

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayeshev

23 Kislev, 5780/December 21, 2019

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**We hope to see you this Wednesday, at our free “Tanach: Book of Failure?” program!
See what we can learn from 13 accounts of apparent failure, and hear a panel discussion on blame in Tanach!
For details and Lunch RSVP: www.torontotorah.com/failure**

Yehudah and Tamar, In Context

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

The story of Yehudah and Tamar appears as a jarring interlude interrupting the larger Yosef narrative. From a literary perspective, we are led to ask what this structuring is intended to convey.

There are several ways to contextualize the story. It can be viewed as a reaction to the sale of Yosef, a parallel to Yosef’s odyssey in Egypt, or a further chapter in the overall Bereishit arc. These options are not mutually exclusive, and all shed some light on the story. We will focus on the first one.

As Rabbi Dr. Yonatan Grossman notes, the text is telling us that the specter of Yosef’s sale haunted Yehudah throughout his ordeal. Several details indicate this:

- The story begins with the phrase, “And it happened at that time”, which is generally a connection to the previous section of the text. Rashi explains this phrase on the basis of a midrash which claims the brothers blamed Yehudah for the sale of Yosef, and therefore Yaakov’s suffering, and consequently forced him to leave.
- Yehudah’s departure from the family is described as “going down (*vayered*) from his brothers”. This is unusual terminology, which parallels Yosef’s being “taken down (*hurad*)” to Egypt.
- When Tamar challenged Yehudah with his staff and ring, she asked him if he recognized them (*haker na*). This is the phrase the brothers used when asking Yaakov to identify Yosef’s clothing. (Sotah 10b)

If this story is a response to the selling of Yosef, then we can understand somewhat better the terrible suffering Yehudah endures with the death of his two sons. This punishment was a reaction to his depriving his father of a son.

But we must still ask why Yehudah, in particular, was punished. A cursory reading of Yosef’s sale indicates that Yehudah intervened to save Yosef from death. Surely if any one brother was to be punished, it should *not* have been Yehudah.

Rashi, as noted above, relates that the brothers blamed Yehudah for the sale. This was because had Yehudah told them to stop, they would have listened. Rabbi Grossman argues that the brothers would have listened not only because of Yehudah’s recognized leadership role, but also due to his unique perspective on the sale. A careful reading shows that in their passion, the others had ceased to view Yosef as a brother. The Torah states, “Each man declared to his brother: behold, that dreamer is coming.” (Bereishit 37:20) Yosef is called a “dreamer” and is explicitly excluded from the group of brothers. Only Yehudah recognized Yosef as “our brother, our flesh.” (Ibid. 37:26) One may have thought this recognition would cast Yehudah in a better light, but it actually amplifies his moral failing. The other brothers, no longer capable of seeing Yosef as a brother, are less culpable of abandoning one. Yehudah’s unique perspective produced his jarring question, “What profit will we gain by killing our brother and covering

up his blood?” (Targum Onkelos to Bereishit 37:26) He recognized his brother, and chose to ignore his suffering. The brothers recognized Yehudah’s cool-headed judgment of the situation, and therefore accepted it. It is for this reason that Yehudah received a unique share of the punishment for the sale.

The episode with Tamar brought about Yehudah’s teshuvah. Facing Tamar and her proofs of their encounter, he found himself in a familiar situation. On the one hand, conceding to Tamar meant exposing himself to public embarrassment, which he had sought to avoid. On the other hand, denying her meant sentencing a family member to death. Yehudah was once again in a place of unquestioned authority. The choice was totally his. This time he chose to sacrifice himself, and went further than this by justifying Tamar’s actions. And ultimately, Yehudah’s ability to place his brother Binyamin before himself ensured the continuity of the Jewish people during Yosef’s trial of the brothers. His teshuvah was rewarded with two new sons.

Jews are highly ideological. In our fervor, we sometimes lose sight of one another, failing to recognize each other as brethren. Yehudah’s story teaches that as hard as this is to correct, it is not enough. We must not only recognize this brotherhood, we must be ready to sacrifice our honour, ideals, and sometimes ourselves, to protect it.

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Summary

As Shemuel grew old, his sons began to assume his leadership role, but they failed to continue their father's high standards of integrity and honesty. This prompted the nation's elders to confront Shemuel and demand the establishment of a proper monarchy, like the rest of the nations. Shemuel's angry reaction to this request was validated by Hashem, who told the prophet that this demand was actually just another attempt to reject the true, Divine monarchy. Nonetheless, Shemuel was told to cooperate with the people, while explaining to them the real impact of accepting the yoke of a man instead of G-d. Thus, Shemuel explained to the people the authority that a king would have over them, and the demands he may make upon them – taking their property, and even their children, for his service. The people were not impressed, and told Shemuel that even so, they wanted a king to rule over them. G-d then told Shemuel to indeed appoint a king, according to the nation's will.

Is monarchy good or bad?

Our chapter raises a major question – is the wish for a king inherently a good or a bad desire? The question is not new,

and it is apparent already in Devarim 17:14, when the Torah anticipates the event occurring in Shemuel: “When you will come to the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you will inherit it and settle in it, you will say, I shall set a king over myself, like all the nations around me.” Clearly, the Torah is ambiguous regarding this demand; is it a natural development and part of establishing a kingdom, or is it a negative imitation of the heathen nations around us?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 20b) discusses both Devarim and Shemuel in analyzing the biblical attitude toward human monarchy. Basically, three distinct approaches emerge:

- Rabbi Nehorai: There is no mitzvah of appointing a king, and the Torah only mentions this possibility in case the people, influenced by the surrounding nations, demand it.
- Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yosi: There is a mitzvah of appointing a king, prior to fulfilling such mitzvot as fighting Amalek and building the Beit HaMikdash.
- Rabbi Eliezer: The desirability of appointing a king depends on the motivation. If the motivation is to correct society and instill justice,

then monarchy is appropriate. If the motivation is to imitate other nations, then monarchy is improper.

Rambam (Hilchot Melachim 1:2) tends toward the third approach, which explains well the response of both Shemuel and G-d to the request for a king. They express anger, and yet G-d grants the nation's request.

The improper motivation which underlay the appointing of Shaul may have contributed to his undoing. He was unable to lead the people to accept G-d's commands – because they chose him as an escape from the yoke of heaven.

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Holy Land Halachah: Lighting an Extra Menorah to Avoid Suspicion**Ezer Diena****Rabbi Nissim Karelitz, Chut Shani, Chanukah 19:7**

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 671:8, based on Talmud, Shabbat 23a) writes that one who lives in a home that has two openings, facing different directions, must light a menorah at both openings. Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chaim 671:51) explains that this is necessary, since people passing by a menorah-less entrance might suspect that the owner did not light a menorah altogether. Therefore, there was a historical requirement to light a second menorah, so that no passerby would suspect the owner of not fulfilling this mitzvah. As Rama (Orach Chaim 671:8) notes, the additional lighting would be performed without reciting a blessing.

Rama (ibid.) also adds that since nowadays we light inside our houses, it is not necessary to light an additional menorah on each (internal) side of the house, and he claims that common custom follows this ruling.

Although in Rama's time and locale (16th century Poland) it was not common to have people light outdoors, in our day and age, and especially in Israel, many have returned to the original custom of lighting the menorah outdoors. If so, does the original requirement to light in a way that is visible to all directions also return? Or does this practice, once halted, not return?

Rabbi Nissim Karelitz rules that even with many people resuming the original custom of lighting outdoors, there is still no requirement to light an extra menorah for each side of the home. Rabbi Karelitz explains that the original requirement to light an extra menorah was only relevant at a

time when there was a universal custom of lighting the menorah outside. Nowadays, as Rabbi Karelitz puts it, “One person lights in the window, a second person lights at the entrance to their house in the stairwell, etc.” There is no common custom, and so a passerby who sees an entrance without a lit menorah will assume that the homeowner lit in a different location.

However, even if the entire Jewish people would light at the entrance of their homes, Rabbi Karelitz offers another reason to be lenient regarding lighting to avoid suspicion. As others note, the rule of making a menorah visible to everyone applies only during the first half-hour following lighting, when people would normally be passing by outside. Since today people light their menorahs at a range of times (see Mishnah Berurah 672:1), people passing by will assume that the menorah for this family was lit earlier or will be lit later. Therefore, he concludes that there is no need to light another menorah to avoid suspicion by passersby in our day.

For further discussion, see Mishnah Berurah (Dirshu Edition) Orach Chaim 671, note 89. Also, note that the Talmud cited above actually discusses the case of lighting at the entrances of courtyard; in talmudic times, homes opened on to joint courtyards, which separated the homes from the street. We have substituted “home” because our homes generally open directly to the street.

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Biography

Rabbi Yisrael Isserlein

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rabbi Yisrael Isserlein was born into a scholarly family in Marburg an Drau, now Slovenia, in 1390. (Some contend he was born in Regensburg.) He was educated by his mother's brother in Germany until the latter was killed in the "Vienna Gezeirah" pogroms of 1421. He fled the pogroms to Italy, ultimately returning home to become Rabbi in Brunn, then Marburg, and eventually Neustadt until he died in 1460. Rabbi Isserlein was the leading light for thousands of Jews during a period of pogroms and martyrdom. He was a popular orator, and he prescribed paths of repentance for Jews who had left Torah and desired to return. He corresponded with the leaders of Ashkenazi Jewry of his day, and was treated with the greatest respect.

Rabbi Isserlein and his wife Schoendlein had four sons, as well as a daughter who died as a child. Schoendlein was also scholarly, and known for specific pious practices; she is also reported (*Leket Yosher* 20) to have answered a halachic question on her husband's behalf.

Expert in both halachah and kabbalah, and reported (by Chida) to have engaged in "practical kabbalah", Rabbi Isserlein was an ascetic who devoted all of his energies to piety and the study of Torah. Rabbi Isserlein is considered one of the last great Ashkenazi authorities of the pre-Shulchan Aruch era, one of the establishers of Ashkenazi custom for centuries to come. His work was a major influence on Rabbi Moshe Isserles, author of the Ashkenazi component included in Shulchan Aruch. Rabbi Isserlein signed his letters, "The smallest and youngest in Israel".

The greatest written legacy of Rabbi Isserlein is his *Terumat haDeshen* collection of 354 responsa, which are models of brevity and clarity. Rabbi Shabbtai haKohen (*Shach*, Yoreh Deah 196:20) wrote that Rabbi Isserlein created the questions himself as a means of educating the public in halachic matters, but others disagree. Rabbi Isserlein also wrote *Hagahot Shaarei Dura* and a commentary on Rashi on Chumash. A student of his wrote *Leket Yosher*, collecting additional responsa from Rabbi Isserlein as well as his customs and anecdotes about him; some have challenged its authenticity, but the major halachic authorities of our day accept its legitimacy.

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Torah and Translation

Rabbi Isserlein's Shabbat Table

Rabbi Yaakov ben Moshe, *Leket Yosher*, I Orach Chaim 36:3

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

כשעשה קדוש בשבת או ביום טוב בלילה או ביום נטל ד' כוסות. אחד שמברך עליו נטל ביד ימינו והשני נתן בצד ימינו של כוס. והשלישי בצד שמאלו של כוס, והרביעי נתן לפני הכוס שמברך עליו. ונטל כוסות אלה משום עטור. אבל בלילה פסח או לסעודת שלישית נטל רק כוס אחד. וזכורני שא' לי שאירי מהר"ר אייזק ס"ל ז"ל, שנוהג הגאון זצ"ל להגביה הכוס בין הג' כוסות למעלה כשעור, ולא חוץ לכוסות כנגדו או לצדדיו.

וזכורני כשאמר זמירות בכל לילי שבת ששייך לומר בהם זמירות על השלחן קודם שאכל פשטיד"א. ועומד לפניו על השלחן הד' כוסות לעיטור כמו שפי' ושפך אותם מלא יין בלא מים, וכשהתחיל לומר היה מגביה כוס האמצעי מעט ועומד על השלחן. וכשמסיים הזמירות טועם מכוס האמצעי וכל היושבים על שלחנו. ונתן מאותן כוסות אחד או ב' להבחורים לטעום את כלן. ואח"כ נתן לכל אחד מן הבחורים חתיכה פשטיד"א.

ובשחרית בשבת על השלחן עשה עיטור ואמר זמירות כמו בליל שבת קדם שורטבי"ל ונתן לבחורים להבחורים כוס א' או ב'. וכן עשה ביום טוב בשחרית ואמר רק זמר שלו [שעשה שכתבתי אותו בהלכות פסח לקמן]. ואם נשלח לו יין ביום טוב מן הבעלי בתים לדורון, שפך לאותן כוסות ונתן כוס אחד להבחורים או יותר.

ובליל שבת אמר כל מקדש שביעי ומה ידידות מנוחתך, לפעמים מה יפית. לפעמים זמר אחר השייך לענינו של יום, כגון מעוז צור ישועתי בחנוכה. ובשבת שחרית ברוך ד' יום וברוך קל עליו ויום זה מכובד, ולפעמים זמר אחר מענינו של יום כגון יום שבתון לפ' נח.

[Preface: The Talmud (Berachot 51a) prescribes practices to be observed when a cup of wine is used for a ritual. One of those is *itur*, to ring the cup with a 'crown'; Rav Yehudah crowned the cup with a ring of students, and Rav Chisda crowned it with a ring of cups.]

When [Rabbi Yisrael Isserlein] made *kid-dush* on the night of Shabbat or Yom Tov, he used four cups. The one on which he blessed, he held in his right hand, and he placed the second one on the right side of this cup. The third was on the left side of the cup. The fourth was in front of the cup on which he blessed. He took these cups to fulfill *itur*. But on Pesach night, and for the third meal, he used only one cup. And I recall that my brother-in-law, Rabbi Isaac Sel z"l, told me that the Gaon zt"l would raise the [main] cup a minimum height above the other three cups, but not outside of them before himself or to the side.

And I recall how he sang on every Friday night when one could sing songs at the table, before eating *pashtida* [a starchy food with a filling]. The four cups stood before him for *itur*, as I have explained, and he filled them with wine, without water. And when he began to sing, he raised the middle cup a bit and stood by the table. And when he finished the songs he tasted from the middle cup, as did all who sat at his table. And he gave from those cups for one or two of the youths to taste all of them, and then he gave each of the youths a piece of *pashtida*.

And on Shabbat morning he did *itur* at the table and sang songs like on Friday night, before *sur table* ["on the table"]. And he gave the youths a cup or two. And so he did on Yom Tov morning, and he sang only his own song [which I have recorded in the laws of Pesach]. And if householders sent him wine on Yom Tov as a gift, he poured it into those cups and gave one cup, or more, to the youths.

And on Friday night he sang *Kol mekadash shevii* and *Mah yedidut menuchateich*, and sometimes *Mah yafit*. Sometimes another song related to the day's nature, like *Maoz tzur yeshuati* on Chanukah. And on Shabbat morning *Baruch Hashem yom yom*, *Baruch Kel elyon* and *Yom zeh mechubad*, and sometimes another song of the day's nature, like *s nature*, like *Yom shabbaton* for Parshat Noach.

Failure Preview: Yiftach: Just Say No to Human Sacrifice!

Ezer Diena

Yiftach, the *shofeit* and military leader of his day, vowed that if he would succeed in battle against the Amonites, then upon his return home he would offer the first thing to emerge from his house as an *olah* to Hashem. (Shoftim 11:30-31) Upon his victorious return from war, Yiftach was distraught to find that his daughter was the first to leave the doors of his house. He tore his clothes in grief. (11:35) Despite his clear distress at having to fulfill his promise, Yiftach killed his daughter. (Talmud, Taanit 4a)

There were clearly many failures in this entire saga, but possibly none more troubling than the fact that Yiftach could have easily avoided carrying out this terrible act!

Malbim notes that not only was the original promise invalid, since a person is not considered to be a proper *olah* offering, but in addition, Yiftach could have taken advantage of the rite of *hatarat nedarim*, and annulled this vow. Furthermore, Targum Yonatan (11:39) notes that he could have redeemed his consecration for money. Finally, we can add that although it is certainly meritorious to keep one's word, it is certainly worse to kill one's child!

Yiftach clearly cared about his daughter (as well as G-d's will), so why didn't he try to avoid this awful ending, which neither he nor G-d desired? Come find out on Wednesday, at 9:30 AM! www.torontotorah.com/failure

Weekly Highlights: Dec. 21 – Dec. 27 / 23 Kislev – 29 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Dec. 20-21				
10:30 AM	R' Alex Hecht	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	After Hashkamah
Before minchah	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
7:30 PM	Beit Midrash	Would the Maccabees Participate in the Maccabee Games?	37 Michael Ct.	Melaveh Malkah University Men
Sun. Dec. 22				
9:15 AM	Netanel Klein	Contemporary Halachah	Adas Israel Hamilton	Not this week
9:15 AM	R' Sammy Bergman	Chagigah/Chasidut/Chevra	Shaarei Shomayim	Teens
10:00 AM to 11:20 AM	Mrs. Orly Turtel R' Sammy Bergman	The Nature of Miracles The Dark Side of Chanukah	Midreshet Yom Rishon Forest Hill Jewish Centre	Women Light Refreshments
Tue. Dec. 24				
Chanukah, Day 2				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Yeshayah	Shaarei Shomayim	Not this week
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Shoftim	129 Theodore Pl.	Not this week
Wed. Dec. 25				
Chanukah, Day 3				

9 AM TO 4:30 PM TANACH: BOOK OF FAILURE? 1 DAY, 14 INSPIRING PERSPECTIVES!

For the roster of classes, see www.torontotorah.com/failure

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Free Pizza Lunch Served, but please RSVP for lunch to info@torontotorah.com

Thu. Dec. 26				
Chanukah, Day 4				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Shemuel	49 Michael Ct.	Not this week
8:30 PM	Ezer Diena	Gemara Beitzah	ediena@torontotorah.com	Not this week
8:30 PM	R' Sammy Bergman	Shabbat: Laws of Boreir	Shaarei Shomayim	Not this week
8:30 PM	R' Jeff Turtel	Tzurba MeiRabbanan	Shomrai Shabbos	Men
Fri. Dec. 27				
Chanukah, Day 5				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Bava Metzia: Perek 6	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Not this week

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM Sunday, R' Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat

11:00 AM Sunday, Beit Midrash Rotation: Not this week

8:30 AM Wednesday, Ezer Diena, Mishlei Not this week

8:30 AM Friday, R' Mordechai Torczyner, Parshah Not this week

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

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

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