

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Ki Tisa/Parah

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Your Greatness Depends On Them

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

As soon as the Jews commit the sin of the Golden Calf, G-d demands that Moshe descend from Sinai. The Talmud interprets this to mean, "Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, descend from your greatness. Isn't it only for the sake of Israel, so that you may serve as an emissary, that I granted you prominence; and now that Israel has sinned, why do I need you? There is no need for an emissary." (Berachot 32a, Koren translation)

However, before Moshe left, G-d spoke again. "Leave Me be, that I may destroy them. (Shemot 32:10)" It seems that the Talmud senses that Moshe had responded to G-d's first demand with shocked silence. Had G-d indeed wanted Moshe to allow Him to destroy the Jews, G-d would have simply let Moshe vacate Sinai. However, G-d surprises Moshe with a second request, that Moshe leave Him alone. Moshe now understood that G-d wanted the opposite; otherwise, why hadn't he allowed him to crawl away in silent shame? By insisting that Moshe leave Him alone, Moshe understood that G-d was giving him an opening. As the Talmud phrases it, he understood that this matter was dependent on him. If Moshe would defend the Jewish people, he would succeed.

There is a tension in the Aggadic understanding of this story:

- At first, the Talmud claims that Moshe's greatness depended on the

Jewish people. Thus, when they sinned, he no longer deserved to remain in Heaven with G-d.

- However, as the Talmud notes, G-d did not actually want Moshe to leave. He signaled that He wanted him to remain and fight. Thus, he was worthy. As the Talmud describes it, Moshe was the friend of the king, uniquely situated to intervene on behalf of a wayward prince. So which is it – is Moshe only great because of the people, or can he be great even when they fall?

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (*Reshimot Shiurim* to Berachot 32a) notes this problem and argues that we must sharpen our understanding of the two parts of this talmudic passage. When G-d said, "Why do I need you?" He was not saying that the greatness of a leader is **proportional to** that of the people he leads. Rather, a leader's status derives from **being a leader**, with the gifts needed to guide his people. If he loses his flock, he loses his right to leadership. Hence, Moshe's status was threatened as G-d was about to annihilate the Jews.

However, when Moshe realized that G-d wanted him to intervene, he became an even greater kind of leader – one who is willing to sacrifice himself for his people. He didn't just lead the Jews, or even represent them. He put their wellbeing ahead of his own. Rabbi Soloveitchik notes that it was only this act of self-sacrifice that Moshe transformed. When he came down from

Sinai the second time, his face shone. By being willing to give himself up, he gained personal sanctity, as the lead.

Tanach often emphasizes that it is precisely the ability to put others first, even at the expense of oneself, that allows for personal greatness. As we read this past week, Mordechai tells Esther that she needs to save the Jews, but not because they would be lost without her. Indeed, he insists that "if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter." G-d would find a way, with or without Esther. Mordechai's argument is different and counterintuitive - Esther is required to act so **she** will not perish. "And who knows, perhaps you became royalty for precisely such a time!" (Esther 4:14)

True greatness comes from the realization that putting oneself first is the best way to remain unimportant. To be able to be there for others, even when it is hard, even when it seems that it requires giving up too much, is precisely how we transcend ourselves and become something bigger. It is Moshe's legacy, Esther's lesson, and our challenge.

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Our chapter begins immediately after David's slaying of Goliath. David seems poised to become a member of King Saul's household, as Saul had declared that his daughter would marry the one who would defeat Goliath. Further, Yehonatan, son of Saul, immediately develops a deep emotional bond with David, forges a covenant with him and gives David his cloak, armor, and weaponry as a demonstration of their relationship. (Radak 18:4) Furthermore, as an indication that he wants David to become a member of his own household, Saul enjoins David not to return to his father's house. (Malbim 18:2) After seeing David succeed in everything that Saul sends him to accomplish, Saul appoints David over his army. David's prominence is applauded by all of Israel and all of Saul's servants. (18:1-5)

However, as David continues to succeed and his reputation grows, Saul becomes wary of David's power. When David returns from battling the Philistines, the women of Israel praise the Jewish army by saying: "Saul has struck with his thousands, and David with his tens of thousands." Saul is angered by the impression that David's success has

surpassed his own, and he plots to take David's life. Saul throws his spear in David's direction as David plays his lyre, and David avoids the spear twice. Saul then demotes David from being the general of the entire army, to an officer in charge of one thousand soldiers. However, David continues to be successful in all his ways and to demonstrate that G-d is with him. Furthermore, his popularity among the people continues to skyrocket. This causes Saul to dread David even more. (18:6-16)

Although he had already promised his daughter Meirav to the one who would vanquish Goliath, Saul schemes to use both Meirav and his other daughter, Michal, in plots to endanger David. First, he tries to prompt David to earn Meirav's hand further by waging war with the Philistines, hoping that David will die in the process. However, David humbly refuses the offer, and argues that he doesn't deserve to be the king's son-in-law. Instead, Meirav marries Adriel the Meholathite. Next, Michal falls in love with David, and Saul now encourages David to win Michal's hand. King Saul orders his servants to participate in convincing David as well.

David argues that he can't offer Saul an appropriate dowry for his daughter. Hoping that David will fall in battle, the king says that the only dowry he requires is that David kill one hundred Philistines. However, once again David is successful in battle and returns having killed two hundred Philistines, forcing Saul to allow David to marry Michal. Although King Saul sees that Hashem is with David, and that his daughter Michal loves him, Saul continues to harbor resentment for David. (18:17-30)

This story demonstrates the futility of interfering with Hashem's divine plan. Seeing David's success, Saul fears that David will succeed him as king. However, all of his attempts only propel David to further greatness.

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Holy Land Halachah: Eating in Others' Homes in Israel

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

In many communities outside of Israel (like Toronto), local kashrut organizations oversee a majority of kosher food production. As a result, most of the food that people have in their homes is of the same kashrut standard. In Israel, the kashrut scene is much more complex. The Chief Rabbinate offers kosher certification at two different levels of stringency. The lower level, called simply "kosher", has guidelines which are intended to be uniformly applied across the country. The higher level, "kosher *lemehadrin*", also has general basic requirements which can be modified by the rabbinate of different municipalities. In addition to the Chief Rabbinate, organizations from various *chareidi* communities offer certification at an even higher level of stringency. Even an educated consumer can have problems deciding what and where to eat. Community rabbis generally offer lists of certifications that they deem acceptable. Given the large spectrum of options, questions arise about eating at someone else's home. May one who generally accepts only more stringent certifications eat in the home of someone who relies on more lenient ones?

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed dealt with this question in a recent column for the Israeli weekly *BaSheva* (<https://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/418087>). His argument begins with an assumption about the relative halachic weight of positions held by the different certifications in Israel. Based on his knowledge of the system, Rabbi Melamed asserts that the basic certification of the Chief Rabbinate fulfills all basic requirements of halachah. It accepts leniency only where warranted. As such, the additional care taken by the higher level certifications is non-essential stringency (*chumrah*). While it is certainly commendable to be more stringent, this distinction has practical ramifications.

The Talmud (Pesachim 51b) outlines the rules for one who comes from a place which practices a certain stringency and visits a place where the community is lenient. The conclusion is that the visitor should maintain the stringent practice, but only if this can be done inconspicuously. If the practice is noticeable, it may cause arguments, and is therefore forbidden. Given Rabbi Melamed's first assumption above, this gemara indicates that while visiting another's home one is forbidden from openly indicating their own practice of relying only on higher level kashrut, if the host does not. Of course, this is assuming that the host is familiar with, and observing, the basic halachot of kashrut. Rabbi Melamed brings a few other sources from Chazal to reinforce this point.

The exception to this general prohibition of stringencies while eating out is for stringencies which are widely known, and will therefore not cause any fighting. Rabbi Melamed cites three examples: Not eating *kitniyot* on Pesach, eating only *glatt* kosher meat, and only eating certain vegetables that were grown in a way that prevents insect infestation.

Among the criticisms of Rabbi Melamed's position is that even though the lower level certifications commit in theory to basic halachic standards, the practical implementation is not always at this level. This is something which, arguably, is not true of the more stringent certifications.

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Biography

Rabbi Malkiel Tannenbaum

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Rabbi Malkiel Tzvi HaLevi Tannenbaum was born in 1847 in Motele, Russia (now Belarus). From his youth he was known not only for his brilliance and sharpness, but also for his devotion to, and zeal for, Torah study. He learned at the famed yeshiva of Volozhin, and after his marriage (at the age of 19), he continued his learning in the city of Korelitz, where he was supported by his father-in-law.

Following a failed attempt to go into the business world, in 1877 Rabbi Tannenbaum accepted the rabbinate of Bodky – a small town of about 600 hundred Jews. He soon became known for his responsa, which were written in a clear and lucid style, avoiding distracting tangents and demonstrating his great analytical skill.

After more than ten years in Bodky, Rabbi Tannenbaum was called to the much larger and more central community of Łomża, Poland, a city of nearly 10,000 Jews. There, he proved himself not only as a great halachist and deep-thinking intellectual, but also as a public figure and a charismatic leader. Rabbi Tannenbaum opposed the movements of Haskalah (enlightenment) and Zionism, and was chosen by the Russian government to take part in the general rabbinic assembly in St. Petersburg in 1910, where they planned to discuss the requirements necessary to be recognized by the government as an official Rabbi. Although he was unwell at that time, and had completely ceased to answer halachic questions for the previous three years, he saw the convention as having great importance for the future of the Russian Jewish community, and so he embarked on the journey to St. Petersburg. He attended the convention and voiced his opinion that recognition as a Rabbi should not be contingent on secular knowledge. However, on his way back he became seriously ill, and he died on Nissan 5, 5670 (1910). After great efforts, the people of Łomża were able to claim his body and he was buried among the people he had led for more than a decade.

Rabbi Tannenbaum published 5 volumes of his Responsa Divrei Malkiel, which are still well-known to this day.

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Torah and Translation

Avoiding Panic in a Time of Plague

Rabbi Malkiel Tannenbaum, Divrei Malkiel 2:90

Translated by Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

באשר בעת הזאת נראתה בעוה"ר בכמה עיירות מחלה הנקראת חלי רע, וגם בעירנו קרה איזה מקרים, אך מעטים המה ומתו מזה בעיר רק שלשה נפשות במשך ששה שבועות. ואחד מהם היה זקן יותר משבעים שנה. רק בכפר הסמוך לפה כתחום שבת חלו הרבה ומתו מהם כשמונה אנשים. ובאיזה עיירות הסמוכות היתה המחלה בזעף ר"ל. ונשאלתי למעשה אם צריכים להתאבל. כי בש"ע סי' שע"ד איתא שי"א שבשעת הדבר אין מתאבלין משום ביעתותא. ואמרתי לברר דין זה...

ונראה הכוונה דבעידן ריתחא יש הרבה מתים ר"ל. ואם יתאבלו כל קרובי המתים אזי יפול הפחד מאוד על החיים כי יהא ניכר שמתו כבר הרבה. אבל כשלא יתאבלו. לא יהא ניכר הדבר כ"כ.

ולכאורה יש לפרש באופן אחר שהאבלים בעצמם יהי להם ביעתותא ופחד בשבתם עצורים בביתם ויוכל להזיק לבריאותם... ומוכח כפירוש הראשון:

ונ"מ בין הפירושים לדינא היכא שנגלה בעיר מחלת הדבר ר"ל ונחלו הרבה בחולי זה ר"ל. אבל לא מתו רק אחדים באופן שלא שייך כלל שיפחדו מריבוי המתים. דלפירוש השני שייך גם בזה שלא יתאבל משום ביעתותא של האבלים בעצמן. ולפירוש הראשון לא שייך זה וצריך להתאבל. ועוד נ"מ אם אחד רוצה לקיים מצות אבלות. דלפירוש הראשון שפיר שרי אם יודע בירור שהאבלים משאר המתים אינם מתאבלין. דמאחד לא יהי בעיתותא. אבל לפירוש הב' אסור לו להביא א"ע לידו סכנה...

והנה לפ"ז צריך לבאר כמה הוא שיעור המתים שיהא מותר שלא לנהוג אבלות... היכא שלפי ראות עיני הדיין כבר הוחזק שם דבר בעיר בפי כל ואיכא ביעתותא כשידעו מן המתים הרבים... ד' יגדור פרצות עמו ב"י ויבולע המות לנצח בבי"א:

allowed if he knows that those grieving the other casualties will not observe mourning rituals – for one mourner will not cause fright. But according to the second explanation he is not allowed to put himself into danger...

According to this we need to clarify: what is the number of deaths from which it is permissible not to observe mourning rituals? ...Where according to the judge's [understanding] the word about the plague is already [circulating] in the whole city, and there will be fright when the large number of deaths will become known. ... May the Almighty rebuild the breached walls of His people Israel, and death will be swallowed forever speedily in our days, Amen.

At this time, we have seen, in our sins, many cities affected with the disease named cholera. [Rabbi Tannenbaum employs the Hebrew words *choli ra*, which mean "bad illness"]. In our city also there have been some instances, albeit few, so only three people have died in a six-week period, with one of them above seventy years old. However, in a village near here, within *techum shabbat* [approximately one kilometer], many have fallen sick and about eight have died. In some nearby cities the sickness is raging, may G-d save us. So, I was asked if there is an obligation to observe mourning rites, for in Shulchan Aruch [Yoreh Deah] 374 an opinion is brought that during a plague no mourning rituals are conducted due to fright. I have set out to explain this law...

It seems the intention is that at a time of wrath there are many who die, may G-d save us. Thus, if all of the relatives of all those who have died will observe mourning rituals, that will scare the living greatly, because it will be clear that many have died. But, if there will be no mourning rituals, the [death] won't be as apparent.

One could suggest another explanation, that the mourners themselves may have fear and anxiety when they remain closed in their homes, and that may damage their health... But it is clear that the first explanation is correct.

A practical difference between these two explanations is where a plague is discovered in a city, may G-d save us, and many fall sick from this illness, may G-d save us. However, only a few have died, in a way that it is impossible for people to fear a great number of casualties. According to the second explanation, [the avoidance of rituals] is still relevant in such a case, so as to not cause fear for the mourners themselves. According to the first explanation, fear is not relevant and one is required to observe mourning rituals. Another practical difference is if one still wants to observe mourning rituals. According to the first explanation, this is

Weekly Highlights: Mar. 14 – Mar. 20 / 18 Adar – 24 Adar

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
Daily				
Mon-Thu 8:00 AM	Netanel Klein	Gemara Moed Katan	Clanton Park	Men
Mar. 13-14				
10:30 AM	R' Alex Hecht	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	After Hashkamah
Pre-minchah	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Not this week
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. Mar. 15				
8:15 AM	TBD	Contemporary Halachah	Yeshivat Or Chaim	
9:15 AM	R' Sammy Bergman	Chagigah, Chasidut, Chevra	Shaarei Shomayim	Teens
9:15 AM	Netanel Klein	Contemporary Halachah	Adas Israel, Ham.	Not this week
Tue. Mar. 17				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah Chap. 36-37	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim Chap. 11-12	129 Theodore Pl.	Men
Wed. Mar. 18				
10:00 AM	R' Sammy Bergman	Seder! Week 2 of 3 Tastes of the Seder	Beth Emeth	RSVP <i>torontotorah.com/seder</i>
7:30 PM	R' Alex Hecht	Stories from the Talmud	Shaarei Tefillah	Not this week
7:30 PM	R' Sammy Bergman	Ancient Texts, Modern Dilemmas	Shaarei Shomayim	Not this week

8:00 PM Haggadah Night at Shaarei Shomayim!

Ten-minute, Seder-ready Torah thoughts!

Dedicated by Raquel and Jason Goldberg, in memory of their daughter Temima a"h

Ezer Diena: The Start of the Seder

Rabbi Alex Hecht: V'He She'amdah

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: Perek: Psychological Warfare

Rabbi Sammy Bergman: Chad Gadya

Thu. Mar. 19				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel, Chap. 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. Mar. 20				
10:30 AM	R' Sammy Bergman	Bava Metzia: Perek 6	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

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

11:00 AM Sunday, Beit Midrash Rotation - R' Alex Hecht: Asking a non-Jew to Break Shabbat

8:30 AM Wednesday, Ezer Diena, Mishlei

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

For University Women

6:00-8:00 PM Sunday at Yeshivat Or Chaim, R' Sammy Bergman: The Mystery of the Red Heifer

7:00-9:00 PM Tuesdays at BAYT, Open Beit Midrash

8:30 PM Thursdays at Shaarei Shomayim, R' Sammy Bergman, In-Depth Gemara: Laws of Shabbat

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

10:00 AM to Noon, Mon/Wed Masechet Taanit, Orot haTeshuvah of Rabbi Kook, Pninei Halachah

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