

# Toronto Torah

## YU Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vaera

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Golda Brown and Harry Krakowsky for the yahrtzeit of Harry's father, Joe Krakowsky ז"ל, יוסף בן משה ז"ל, on his yahrtzeit *bo bayom*

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Shoshanna Schapira in memory of her beloved mother, Hadassah Schapira א"ה, הדסה בת אברהם ע"ה, on her yahrtzeit *bo bayom*

### The Lessons of Our Blessings and Challenges

Rabbi Elihu Abbe

The four cups of wine that we partake of on the seder night are said to represent the four terms for salvation that appear at the beginning of this week's parshah: "And I will take you out," "And I will save you," "And I will redeem you," "And I will bring you."

Rabbi Ephraim Luntschitz (Kli Yakar) notes that at the *Brit Bein HaBetarim* (Covenant of the Parts), Hashem tells Avraham of four different experiences that the Jewish people will endure. "You should know that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, and they will subjugate them and cause them to suffer for four hundred years (Bereishit 15:13)." We will be:

- 1) Strangers;
- 2) Residents of a foreign land (which the Kli Yakar explains refers to being distanced from G-d's presence, since we know that G-d's presence is most primary in the Land of Israel);
- 3) Subjugated as slaves; and
- 4) Made to suffer.

The four terms for salvation refer to being redeemed from these four experiences. Hashem began by taking us out "from under the burden of Egypt," a reference to the suffering that we endured. He then "saved us from slavery," "redeemed us" from the land of Egypt, and "took us to Him as a people," a reference to returning to closeness to G-d.

Sometimes a difficult situation can

look so bleak that we feel overwhelmed. We feel helpless because we do not know where to begin rectifying the many problems. It is helpful to name the individual problems and view them as layers that can be peeled away. In this way, it is possible to look for solutions one step at a time.

Similarly, when everything is going well, we can forget to notice the many wonderful blessings that we have. We sometimes make the mistake of seeing an amazing situation as one where "there are no problems," rather than as a composition of all the fabulous components that we can be grateful for.

There is a well-known mitzvah on Purim to drink wine to the point where one does not know the difference between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai." [Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Shulchan Aruch 695:2) rules that one should drink slightly more than usual and then take a nap. While one is sleeping, one will not know the difference between Haman and Mordechai.] Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Mishneh Berurah 695:4) explains that Hashem did two favours for the Jewish people: He brought about Haman's downfall and He elevated Mordechai. When a person is sober they are able to thank Hashem for each of these favors individually. A person is to drink on Purim to the point where he becomes confused and views these two favors as only one. Looking at the situation from a shallow perspective one might see

only one favor of "everything going well." In reality, Hashem both saved us from harm and elevated our people.

The Talmud (Berachot 59b) teaches that a blessing is recited on the rain. The Shulchan Aruch (221:1) explains that this blessing is only recited after a difficult drought. Rabbi Isserles notes that our custom is therefore not to recite the blessing, as our localities usually have sufficient rain. But imagine the situation of an entire land enduring the hardships of a terrible drought. Life-giving rain finally falls. The situation has gone from one of dread to one of relief. The superficial perspective would be to thank Hashem in general for the turnaround. Instead, our Sages composed the blessing, "We thank You for each drop of rain that You have brought down for us." A midrash (Devarim Rabbah, Ki Tavo 7:6) teaches that each drop requires many angels to ensure that it travels all the way from the heavens to the earth so that it can be helpful for us. The language of the blessing and the teaching of this midrash can enhance our appreciation for the food that we regularly enjoy.

Noticing the multiple layers of difficult situations can enable us to avoid feeling overwhelmed, and can help us to work on aspects of a challenge. Appreciating all of the components of the blessings that we enjoy can add to our pleasure in life.

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**Summary**

Our (quite short) chapter is one of two twin chapters which tell the story of where and how the tribes of Menasheh and Ephraim – Yosef’s descendants – received their portion from the promised land.

First, we are given the general boundaries for the lot of the whole house of Yosef – covering a vast area north of Jerusalem, up to Beit She’an and the Yizre’el Valley. Then comes a detailed account of the land inherited by the tribe of Ephraim – the southern half of the lot mentioned above. This ends with two interesting facts: 1) Some of Ephraim’s cities were built within the share given to Menasheh, and 2) Ephraim did not destroy the Canaanite city of Gezer, but made its inhabitants subject to servitude.

**Insight: Two Brothers, One House**

The text chose an intriguing way to describe the inheritance of Menasheh and Ephraim. As mentioned earlier, the account begins by stating the general borders of the house of Yosef, continues in a description of Ephraim’s portion, goes on to describe Menasheh’s portion, and ends yet again with general problems faced by the unified “sons of

Yosef.” (Yehoshua 16:14-18) As noted by various commentators (see Ramban, Bamidbar 26:54), Yehoshua emulated Yaakov’s blessings to Yosef separating them, “Ephraim and Menasheh will be the same as Reuven and Shimon to me” (Bereishit 48:5), as well as the unified, “I have given you one portion more than to your brothers.” (ibid. 48:22)

Also telling is the fact that throughout these two chapters, the naming order for the two brothers changes. We begin by naming Menasheh first (Yehoshua 16:4), but then describe Ephraim’s land (ibid. 16:5-10). In the next chapter we start by stating that Menasheh is the first-born (ibid. 17:1), but after describing his portion we come to Yehoshua’s address to the two tribes speaking “to Ephraim and Menasheh.” This flux seems to reflect no fixed hierarchy between the brothers.

However, the most striking point appears in Yehoshua 16:9, describing “separate cities for the children of Ephraim among the inheritance of the children of Menasheh.” The tribe of Menasheh allowed people from Ephraim to build cities in its land even

though, as we will see in the next chapter, there was not enough land for the whole house of Yosef! Our chapter seems to be short, technical, and of interest only to historians and geographers. But as in any other chapter of prophecies handed to us through the generations – there is much more to its words than what meets the eye. Underneath the terse description of geographical features, one can find a quiet but rich lesson about brotherhood and kinship.

Many follow the practice of blessing their children every Shabbat with Yaakov’s words – “G-d should make you as Ephraim and Menasheh.” (Bereishit 48:20) Some suggest that Ephraim and Menasheh were chosen as the role models for brothers who were able to overcome envy and competition, promising a cure to the ever-threatening disease of sibling hatred. Our chapter is another embodiment of this same trait.

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**Law of the Land: Who Votes?**

Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, many leading rabbis of the time sought to develop a halachic framework within which the democratic country would function. One challenge that was addressed was the question of which segments of the population should be given the right to vote. While people today might intuitively answer that all adult citizens should be able to participate in elections, leading rabbis of the time did not take this for granted. Specifically, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook (1865-1935) and Rabbi Ben-Zion Uziel (1880-1953) debated the issue of women’s suffrage, with the former opposed and the latter in favour.

Rabbi Kook, in a 1919 public letter titled “*Bechirat Nashim*” [“Election of Women”], explained his opposition to women’s participation in the political process. Based on the Talmud’s statement (Yevamot 65b) that “It is a man’s manner to conquer and not a woman’s manner to conquer,” and on the verse, “The honour of the king’s daughter is within” (Tehillim 45:14), Rabbi Kook ruled that “Roles of office, of judgment, and of testimony are not for her.” He expressed concern that women’s participation in the public sphere would compromise standards of modesty and separation of the genders. In a 1920 responsum addressing women’s participation in elections, Rabbi Kook emphasized that the family, in which women play a primary role, is the foundation of the Jewish people. He argued that, “The psychological basis for calling for public participation in elections by the name of ‘women’s rights’ arises fundamentally from the unhappy position of the mass of women among the nations. If their family situation had been as peaceful and dignified as it generally is in Israel, the women themselves... would not demand what they call

‘rights’ of suffrage for women ... a step that might spoil domestic tranquility and ultimately lead to a great deterioration of political and national life in general.” (translation – Zvi Zohar)

Rabbi Uziel (*Mishpitei Uziel* 44), however, presented several arguments in favour of women’s suffrage:

- Since women are impacted by the policies of elected officials, they should be able to influence who is elected to represent them.
- “But perhaps this should be prohibited because of licentiousness? But what licentiousness can there be in this, that each person goes to the poll and enters his voting slip? If we would start considering such activities as licentiousness, no creature would be able to survive!”
- Differences of political opinion within a family are inevitable, and there need not be concern that friction will result.
- Even if women are not included in the legal category of “congregation” [counted in the Biblical census and in the Torah’s recording of genealogy], they nevertheless have concerns that elected officials can address.

In the 1920 Knesset elections, both Rabbi Kook’s and Rabbi Uziel’s positions were met with resistance: Liberal elements of the population distanced themselves from Rabbi Kook’s camp, and a large percentage of religiously conservative elements did not participate in the elections because women were going to the polls. (For more on the 1920 election, see <http://www.traditiononline.org/pdfs/49.1/0068-0071.pdf>)

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## Biography

### Rabbi Natan ben Yechiel

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

Natan ben Yechiel of Rome was born circa 1035 in Rome to a prominent Jewish family. His father, Rabbi Yechiel ben Avraham, was a scholar and liturgical poet. Rabbi Natan's great scholarly contribution is the Sefer HaAruch, a lexicon of Talmudic terms. This book also contains several autobiographical fragments, from which scholars have pieced together elements of Rabbi Natan's life story.

Rabbi Natan began his professional life not as a scholar but as a peddler of linen. When his employer died, he returned to his father's home and began to study seriously with him. This initial time inspired Rabbi Natan to travel abroad and learn Torah from other prominent scholars. He travelled to Sicily where he studied under Matzliach ibn al-Batzak who had just returned from Pumbedita in Babylon where he had studied under Rav Hai Gaon. The teachings of the Gaonim, especially Rav Hai Gaon, feature prominently in Sefer HaAruch. After this, Rabbi Natan travelled to Narbonne where he studied under Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan, a prominent exegete who is mentioned several times in Rashi's commentary to Chumash. Rabbi Natan likely spent more time studying in various other yeshivot throughout Italy before returning home to Rome.

When Rabbi Yechiel ben Avraham died in 1070, leadership of the rabbinical college of Rome was handed over to Rabbi Natan and his two brothers, named Daniel and Avraham. The brothers quickly became regarded as important Torah authorities. Rabbi Natan committed himself to renewing the infrastructure of the Jewish community in Rome. In 1085 he constructed a mikvah, and in 1101, together with his brothers, he built a new synagogue. While his scholarly and communal efforts were successful, Rabbi Natan's personal life was tragic. All of his children died at early ages. He himself died circa 1106.

The Sefer HaAruch was one of the first Talmudic dictionaries, and was by far the most comprehensive of its time. Its publication came at the time when the heart of Jewish learning was migrating from the Middle East to Europe. The work contains not only key definitions but also important methodology and insights from the Babylonian schools.

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## Torah and Translation

### Exaggeration in the Torah

#### Rabbi Natan ben Yechiel, Aruch "Guzma"

Translated by Rabbi Adam Friedmann

"אמר ר' אמי דברה תורה בלש' הבאי. ויתבקע הארץ לקולם – ויתבקעו ס"ד? אלא גוזמא. א"ר יצחק אמר שמואל: בגי' מקומות דברו חכמים לשון הבאי..."

ופירוש "גוזמא" "לשון הבאי" ו"דברי הבאי" אחד הוא, והוא כאדם שמגדל את הדבר הרבה ומוסיף בגידולו, והוא כענין "ערים גדולות ובצורות בשמים" אשר בתורת משל הוא כשם שהשמים [אי] אתה מגביה ראשך ככל יכולת עד שתראה המקום שלמעלה הימנו, כך הערים האלה אי אתה רואה את ראש המבצר עד שתגביה ראשך ותשא עיניך בכל יכולתך.

ואם במנין אתה תמה איך יאמר מנין שאין הדבר בקצבה ההיא, כל שכן שאמר "ותבקע" מעשה שהיה ראוי לתימהו. והנה במנין לשון הבאי הרבה באמרך "ואלו חיה אלף שנים פעמים" ואין זה מצוי באנוש... "ולקבל אלפא חמרא שתה" הרי זה מנין שאי אפשר להיות כמשמעו, שישתה אחד כנגד אלף, אלא לשון הבאי הוא, והוא נקרא "גוזמא כי הוסיף בעילוי של דבר כלומר "אילו היה בן אדם יכול לשתות כך היה זה שותה."

אף כך הוסיף בעלוי תפוח כי פעמים עליו שלוש מאות כור ובפרוכת שלוש מאות כהנים מטבילין אותה כלומר כי לא נראה כמה הן והיו נראין לעינים כאשר יראו כורין הרבה והמטבילין נראין כאשר יראה קהל גדול, כמשל בעלמא... וכיון שחקרו אנשי התלמוד וראו כי לא בדקדוק נאמרו משניות הללו אלא הבאי, גילו כי כן הם.

"Rabbi Ami said: The Torah speaks in the language of *havai*. 'The earth split from their voices (Melachim I, 1:40).' Do you think it actually split? Rather it is *guzma*. Rabbi Yitzchak said in the name of Shmuel: The sages spoke in the language of *havai* in three places..." (Talmud, Chullin 90b)

The meaning of *guzma* and language of *havai* and words of *havai* is the same, and that is when a person exaggerates something greatly and adds to its size. This is like "great cities and fortresses in the sky" (Devarim 1:28) which is stated as a metaphor. Just as with the sky you cannot raise your head, despite maximum effort, until you can see the place which is above it, so too regarding these cities you cannot see the top of the fortress until you raise your head and raise your eyes up with maximum effort.

And with regards to numbers you wonder how can a number be stated when the thing cannot possibly exist in that magnitude, all the more so when it says "And [the earth] split," which is stated as a historical fact, which is worthy of wonderment. But as regards numbers there are many examples of language of *havai*. When it says, "And if he lived a thousand years twice over (Kohélet 6:6)," and this [lifespan] is not found in people... [so too] "And he drank wine with a thousand (Daniel 5:1)." Behold, this number cannot be as it sounds, that one should drink the equal of a thousand, rather it is *havai* and this is what is called *guzma* since he exaggerated its greatness. That is to say, if a person had been able to drink this way, so did this one drink.

So too [the Mishnah] exaggerated the greatness of the mound [of ashes on the altar in the Temple] that it would sometimes reach 300 *kur*, so too that 300 *kohanim* were required to immerse the partition veil [of the Holy of Holies in the Temple]. That is to say that one could not see clearly how much [ash] there was and it appeared that there were many *kor*, and the group who immersed [it] appeared like a large group... And when the men of the Talmud analyzed and saw that these *mishnayot* were not stated precisely and rather are *havai*, they revealed that this was the case.

According to the Sefer haChinuch, the Torah's 25<sup>th</sup> mitzvah is the command which begins the Aseret haDibrot (Ten Commandments), "I am G-d, your Lord, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves."

The Sefer haChinuch followed the 12<sup>th</sup> century view of Rambam (*Sefer haMitzvot*, Aseh 1) that this mitzvah includes belief in a single G-d who created all that exists, by whose Will all exists, and who is eternal. The mitzvah is also to believe that this same G-d brought us out of Egypt and gave us the Torah. This is the foundation of Jewish belief and practice; the fact that there is an omnipotent G-d, who is involved with our world, is what establishes the validity of the rest of Torah. Ramban writes similarly. (*Hasagot* to Aseh 1 and Lo Taaseh 5)

In contrast, the author of Halachot Gedolot (*Bahag*, cited in Ramban's *Hasagot* to Aseh 1) argued in the 8<sup>th</sup> century that this Divine declaration sets the stage for all other mitzvot, but is not a mitzvah unto itself. He cites a midrash (*Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*, Yitro: BaChodesh 6) which indicates that before there can be a mitzvah, there must be a pre-mitzvah general acceptance of G-d: "This may be compared to a king who entered a land. His servants said, 'Issue decrees upon them!' He replied, 'No; when they accept my reign, I will issue decrees upon them. If they do not accept my reign, how will they fulfill my decrees?' So G-d declared to Israel, 'I am G-d, your Lord. You shall not have the gods of others before Me.' I am the One whose reign you accepted in Egypt.' They replied, 'Yes.' Then just as you accepted My reign, so You shall accept My decrees: You shall not have, etc."

*To be continued next week...*

**Weekly Highlights: Jan. 5 – Jan. 11 / 28 Tevet – 5 Shevat**

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
<b>Shabbat Jan. 4-5</b>				
<b>Fri. 4:20 PM</b>	<b>Ezer Diena</b>	<b>Parshah/Kugel: <i>Dam</i></b>	<b>BAYT</b>	<b>TFBM</b>
<b>10:30 AM</b>	R' Alex Hecht	Post-Hashkamah Parshah	Clanton Park	
<b>After musaf</b>	<b>Ezer Diena</b>	<b>Derashah: Moshe's Message</b>	<b>BAYT</b>	<b>JLIC/YAU Minyan</b>
<b>3:40 PM</b>	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
<b>After minchah</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	<b>Simcha Suite</b>
<b>6:30 PM</b>	R' Elihu Abbe	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	<b>Not this week</b>
<b>Tue. Jan. 8</b>				
<b>10:00 AM</b>	<b>R' Mordechai Torczyner</b>	<b>Michah: Save Us From Well-Meaning People</b>	<b>Adath Israel</b>	<b>Women; there is a fee info@adathisrael.com</b>
<b>1:30 PM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah: Chapters 7-8	Shaarei Shomayim	
<b>7:30 PM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua: Chapter 16	129 Theodore Pl.	<b>Men</b>
<b>Wed. Jan. 9</b>				
<b>10:00 AM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Strange Story of Daniel Week 1: The Fiery Furnace	Beth Emeth	<a href="http://www.torontotorah.com/daniel">www.torontotorah.com/daniel</a> to register
<b>7:30 PM</b>	R' Alex Hecht	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Controversies	Shaarei Tefillah	
<b>7:30 PM</b>	Ezer Diena	Ripped from the Headlines	BAYT	
<b>Thu. Jan. 10</b>				
<b>1:30 PM</b>	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel: Chapters 5-6	49 Michael Ct.	<b>Women</b>
<b>8:30 PM</b>	Ezer Diena	Gemara Beitzah	ediena@torontotorah.com	
<b>Fri. Jan. 11</b>				
<b>10:30 AM</b>	R' Elihu Abbe	Kiddushin	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: R' Alex Hecht: Bishul Akum**

**8:30 AM Tuesday, Ezer Diena, Stories and She'eilot**

**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**