

# Toronto Torah

## YU Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Shemot

21 Tevet, 5779/December 29, 2018

Vol. 10 Num. 17 (#395)

Enjoy this mini-edition of Toronto Torah; our full edition returns next week!

Issue #400 is coming up with Parshat Mishpatim (February 2)

To place a dedication in this special edition, please email [info@torontotorah.com](mailto:info@torontotorah.com) or call 416-783-6960

### Selective Sight

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Central to the opening stories of Shemot is “sight” – who sees, who does not, and what that means. Moshe consistently sees the right things – he sees the Egyptian striking the Jew and takes action. (Shemot 2:11) This vision demonstrates his empathy and willingness to act for others. Later, Moshe reveals his ability to perceive that life is not as it seems – and G-d sees that Moshe bothered seeing the burning bush that was not consumed. (Shemot 3) Moshe’s mother sees his goodness, and is driven to hide her son. (Shemot 2:2) The daughter of Pharaoh sees the box with the child floating in the river, looks at the crying infant, and chooses to have mercy (Shemot 2:5-6), an act which led to the redemption of the Jewish people (and in Chazal, conviction that the daughter of Pharaoh herself joined the Jewish people [Megillah 13a]).

What makes people see the right things, granting them the ability to do what is demanded of them? Umberto Cassuto notes a play on words that hints at the answer. Pharaoh commands the midwives to see whether a given child is a boy or a girl, and to surreptitiously murder the boys. (Shemot 1:16) However, the midwives did not, as they feared G-d. (ibid. 1:17) Cassuto notes that the word for sight and fear (of G-d, in this case), are expressed with the same letters - *resh, aleph, hei*. In verse 21, the midwives are reward for this fear and are granted houses. As Cassuto puts it, “they feared (*yiru*), rather than saw (*rau*).” (Cassuto to 1:17)

We tend to think that the raw data that we gather from our senses, be they sight, hearing, or touch, is objective. What we do with that information is subjective and thus can depend on values. However, that is not completely true. We view the world through a lens. Modern psychology has explored at length the extent to which our very perceptions are controlled by preconceived notions. For example, the “halo effect” refers to the tendency of human beings to judge people positively if their first interactions were positive, or if the person is attractive, or if the person has any other feature that initially biases the seer to view them positively. The reverse can also be true – once someone has a negative opinion of a specific person, either due to a negative first interaction or due to their displeasing physical appearance, they are more likely to judge their future actions in a negative light. Research into these and other forms of cognitive bias has shown that the line between what we physically see and perceive is not absolute. We shape our perceptions and choose what we see and hear, or at least what we let register.

It is for this reason that the same facts offered to members of different political parties are likely to be understood in ways that support the political ideology and agenda of the person taking in the information. And often, each side cannot even see how the data could support a different narrative than their own.

And when we are looking for the wrong

things, we may literally not see what is in front of our eyes. In the well known “Invisible Gorilla” experiment, researches proved that human beings have selective sight. When asked to focus on the number of times basket players in white shirts pass a ball, the viewers did not see a person in a gorilla suit walk in front of the screen. What we want to see actually rewires our brain and controls what raw data even registers.

The Torah’s play on words offers a theological angle to this psychological insight. Fear of G-d, a proper world view, can and should affect what we choose to see. Empathy led Moshe to see his brothers’ plight. His curiosity opened up his eyes to the possibility of wonder and thus to his encounter with G-d. The midwives’ fear of G-d made them blind to the murderous commands of Pharaoh. Each act of intentional sight lays the groundwork for the redemption of the Jewish people – to G-d choosing to “see” the plight of the Jewish people and set the process in motion to save them. Our challenge is to shape our vision to similarly see what we should, respond accordingly, and hopefully merit G-d looking upon us with deserved mercy.

[jjziring@torontotorah.com](mailto:jjziring@torontotorah.com)

#### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

<b>ROSH BEIT MIDRASH</b>	RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER
<b>SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH</b>	RABBI ELIHU ABBE
<b>AVREICHIM</b>	EZER DIENA, RABBI ALEX HECHT
<b>ADULT SEDER BOKER DIRECTOR</b>	RABBI MOSHE YERES
<b>WOMEN’S BEIT MIDRASH</b>	MRS. ELIANA ABBE
<b>ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS</b>	RABBI ADAM FRIEDMANN, RABBI BARUCH WEINTRAUB, RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING
<b>UNIVERSITY CHAVERIM</b>	YONI BLUMENFELD, NAFTI DIENA, NADAV GASNER, COREY KAMEN, YEHUDA LEVI, COBY LYONS, JACOB POSLUNS, MORDECHAI ROTH, ARI RUBIN, DAVID TOBIS, URIEL WEISZ, ELI WELTMAN, MARK WERNER, BARUCH WISE



Find our upcoming shiurim on-line at [www.torontotorah.com](http://www.torontotorah.com)

We are grateful to Continental Press 905-660-0311

Most halachic authorities rule that appointing a king is a mitzvah, in accordance with the simple reading of Devarim 17:15. It also seems clear that although, due to our sins, we do not yet have prophets and a Sanhedrin, we must appoint one type of government or another, and this government will have at least some of the king's authority. [See Rabbi Kook's Mishpat Kohen 144, and others quoted in Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's Yechaveh Daat 5:64.] However, the Written Torah, as well as most of the classic sources of the Oral Torah, do not expound on the scope of the king's or the government's authority – are they supposed to make independent decisions and legalizations based on **their** understanding of what will best advance the values of Torah and justice; or are they only an executive branch, expected to implement the decisions made by the Sanhedrin and Torah sages?

It should be emphasized that regarding halachic decisions, such as a law to eat chametz on Pesach or to ban tefillah in public etc., the government certainly has no authority. [See Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 3:9.] Our focus is on laws which have halachic implications and are made in light of Jewish values, but also include questions of *metziut* (evaluation of reality) and ideological prioritization, such as: 'land for peace' in the international arena; range of social benefits in the social sphere; extent of state funding to public transportation in the economic domain, and many more.

The answers to such questions are obviously complex and nuanced, and approaches to them must not be falsely portrayed as an either/or dichotomy. Nonetheless, two distinct main approaches exist within Jewish society today. The first one, popularized in recent generations and known as the "Daat Torah" doctrine, gives Torah scholars a

complete dominance over the political world. This attitude stands on two firm feet – one leg is halachic, rooted in the biblical command, "You shall not deviate from the thing they will tell you neither left nor right" (Devarim 17:11), and the other leg is philosophical, based on the idea of "faith in the sages" (*emunat chachamim*). The other approach rejects the relevance of both of those 'firm feet'. The mitzvah to adhere completely to the sages relates only to the Sanhedrin and is limited to Torah issues alone. (Rambam, Hilchot Mamrim 1:1) Additionally, *emunat chachamim* does not assume expertise or prophecy, and certainly should not be misunderstood as belief in infallibility. According to the second approach, there is a difference between men of great vision and ideals (Torah sages) and men of reality and practice. These two types must work together, but their confusion may be catastrophic, and can explain why the Torah prevented Kohanim from becoming kings. [See Ramban to Bereishit 49:10.]

Both approaches have been advanced by Torah giants; Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan Poupko (the Chafetz Chaim) and Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman ascribed complete authority to Daat Torah, while Rabbi Kook, Rabbi Yisraeli and Rabbi Amital argued for a partial independence for the political sector. It is interesting to note that Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein noted a shift in Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's opinion on this matter. In his youth he supported an extreme version of the Daat Torah principle, but later in life, perhaps in light of the tragedies of the Holocaust, he tended to see a "distinction between matters involving mitzvot (*divrei mitzvah*), which are to be decided by halachic decision-makers, and other matters (*divrei reshut*), in which significant weight is attached to the opinions and authority of other leaders, or to private judgment." (*Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1 pp. 227-228)

**Weekly Highlights: Dec. 29— Jan. 4 / 21 Tevet — 27 Tevet**  
**Many classes are off this week, but learning opportunities remain!**

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
<b>שבת Dec. 28-29</b>				
<b>After minchah</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshivat Shem v'Ever	BAYT	<b>Simcha Suite</b>
<b>Mon. Dec. 31</b>				
<b>8:00 PM</b>	<b>R' Mordechai Torczyner</b>	<b>Bridging Vayikra, Bamidbar</b>	<b>BAYT</b>	<b>The 929 Shiur</b>
<b>Tue. Jan. 1</b>				
<b>9:35 AM Chavruta</b> <b>10:00 AM Shiur</b>	<b>Ezer Diena</b>	<b>Yichud in School and the Workplace</b>	<b>BAYT</b>	<b>TFBM, with JLIC University students</b>
<b>Wed. Jan. 2</b>				
<b>7:30 PM</b>	Ezer Diena	Ripped from the Headlines	BAYT	
<b>Thu. Jan. 3</b>				
<b>8:30 PM</b>	Ezer Diena	Gemara Beitzah	ediena@torontotorah.com	<b>Men</b>
<b>Fri. Jan. 4</b>				
<b>10:30 AM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Kiddushin: Prenups	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<b>Advanced</b>

**For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim**

**10:00 AM Sunday, Rabbi Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat—not this week**

**11:00 AM Sunday, Contemporary Halachah: - not this week**

**8:30 AM Tuesday, Ezer Diena, Stories and She'eilot—not this week**

**8:30 AM Friday, R' Mordechai Torczyner, The Book of Yeshayah**

**Seder Boker for Adult Men with Rabbi Moshe Yeres**

**10:00 AM to Noon, Wednesday - Masechet Megilah and Eim haBanim Semeichah**

**10:00 AM to Noon, Tuesdays/Thursdays - Parshanut on Parshah and Pinei Halachah**