

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Toldot

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Miriam Frankel and her children,
Mark and Judy, Ralph and Gitty, Esty and all their families,
l'zecher nishmat Aron Frankel, Aron Mechel ben Chaim Meir a"h, on his eleventh yahrtzeit

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Robert and Karyn Goldberger ל"ל ז"ל
in memory of Robert's father Arye Goldberger ז"ל, on his fifth yahrtzeit

Was Esav a Believer?

Rabbi Alex Hecht

Did Esav believe in G-d?

The Talmud accused Esav of denying the principle of G-d's existence. (Bava Batra 16b) This is apparent from his readiness to sell the birthright to Yaakov for a bowl of lentil soup (Bereishit 25:34); he despised the birthright and the service of G-d, and ostensibly viewed religion in general as pointless. On the other hand, Esav placed so much value on his father Yitzchak's blessings that he broke down crying after they were given to Yaakov, begging his father, "Have you [but] one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father." And Esau raised his voice and wept." (27:38, chabad.org tr.) If Esav believed, why did he sell the birthright? If Esav did not believe, why did he care so much about his father's blessing for G-d to provide sustenance?

1: Not religious, just jealous

Perhaps Esav did not believe, but he was still angry when Yaakov received what he did not. As he said of Yaakov, "For he has deceived me twice; he took my birthright, and behold, now he has taken my blessing." (27:36, chabad.org tr.) Arguably, Esav could not tolerate his brother receiving something that he did not receive.

2: Religious, but not law-abiding

Alternatively, perhaps Esav believed in some form of "higher power", but rejected the birthright because of the laws that accompanied it.

In utero, Esav demonstrated religious

inclinations; he would try to exit the womb when his mother Rivkah passed houses of idol worship. (Bereishit Rabbah 63:6) If so, it is not surprising that Esav placed value on Yitzchak's blessings for abundance.

However, Rashi records a conversation between Yaakov and Esav about the birthright: Esav asked Yaakov about the nature of the Divine service that would come with the birthright. Yaakov replied, "There are many prohibitions and punishments and death penalties involved with it, etc." To which Esav responded, "Behold, I am going to die because of it (i.e., the birthright); if so, why should I want it?" (Rashi to 25:32, chabad.org tr.) When it came to religious restrictions, Esav was uninterested and scornful.

3: Religious, but self-indulgent

Finally, we may suggest that Esav believed in G-d intellectually, but hedonism overpowered his intellect.

Rabbi Avraham Schorr claims that the biblical word "zeh" ("this") indicates absolute recognition of the subject towards which it is directed. For example, when Bnei Yisrael saw the splitting of the sea, they exclaimed "This is my G-d" with absolute certainty. (Shemot 15:2; Shir haShirim Rabbah 3:15) Likewise, when Esav denigrated the birthright, he said, "Why do I need this birthright?" (Bereishit 25:32) Esav's expression of "this" indicates that, on an intellectual level, he recognized that the birthright was valuable. However,

his great lusts overrode this recognition. (*HaLekach v'haLibuv*, p. 32)

Similarly, Rabbi Moshe Wolfson points out that when G-d offered the Torah to the nation of Edom - descendants of Esav - they rejected the Torah when they were informed that it proscribed murder. "There was no doubt in their minds that it was G-d's Torah, but they refused it anyway...Since they weren't willing to control their desires, and they didn't think it was possible, they simply ignored the offer." (Wellsprings of Faith, pg. 19, citing Sifrei 343) Since Esav's denial of G-d's existence stemmed from lust, he fully understood the value of Yitzchak's blessings for G-d's sustenance, as they did not stifle his pursuit of the physical.

All three approaches point to Esav's pursuit of immediate satisfaction: He could not tolerate being deprived of something received by another person, even if it had no value to him; he wanted free spirituality with neither investment nor sacrifice; he put his intellect on hold to shamelessly indulge in the temporal. The blessings required the opposite: selflessness, obedience to law, and sacrifice.

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Summary

Following the capture of the Ark by the Philistines in Chapter 4, this chapter details the path of the Ark within their hands. They bring it from Even HaEzer to Ashdod and place it in the temple of Dagon. The next morning, they find the idol fallen on the floor. They straighten up the idol and leave the Ark there another night. The second morning, they find Dagon without a head or hands on the threshold of the door. Forever following, the priests of Dagon would not walk on that space.

G-d then punishes the Ashdodites with hemorrhoids, striking fear into the people, as they feel that the Ark is causing their god and them to be punished. They pass the Ark to the Philistine city of Gat, where the same thing happens. They attempt to move the Ark to Ekron, but the people of the city refuse, terrified that the same would happen to them.

Insight

Dr. Tamar Verdiger has pointed out that often in Tanach, when a power

seems to be ascendant over the Jews, and thereby G-d, an educational scene occurs to remind people that a victory over the Jews is only possible if G-d allows it (see <https://bit.ly/33fsFFR>). She makes this point in the context of Pharaoh, who Moshe tries to educate throughout the Exodus, and Daniel who teaches Nevuchadnezzar about G-d by telling him and interpreting his dream. In the latter case, this is particular striking as G-d refers to Nevuchadnezzar (unbeknownst to him presumably) as His servant to carry out punishments against the Jews. (Jeremiah 25:9) In each case, the king in question considered himself godlike, and thus required a reminder that this was not the case.

In this chapter, the same dynamic seems to be at play. The Ark represents G-d, and indeed the Philistines are terrified when they first see the Ark in war, afraid that G-d has entered the battlefield. With that fear as background, their belief in the power of G-d must have been severely weakened when they beat the Jews

and captured the Ark. By punishing the Philistines and destroying their idol, G-d makes it clear that He is still the powerful One behind the scenes. The subsequent steps that the Philistines take to return the Ark indicate that they have internalized this lesson.

The double pronged attack, against the people and the idols, is reminiscent of the Egypt story. Describing the Plague of the Firstborn, G-d specifies that His attacks are against every living creature, human or animal, and also against the gods of Egypt. (Shemot 12:12) The people are punished for what they did wrong, but G-d focuses on the idolatrous pantheon as well to make a point - "I am G-d."

Admittedly, our chapter only highlights that the Philistines did not fully lose faith in Dagon, as the priests treat the place where it fell as sacred. In a polytheistic world, however, they could believe in the power of G-d without abandoning belief that Dagon was a god.

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Holy Land Halachah: A Kohen at the Graves of the Righteous**Rabbi Sammy Bergman****May a Kohen visit Me'arat HaMachpelah? Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Yechaveh Daat 4:58**

Question: May Kohanim visit Me'arat HaMachpelah, Rachel's Tomb, or other graves of righteous people who are buried in the confines of our Holy Land?

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef begins by quoting two different arguments which would allow Kohanim to visit the graves of the righteous nowadays:

1. Elijah the Prophet: The righteous don't contaminate

A midrash states that when the Romans murdered Rabbi Akiva, Elijah the Prophet and Rabbi Yehoshua carried Rabbi Akiva's body on their shoulders together. Rabbi Yehoshua asked Elijah how he could carry the corpse, as he was a Kohen, and forbidden from contracting impurity from a dead body. Elijah answered: "By your life, Rabbi Yehoshua, there is no impurity for Torah Scholars, nor for their students." (Midrash Mishlei 9:1) Based on this midrash, Kohanim would be permitted to visit the graves of the righteous, because they would not contract impurity by doing so.

2. Raavad: Kohanim nowadays are already impure

Raavad, in his challenges to Rambam (Laws of Nezirut 5:15), states that nowadays, we assume Kohanim have contracted impurity from dead bodies, and therefore, aren't liable for additional contact with corpses. Rabbi Yehudah Rosanes (Mishneh l'Melech, Laws of Mourning, Chapter 3) understands that according to Raavad, there is no longer a prohibition for Kohanim to become impure.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef dismisses each of these arguments for the following reasons:

1. Reasons not to rely on Elijah the Prophet

According to various passages in the Talmud, the dead

bodies of the righteous do cause impurity. Sukkah 25b states that the bearers of Yosef HaTzaddik's coffin became impure. Bava Batra 58a notes that Rabbi Benaah posted a sign marking the grave of Avraham. Rashbam, Tosafot, and other commentators explain that Rabbi Benaah did this in order to prevent ritual impurity.

Based on these sources, many commentators, including Ritva (Megilah 3b) and Meiri (Yevamot 61a), reject the statement of Elijah as he is quoted in Midrash Mishlei, since it contradicts the ruling of the Talmud. Rather, Tosafot (Bava Metzia 114b) argue that Rabbi Akiva's body was left unattended. Therefore, Elijah had an obligation to bury him, even though doing so made him impure. His reply to Rabbi Yehoshua was merely intended to deflect the question.

In truth, Ramban (Bamidbar 19:2) and Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah #263) rule in accordance with Midrash Mishlei, that bodies of the righteous don't cause impurity. However, Rabbi Yosef argues that Ramban may have permitted Kohanim to participate in the actual burial of the righteous, but not to visit their graves.

2. Reasons not to rely on the Raavad

Most rabbinic authorities argue against Raavad, including Rambam and Rabbeinu Tam. Also, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (Dagul MeiRevavah, Yoreh Deah 372) argues that Raavad agrees there is a biblical prohibition against Kohanim contracting additional impurity from a dead body. Raavad's argument just exempts Kohanim who become impure from receiving lashes.

Therefore, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef concludes that Kohanim should be advised not to visit the graves of the righteous.

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Biography
The Maharal of Prague
Rabbi Josh Gutenberg

Rabbi Yehuda ben Bezalel Loew (Maharal of Prague) was born in Posen, Poland in 1525. He studied independently in his youth and never attended a formal school or yeshiva. Yet, he achieved widespread fame for his vast knowledge of Talmud, aggadah, kabbalah and philosophy.

Maharal's first rabbinical position was in Nikolsburg, Moravia, where he served between 1553 and 1573. He was the main rabbinic authority in the city, and he was responsible for choosing the talmudic tractate that would be studied in each community. He moved to Prague in 1573, but he did not hold a formal rabbinic position. He taught in a local shul, where he was able to impart his methodology for learning to his students. He was also responsible for formalizing the chevra kadisha, which became standard in many other European communities. Ten years later, the Chief Rabbi position in Prague became available, but Maharal did not receive the position, so he moved to Posen where he was appointed Chief Rabbi. In separate periods during the ensuing years he served as Chief Rabbi in Posen and in Prague, before retiring from his rabbinic duties in 1604.

Maharal's written works cover a wide spectrum of Jewish studies. Gur Aryeh is his commentary to Rashi's commentary on the Torah, and his Be'er haGolah discusses and explains difficult passages in the Talmud. He wrote a book on ethics titled Netivot Olam, and a commentary on Pirkei Avot titled Derech Chaim. He also wrote many works related to the Jewish holidays, including: Gevurot Hashem for Pesach, Or Chadash for Purim and Ner Mitzvah for Chanukah. His works on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot have all been lost.

Many legends claim that Maharal created a golem, a clay creature, to defend the Jews in Prague from anti-Semitic acts; most scholars deny the veracity of these legends.

Maharal died in Prague in 1609. He was buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague, and his grave is visited by thousands of people each year.

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Torah and Translation
The Trait of the Tam
Maharal, Netivot Olam, Netiv haTemimut I
Translated by Rabbi Adam Friedmann

מי שיש בו מדת התמימות שאינו יוצא חוץ מתמימותו ואינו מתחכם בתחבולה כלל ולפיכך בעל המדה הזאת אינו סר מן הש"י, כי כל מי שהוא מתחכם ויוצא בחכמתו חוץ לתמימות מה שהוא בעצמו דבר זה הסרה מן הש"י כאשר יוצא בתחבולות חכמתו, וזה בודאי הסרה מן הש"י. ולפיכך אצל אדם הראשון קודם שחטא והיה עם הש"י לא היה בו תחבולות חכמה יתירה, והנחש שהיה ערום היה מרוחק מן הש"י, ובערמת הנחש הסית ג"כ את האדם שנאמר ונפקחו עיני שניכם והייתם כאלקים יודעי טוב ורע, ודבר זה ידיעה יתירה חוץ מעצמו של אדם ובחכמה זאת הסיר את האדם מן הש"י, כי ידיעת טוב ורע היא ידיעה יתירה אל האדם כי הידיעה אל הרע אין צריך אל האדם והוא שהיה גורם את המיתה לאדם, וכל אלו דברים סתרי חכמה.

ואילו לא היה זה לאדם היה חי לעולם כי כך ראוי אל התמים הנצחי, כמו שאמר בתומי אלך ותציבני לפניך לעולם, ולכן הקושיא שהקשה הרמב"ם ז"ל בספרו מו"נ וכי נותנים שכר על העבירה, שמפני שעבר מצות הש"י נתן לו שכר שידע בין טוב ובין רע והיה משכיל יותר ממה שהיה לאדם קודם, כי בודאי יצא שכרו בהפסדו כי החכמה הזאת הוא התחכמות שיצא מן התמימות וגרם לו המיתה, והיה הסבה אל הדבר הזה הנחש שעליו נאמר והנחש היה ערום מכל ועל ידי נחש באה המיתה לעולם, שמזה תראה כי כמו שהתמימות הוא החיים, וכל זמן שהאדם הראשון היה תמים היה חי ולא מקבל מיתה וע"י הנחש שהוא ערום קבל המיתה מזה:

Whoever has in him the trait of wholesomeness does not stray from simple behavior and does not act cleverly with schemes at all, and therefore one who has this trait never leaves G-d. Because whoever is clever and uses his intelligence outside of its simple nature, this itself is a separation from G-d, when he goes beyond with the schemes of his intellect, and this is certainly a separation from G-d. Therefore, the first man before the sin, who was close to G-d, didn't have within him the schemes of excessive intelligence, and the snake who was crafty was distant from G-d. And with his craftiness, the snake seduced the man as well, as it says, "Your eyes will be opened and you will be as G-d, knowers of good and evil." (Bereishit 3:5) This refers to excessive knowledge outside of the nature of Adam. With this cleverness [the snake] distanced Adam from G-d. Because knowing good and evil is extraneous knowledge for a person, since knowing evil is unnecessary for a person, and it was this that caused Adam to die, and all of these things are secrets of wisdom.

And if this had not happened to Adam he would have lived forever, because this is fitting for an eternally wholesome one. As [King David] said, "I will walk in my wholesomeness and You will stand me up before You forever." (Tehillim 41:13) Therefore, [we can answer] the question which the Rambam asked in his book the Guide for the Perplexed, (Book I, Chapter 2) "Is reward given for sins?" Since [Adam] violated the command of G-d he was given the reward of knowing between good and evil, and Adam had more enlightenment than before! [We can answer that] certainly the [act's] 'reward' was overshadowed by its loss because this knowledge was cleverness that extended beyond wholesomeness and caused him to die. And the cause of this thing was the snake, regarding whom it is said, "The snake was craftier than anything," (Bereishit 3:1) and by means of the snake, death entered the world. From this we see that wholesomeness is life, and all the time that the first man was wholesome he lived and did not receive death, and through the snake, who was crafty, he received death.

Weekly Highlights: Nov. 30 – Dec. 6 / 2 Kislev – 8 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Nov. 29-30				
Fri. pre-minchah	Ezer Diena	Parshah & Kugel: Begging for Lentils	BAYT	TFBM
10:30 AM	R' Alex Hecht	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	<i>After Hashkamah</i>
After musaf	Ezer Diena	Mini-Shiur: Yaakov, Esav & and a German OB/GYN	BAYT	YAU Minyan
Before minchah	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. Dec. 1				
8:15 AM	R' Aharon Adler	Beit haMikdash Projections in Bereishit	Yeshivat Or Chaim	
9:15 AM	Netanel Klein	Tzedakah Priorities	Adas Israel Hamilton	
9:15 AM	R' Sammy Bergman	Chagigah/Chasidut/Chevra	Shaarei Shomayim	Teens
Mon. Dec. 2				
8:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Chanukah 5780 #1: A Unique Hallel	Shomrai Shabbos	Men
Tue. Dec. 3				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Rock of Ages for the Modern Age	Adath Israel	Women; there is a fee info@adathisrael.com
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah, Ch. 24	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Shoftim, Ch. 6-7	129 Theodore Pl.	Men
Wed. Dec. 4				
6:00 AM	Ezer Diena	Gemara Succah	BAYT	<i>West Wing #2, men</i>
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Life After Death 5: Limbo, Dybbuks, Gilgul	Beth Emeth	<i>There is a fee torontotorah.com/life</i>
12:30 PM	Ezer Diena	The Ethical Challenge 3: Voluntary Disclosures	Zeifmans LLP 201 Bridgeland	Lunch served; RSVP rk@zeifmans.ca
7:30 PM	R' Alex Hecht	Bringing G-d Into Our Lives #5: Imitating G-d	Shaarei Tefillah	
8:00 PM	R' Sammy Bergman	All Things Shabbat: Boreir	Shaarei Shomayim	Open to All!
Thu. Dec. 5				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel I, Ch. 14-15	49 Michael Ct.	Women
8:30 PM	Ezer Diena	Gemara Beitzah	ediena@torontotorah.com	Men, Advanced
8:30 PM	R' Jeff Turtel	Tzurba MeiRabbanan	Shomrai Shabbos	Men
Fri. Dec. 6				
10:30 AM	R' Sammy Bergman	Bava Metzia	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM Sunday, R' Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat—Not this week

10:00 AM Sunday, Beit Midrash Rotation: R' Aharon Adler: Meat, Milk & Chanukah Candles (special time)

8:30 AM Wednesday, Ezer Diena, Mishlei

8:30 AM Friday, R' Mordechai Torczyner, Parshah

Seder Boker for Men with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM to Noon, Mon./Wed. Masechet Megilah, Orot of Rav Kook, Chovot haLevavot

10:00 AM to Noon, Tue./Thu. Parshanut on the Parshah, Sefer Shoftim, Pninei Halachah