

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayera

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Rabbi Dr. Mervyn and Joyce Fried and Family  
in honour of the yahrtzeit of Mervyn's mother, אשת וירה בת ישראל משה הלוי ז"ל

### A Time to Pray, a Time to Act

### Ezer Diana

Our parshah tells the story of Hagar and her son being sent away by Avraham, on Sarah and Hashem's command. [The son is not named in the Torah, but is presumed to be the 17-year old Yishmael.] Avraham arises early in the morning and gives them bread and water for their journey into the desert of Be'er Sheva. Sometime later, their water supply runs out, and the child (who, according to Bereishit Rabbah 53:13, is ill) is cast under one of the shrubs by his mother. Realizing the inevitable ending to the story, she leaves the area so as not to witness her son's death, and cries out. However, Hashem sends a messenger, who tells her not to fear, and Hashem shows her a nearby well, from which she fills her jug and gives her son to drink, saving his life. (Bereishit 21:9-21)

Although the Torah explicitly describes Hagar's cries (21:16), it then states that "G-d heard the cries of the child" (21:17). Why does the Torah specify that the cries of the child were the ones G-d answered?

- 1) Rashi, citing Bereishit Rabbah 53:14, suggests that an ill person's prayer on their own behalf is heard ahead of others who may be praying on behalf of that same ill person.
- 2) After his translation of "G-d heard the cries of the child", Targum Yonatan adds "in the merit of Avraham." It is possible that Yishmael, a son of our forefather Avraham, had his cries accepted by G-d due to him being the son of Avraham; Hagar may not have been heard on her own. (See also Rashi to Bereishit 25:21.)
- 3) Perhaps a child's cries would be

accepted over an adult's cries based on the talmudic notion (see e.g. Shabbat 119b) that young children are dear to G-d in their innocence. Although we see this primarily in regards to the value of children's Torah learning, it might be applicable for their prayers as well, and would explain why the child was answered, and not Hagar.

- 4) One final possibility is that Hagar was ignored by G-d because of her conduct during this episode. Some recent commentators, such as Malbim and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, are critical of Hagar's decision to send the child under one of the trees (21:15), and view this as abandoning her son at a time of need. It is then understandable that G-d would not listen to the cries of a mother who had just left their own child to die. (Rabbi Hirsch to 21:15)

The fourth approach is challenging; the simple read of the verses indicates no such negativity towards Hagar. Indeed, Targum Yonatan (to 21:15) describes Hagar putting Yishmael under the tree only due to her total exhaustion, and Ralbag writes that she placed him under the tree in an effort to shade him from the sun. (Beur HaMilot to 21:15)

Nevertheless, it is possible that despite Hagar's best intentions, Hashem did not hear her prayer and cries because this was not what she should have been doing at that time. This situation would then be similar to Shemot 14:15, in which Hashem's tells Moshe that it is not time to pray as the Jews stand opposite the Yam Suf with their enemies chasing them - it is actually time to

travel forward. In fact, the Divine messenger's first instruction for Hagar was "Rise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thy hand." (Koren Jerusalem Bible translation) What Hashem wanted at that time was not for Hagar to stand back and pray, but rather, despite all of her initial efforts, to remain with her son helping him, no matter what it may have taken.

We traditionally view prayer as the most spiritually appropriate response in a trying situation. However, these stories teach that sometimes, we must evaluate whether we should strive to do more than cry out to G-d. If our efforts and *hishtadlut* are done with the intention of serving G-d and not of taking the situation into our own hands, we will often be doing exactly what Hashem wanted us to do in first place.

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#### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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## Summary

Our chapter opens with King David's quest to locate Shaul's descendants, as he had assured Shaul's son, Yehonatan, that he would show kindness to his offspring in the event that Yehonatan predeceased him. (Shemuel I 20:15) David's officials located Shaul's servant, Ziva, who was brought to David and informed him that Yehonatan's disabled son, Mefiboshet, was still alive, and hiding in the house of Machir in Lo Devar. [In Shemuel II 4, we were told that Mefiboshet was left unable to walk after he was dropped by his nurse as an infant.] (9:1-4)

David summoned Mefiboshet, and assured him that he need not fear retaliation for his grandfather Shaul's behaviour; to the contrary, David intended to return all of Shaul's property to Mefiboshet, and invited him to eat at the royal table regularly. Astonished by David's kindness towards him, Mefiboshet asked, "What is your servant, that you should turn towards a dead dog like me?" (Shemuel II 9:8) David informed Ziva that he and his fifteen sons, and twenty of his own servants, would now be servants to Mefiboshet. The passage also informs us that Mefiboshet had a son, Micha. (9:5-13)

## Insight

"Ziva answered the king, 'Yes, there is still a son of Yehonatan whose feet are crippled.' 'Where is he?' the king asked, and Ziva said to the king, 'He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, in Lo Devar.'" (9:3-4, modified JPS 1985 tr.) Although the biblical text does not indicate a particular agenda in Ziva's report of Mefiboshet's whereabouts, the Talmud tells us that Ziva intended to portray Mefiboshet as a worthless person. (Shabbat 56a) According to this interpretation, "Lo Devar" does not simply refer to a place; rather, Ziva wished to convey to David that Mefiboshet was "b'lo devar" ("lacking substance"), with regard to his Torah knowledge. David soon realized that Ziva had described Mefiboshet falsely, and that he was, in fact, "malei devar" ("full of substance"). (Rashi ad loc.)

It is possible that Ziva thought that he could convince David that Mefiboshet lacked intellectual ability after describing his physical handicap. According to an [article from the Centre for Disability Studies](#), people with physical disabilities are often stereotyped as unintelligent, and are treated accordingly: "Merry Cross was made particularly conscious of the

stereotypes that are attached to people in wheelchairs when she was temporarily confined to one in place of the caliper she was then using: 'When I was in the wheelchair for three weeks, I was appalled. People patted me on the head and called me "dear" and offered to do things for me that were ludicrous.'

King David rejected these false stereotypes, and recognized Mefiboshet's towering scholarship. The Talmud describes how David would defer to Mefiboshet's opinion on all matters of Jewish law, and was not embarrassed to be corrected by him, without concern for the perception of others. (Berachot 4a)

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# The Israeli Farmer: Automated Seeding in Shemita

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

We may not sow seeds in Israel during the shemita year. But what if we load seeds into a machine which then plants them on its own? And is there a difference between an automated seeder one must direct around the fields, and an automated seeder which uses artificial intelligence to guide itself?

Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz (Chazon Ish Zeraim 25:38) prohibited such machines during shemita, for two reasons:

- 1) Regarding tort law, Rabbi Yosef Ibn Chaviva explained that one who creates a fire is liable for damage that the fire causes, because we view the damage as taking place at the moment the fire was kindled. (Nimukei Yosef, Bava Kama 10a *b'dapei Rif*) [This is also why we may light candles before Shabbat; we created the fire which burns into Shabbat at the time we lit, and we are not viewed as continually lighting the fire.] Applying this to shemita, the farmer who activates the machine is performing the act of sowing seeds at the moment she pushes the button.
- 2) Regarding the laws of Shabbat, Rabbi Yosef Babad noted that one who plants seeds doesn't actually "make them" take root; as we see regarding cooking and baking, one only creates circumstances which will **enable** that transformation. Indeed, a seed will not germinate and take root until well after Shabbat has ended! (Minchat Chinuch 298:14) Similarly, the farmer who sows seeds during shemita is liable just for creating those felicitous conditions enabling growth – and this definition of "planting seeds" will apply to someone who loads and activates an automatic seeder, too.

On the other hand, Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank contended that there could be ways to permit use of automated seeding. (Har Zvi Orach Chaim 1:208:4) He pointed out Ramban's statement that when a person plows with an animal, the animal is viewed as a tool in the hand of the farmer, like an axe in the hand of a lumberjack. This is why one is liable for plowing on Shabbat. (Ramban to Sefer haMitzvot, Shoresh 14) Rabbi Frank applied Ramban's position to argue that where the farmer does nothing to direct the machine, the machine is not his tool, and he is not liable.

Rabbi Frank's leniency would certainly apply if the machine were designed to automatically operate on its own, prevented only by an external obstruction (*moneia*). If the farmer would only need to remove the obstruction in order for the machine to function on its own schedule, the farmer's role would be entirely indirect.

In the second volume of *Techumin*, Rabbi Yisrael Rozen and Yair Meir published an article describing Zomet-designed machines which could take advantage of Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank's leniency for shemita. However, Rabbi Zev Weitman published a response in the seventh volume of *Techumin*, limiting the leniency to machines which operate without human control. Once a human being directs the plow, it is considered a tool in the hand of the farmer.

Those interested in further discussion may also look at Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, *Shemita* (Heb.) pg. 82, footnote 19.

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**Biography**  
**Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer**  
Rabbi Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer was born in Shnipisok, outside of Vilna, in 1837. He is most commonly known as one of the primary students of the *mussar* [ethical instruction] giant, Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin Salanter. A renowned scholar from a young age, Rabbi Blazer became the Chief Rabbi of St. Petersburg, Russia at the age of 25. This post earned Rabbi Blazer his commonly used diminutive nickname, Reb Itzele Peterburger. His scholarship is immortalized in a two-part collection of responsa, *Pri Yitzchak*.

Rabbi Blazer was known for more than his scholarship; his piety remains perhaps his most lasting legacy. From his writings and stories told about him, it is clear that Rabbi Blazer was strongly attached to the Yamim Noraim [High Holy Days], and he yearned for this time all year long. Once the Yamim Noraim arrived, Rabbi Blazer was profoundly focused on introspection and self-improvement, even going so far as to accept a *ta'anit dibbur* – a fast from speech – for the month of Elul.

Rabbi Blazer was responsible for bringing Rabbi Salanter's writings to print in *Or Yisrael*, and it has since become an essential text of *mussar*. *Or Yisrael* is accompanied by a collection of essays by Rabbi Blazer entitled *Kochvei Or*. These essays are explorations of key themes that Rabbi Salanter expressed in his teachings and writings.

Some of the main themes of Rabbi Blazer's teachings include repentance, honest assessment of one's actions in the context of Divine judgment, fear of G-d, and the severity of wrongdoing, especially neglect of Torah study. Rabbi Blazer, like his teacher Rabbi Salanter, draws primarily from talmudic source material, deriving practical teachings that frame proper ethical thought and behavior. In the later years of his life, Rabbi Blazer moved to Kovno, Lithuania and taught in the Kovno Kollel. From there he moved on to teaching at the Slabodka Yeshiva, led by Rabbi Natan Tzvi Finkel. Finally, in 1904, Rabbi Blazer made aliyah; he lived in Jerusalem until his death in 1907.

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**Torah and Translation**  
**The Intelligent Soul**

**Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, Kochvei Or, 35**  
Translated by Rabbi Adam Friedmann

בגמ' פסחים (קיג:) שלשה הקב"ה אוהב, מי שאינו כועס, ומי שאינו משתכר, ומי שאינו מעמיד על מידותיו. צריך להבין מה המה ג' דברים הללו.... הנה כעס הוא עבירה חמורה מאד... מעביר על מידותיו הוא ג' דבר גדול... אבל מה זה ענין שאינו משתכר, איזו מעלה היא? אינו כועס ומעביר על מידותיו הם מעלות בעצם, אבל שיכור הוא רק פחיתות גדול, ולהיפך מי שאינו משתכר אין זה מעלה בנפש האדם כי הוא דבר נקל מאד.

והנה בוהר הק' (ע" תצוה דף קפב) איתא כי מי שכועס, צלמא איתעבר מיניה. ובדרך נגלה יש לפרש כי בתורה כתיב (בראשית א') נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו. בריאת האדם הוא דבר נפלא מאד מאד. החומר של אדם הוא כמו בהמה [ובגוף חומרי זה נעשה] התקשרות נפש חיה עם בשר ודם והוא הדעת והשכל... וע"כ צריך שיהיה האדם תמיד בדעת, כל מעשיו בהשכל ודעת, וממילא מובן שילך בדרכי ד' הישרים. כללו של דבר כל מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו ישקול האדם בפלס הדעת, אך ברגע אשר יסיח דעתו, הנהו כבהמה ועלול לכל דבר רע והיזק לנטות מאחרי ד'...

והנה כמו מי שהוא כועס דעתו מטורפת, כן הוא שכרות, כידוע בחוש כי השכור יאבד את שכלו לגמרי והוא כעין משוגע!...

והקב"ה אוהב את האדם להיות כרצון הבריאה אשר נפש המשכלת תאור תמיד לנפש האדם ולא יעשה שום מעשה בלא דעת. ע"כ אוהב הקב"ה מי שאינו כועס ומי שאינו משתכר, ומי שאינו מעמיד על מדותיו, כי זה האיש הוא תמיד בדעתו ובשכלו כרצון הבריאה.

In Pesachim (113b): There are three whom G-d loves: one who does not get angry, one who does not get drunk and one who does not bear a grudge. We must understand what these three things are... Behold, anger is a very serious sin.... Not bearing a grudge is also a great thing ... But what is this mention of the one who does not get drunk, what kind of positive attribute is this? Not being angry, and not bearing a grudge are essentially positive attributes, but being drunk is only a tremendous failing, and on the contrary, when one does not get drunk, this is not a positive trait in man's self because it is very easy [to accomplish].

It is stated in the holy Zohar (Tetzaveh 182) that whoever is angry, the image [of G-d] is removed from him. In terms of revealed [Torah] we can explain that in the Torah it says, "We shall make man in Our image and likeness." (Bereishit 1) The creation of man is a very, very wondrous thing. The physical part of man is like an animal [and in this physical body is made] a connection of a living soul to flesh and blood. This (i.e. the soul) is self-awareness and intellect... Therefore, a person must always be self-aware, [and] all his actions must be with intellect and self-awareness. Then it is naturally understood that he will walk in the straight paths of G-d. The principle of the matter is that a person must weigh all of his actions, speech, and thoughts on the scale of self-awareness. But the moment that he is not self-aware, he is like an animal and he is liable to do all manner of evil things and damages [and] stray from after G-d....

And behold, just as one who is angry his self-awareness is disturbed, so too with drunkenness, as is known from sensory experience that one who is drunk loses his intellectual capacity totally and he is like one who is insane!...

G-d loves for man to be as was willed at creation, that the intellectual soul should constantly enlighten the soul of man and he will not perform any action without self-awareness. Therefore, G-d loves one who does not get angry and one who does not get drunk and one who does not bear a grudge, because this is a person who is always self-aware and using his intellect according to the will of creation.

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### **SPECIAL PROGRAMMING**

**8:00 PM Motzaei Shabbat Nov. 7: Halachah in Modern Israel**  
**Rabbi Alex Hecht: Reporting COVID Violations**

**10:00 AM Wed. Nov. 11: Vaccination Ethics Week 4: Ethical Trials, Vaccine Distribution**  
**Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, a 4-part series on Zoom**

**12:30 PM Wed. Nov. 11: The Ethical Challenge**  
**A 3-part Business Ethics Mini-Series, eligible for CPD credit for Accountants**  
**Week 1: Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, COVID Cancellations: Ethics and Law**

**7:30 PM Wed. Nov. 11: Emotional Judaism Week 5: Mind or Heart?**  
**Rabbi Alex Hecht, a 5-part series on Zoom, with Clanton Park and Shaarei Tefillah**

### **DAILY**

**7:10 AM Sun, 7:30 AM Mon-Fri, Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Daf Yomi with BAYT (men), via ZOOM**

**Mon-Thu 10 AM to Noon, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, via ZOOM (men)**  
**Mondays and Wednesdays: Gemara Taanit, Orot haTeshuvah**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays: Parshah, Tanach: Shoftim**

### **WEEKLY**

**Shabbat Nov. 7**

**After minchah at Shaarei Shomayim, Rabbi Sammy Bergman, "Did Yitzchak know he was a korban?"**

**Sunday Nov. 8**

**9:20 AM Contemporary Halachah with Netanel Klein: Health & Fitness, Part 1 of 2**

**10:00 AM Gemara Shabbat with Rabbi Aaron Greenberg (University)**

**7:30 PM Gemara Ketuvot with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)**

**8:15 PM Uncovering Midrash with Rabbi Chaim Metzger *New Series!***

**Monday Nov. 9**

**8:30 PM Gemara Shabbat, Chap. 15, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres**

**Tuesday Nov. 10**

**1:30 PM Megilat Esther, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

**7:30 PM Shoftim, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)**

**Wednesday, Nov 11**

**7:30 PM Genesis Journeys: Created for Mankind?, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman**

**Thursday Nov. 12**

**8:30 AM Daniel, Rabbi Chaim Metzger (University)**

**1:30 PM Shemuel, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women)**

**8:15 PM Gemara Bava Metzia, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University women)**

**8:30 PM Gemara Beitzah, with Ezer Diena (men, advanced)**

**Friday Nov. 13**

**8:30 AM Parshah, Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University)**

**11:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (advanced)**