently the Rabbi of Mayanei Hayeshua Hospital, and his writings in this area include the four-volume *Shiurei Torah l'Rofim* and *Torat haYoledet* on the laws of childbirth.

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Torah and Translation
Teaching One Who Has Not Said Birchot haTorah
Rabbi Y. Zilberstein, Chashukei Chemed to Berachot 21a
Translated by Rabbi Elihu Abbe

שאלה. מעשה בן תורה שנסע באוטובוס מירושלים לת"א, לידו ישב שוטר גלוי ראש שאינו שומר תורה, מעיין בעתון. חשקה נפשו של הבן תורה לקרב לב שכנו לאביו שבשמים הוא פנה לשוטר ואומר לו סלח לי, על דש חולצתך כתוב ישראל, אולי תרשה לי לספר לך מהי המשמעות של התיבה "ישראל"? לא אגזול ממך הרבה זמן... ברצון, השיב השוטר.

אמר לו 'ישראל' הם ראשי תיבות של אברהם יצחק יעקב שרה רבקה רחל לאה. כלומר כשאנחנו מזכירים ישראל, אנו צריכים להזכר ולהתנהג בהתאם למעשיהם של האבות והאמהות ע"ה. ולאחר פירוט הדברים עם דוגמאות מעשיות, סיפר לו הבן תורה שחידוש זה נמצא בתורתו של הבן איש חי, שהיה גדול היהודים בעירק היא בבל. ומכאן זרמו הדברים לתלמוד בבלי, ובנתיים השוטר לבש כובע והטמין את העתון בכיס וכמעט שוחחו שעה בדברי תורה ערבים. וכשנפרדו אמר לו השוטר מה שדברת עמי הם דברים רבי ערך לעומת העתון.

נשאלת השאלה הרי נאמר במסכת ברכות דף כא ע"א מנין לברכת התורה לפנייה מן התורה. שנאמר כי שם ה' אקרא הבו גודל לאלקינו. ואיך היה מותר לשוחח בדברי תורה עם השוטר שלא בירך ברכת התורה לפנייה?

תשובה. הצעתי שאלה זו לפני שנים רבות לפני מר"ח מרן הגרי"ש אלישיב שליט"א והשיב לי: השוטר לא נתכוון לקיים בשיחה זו מצות תלמוד תורה ויתכן שבאופן זה לא חייבים לברך על התורה. כי הוא התעניין בתורה לשמוע חכמתה ובינתה אבל לא נתכוון לקיים בשיחה זו מצות עשה "ושנתם לבניך ודברת בס."

Question: It happened that a Torah-observant person was traveling by bus from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Next to him sat a bareheaded, non-observant police officer, reading a newspaper. The Torah-observant person desired to bring his neighbor close to his Father in Heaven, so he turned to him and said, "Excuse me, on the tag of your shirt it says 'Yisrael', please allow me to explain to you the meaning of the word 'Yisrael', I won't take too much of your time." The police officer replied, "Gladly!"

He said to him, "'Yisrael' [in its Hebrew spelling, and making use of the same letter for multiple names that begin with that letter] is an acronym for the names of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah. When we use the name 'Yisrael' we must be reminded and conduct ourselves in a way that lives up to the conduct of our patriarchs and matriarchs." After detailing the idea [i.e. what it means to live up to our ancestors conduct] with practical examples, the Torah student related that this novelty is found in the Torah of the Ben Ish Chai, leader of the Jews of Iraq, which is Babylon. From here the conversation flowed to (discussing) the Babylonian Talmud, and meanwhile the police officer put on a hat and put away his newspaper in his pocket. They spoke for almost an hour, discussing sweet words of Torah. When they parted, the police officer told him, "What you told me are ideas much more valuable than the newspaper."

The question asked is that it is stated in Tractate Berachot (21a), "From where do we know that there is a biblical requirement to say a blessing before studying Torah? From the verse, 'When I call out in the name of G-d [a reference to studying Torah], ascribe greatness to our G-d.'" Then how was it permissible to discuss Torah with the police officer who had not said a blessing beforehand?

Answer: Years ago, I posed this question to my father in law, Rabbi Elyashiv, and he replied that the police officer did not intend to fulfill the commandment of studying Torah by engaging in this conversation, and it is possible that in such a case one is not required to say a blessing on Torah study. His interest was to hear the wisdom and understanding (of the Torah), but not to fulfill the positive commandment of, "And you shall teach your sons, and you shall speak of them (i.e. words of Torah)."

The 613 Mitzvot: #19, 20—Eating or Possessing Chametz Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Mitzvot 9 and 11 (as described in Toronto Torah 9:37-38) obligate us to destroy chametz before Pesach, and to ensure that we own no chametz during Pesach. Shemot 13:3 adds, “And chametz shall not be eaten,” prohibiting eating chametz during Pesach; Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah’s 19th mitzvah. Shemot 13:7 adds that chametz shall not be seen in our property during Pesach, either; Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah’s 20th mitzvah.

and eliminate it before Pesach; we already declare the chametz ownerless and of no interest to us, so that we are not viewed as “possessing” chametz. The Talmud responds that we are concerned lest we find attractive chametz and decide that we do want it. Tosafot (2a *or*) explains that because we have the added mitzvah prohibiting consumption of chametz, the Sages added a layer of obligation, requiring that we search for chametz and eliminate it.

The Talmud (Pesachim 6b) asks why we search for chametz

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Weekly Highlights: Oct. 27— Nov. 2 / 18 Cheshvan — 24 Cheshvan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Oct. 27				
10:30 AM	R' Alex Hecht	Post-Hashkama Parshah	Clanton Park	
5:25 PM	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Avodah Zarah	BAYT	This week: TFBM
Sun. Oct. 28				
8:45 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Torah of Divorce	Limmud Toronto.	78 Queens Pk Circle
Mon. Oct. 29				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Anti-Zionism, A-Zionism, Zionism Week 1	Beth Tikvah	
8:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Mental Health, Week 3: Pikuach Nefesh	Shomrai Shabbos	Men
Tue. Oct. 30				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah: Chapter 2	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua: Chapter 11	129 Theodore Pl.	Men
8:00 PM	Ezer Diena	Tzurat haDaf 101, Week 2	BAYT	Men; JF Library
Wed. Oct. 31				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Israel's Chief Rabbis 3: Rav Kook	Beth Emeth	torontotorah.com/chiefrabbis
7:30 PM	R' Alex Hecht	Controversies of the 20 th Century	Shaarei Tefillah	
7:30 PM	Ezer Diena	Ripped from the Headlines	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
8:00 PM	R' Elihu Abbe	The 7 Habits, Week 2	Shaarei Shomayim	New Mini-Series!
Thu. Nov. 1				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel: Chapters 2-3	49 Michael Ct.	Women
8:30 PM	R' Elihu Abbe	Gemara Beitzah	eabbe@torontotorah.com	Men
Fri. Nov. 2				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Kiddushin	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM Sunday, Rabbi Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat
11:00 AM Sunday, Contemporary Halachah: Rabbi Elihu Abbe: Opening Bottles and Cans on Shabbat
8:30 AM Monday, R' Elihu Abbe, Midrash on the Parshah
8:30 AM Friday, R' Mordechai Torczyner, The Book of Yeshayah

For University and Adult Women, at Ulpanat Orot

9:30 AM Tuesdays, Mrs. Eliana Abbe: Sefer Devarim
9:30 AM Thursdays, Mrs. Eliana Abbe: Tefillah

Seder Boker for Adult Men with Rabbi Moshe Yeres!

10:00 AM to Noon, Mondays/Wednesdays - Masechet Megilah and Eim haBanim Semeichah
10:00 AM to Noon, Tuesdays/Thursdays - Parshanut on Parshah and Pninei Halachah