

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Toldot

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Jeffrey Silver  
in honour of the first birthday of his granddaughter, Sarena Baila "א"

### Rivkah's Eternal Question

### Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

As twins "race about" in her womb, Rivkah asks ambiguously, *"Im ken, lamah zeh anochi?"* (Bereishit 25:22) Literally translated, Rivkah inquires, "If this is so, why am I?" But what was "this", and "why am I" what?

Traditional commentators have offered various explanations, including:

- Rashi (ad loc.) suggests that Rivkah regretted praying for pregnancy: "If this is the pain of pregnancy, why did I ask for this?"
- In another approach, Ramban (ad loc.) contends that Rivkah was on the brink of rejecting her very life: "If this is the pain of pregnancy, why should I live?"
- Alternatively, Ibn Ezra and Radak (ad loc.) explain that Rivkah questioned her unusual situation. She spoke with other women and discovered that her pain was unique, leading her to ask, "If pregnancy is normally not this hard, why am I experiencing this extraordinary pain?"

However, Dr. Yael Tzohar of Bar Ilan University [notes](#) that these and other traditional answers share certain weaknesses:

- 1) Read literally, Rivkah's question ends, "Why me?" That may fit with Ibn Ezra and Radak, but not with the others.
- 2) Would a woman who prayed for children for two decades respond to pain with this level of rejection? Again, Ibn Ezra and Radak escape this problem, but the others do not.
- 3) And finally, for all of our explanations: where is the comfort

in the Divine response, "You are carrying twins who will be bitter, lifelong rivals"?

Dr. Tzohar offers a different approach, by pointing to how Rivkah came to this point. Rivkah lived with her pagan family until Avraham's servant arrived. That servant declared that Rivkah was special, by dint of her generous conduct at the well. (ibid. 24:14-20) The servant announced that a Divine miracle had identified her as special. (24:40-48) When the family hesitated, the servant reiterated that Hashem had selected her. (24:56) Her family then blessed her, "You shall produce myriads." (ibid. 24:60) Rivkah was anointed to mother the next generation of the family promised to Avraham and Sarah.

Against this backdrop, Rivkah interpreted the pains of pregnancy as a message that something was indeed wrong, and she was actually ineligible. She then asked, "If so, then why choose me?" Why that miraculous selection? If there is something wrong with my lineage, if I am personally unworthy, then why did You set me up for this?

This explains the Divine response, as well. Hashem responds, "There are two nations in **your** uterus. Two nations will separate from **your** womb." (25:23) Yes, Rivkah - **you** are the one I have selected, you are the one who is suited for this task. There is pain now, and there will be pain in the future from your twin sons, and I need **you** to fill this role. The comfort wasn't in telling Rivkah about the two fighters in her womb. Rather, it was in explaining that

Rivkah owned a special identity and mission related to those two fighters. You are the one who is suited to handling your twin sons.

Note that Hashem has not told Rivkah anything specific - that she will win Esav's trust, that Yitzchak will be blind, that she will swap the blessings, or that she will enable Yaakov to escape from Esav. But Hashem gives Rivkah clarity of purpose, and this sense of purpose is what comforts, and empowers, Rivkah. Many years later, when the birthright and the family's future was at stake, and Yaakov warned that his mother's shockingly brazen plan might cause him to be cursed, Rivkah told him as Hashem's official delegate, "Any curse of yours is on **me**." I was destined for this position, because Hashem wanted **me** to make this decision. (27:13)

Hashem's answer to Rivkah's question echoes in our own day. The Divine plan requires that a nation accept Hashem's Torah, live in Israel and stand apart from the world, and that has involved pain for thousands of years. We don't know why **we** must be the ones on the spot. But we have stood up to this challenge for thousands of years with remarkable success, producing a rich culture and a sustained tradition of intellectual depth and moral heights. **We** are here because Hashem knows that Rivkah's descendants are uniquely suited to succeed at the task. Hashem's bet on Rivkah was a good one; may the same be true for Hashem's bet on her descendants.

[torczyner@torontotorah.com](mailto:torczyner@torontotorah.com)

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**Summary:**

A year after the events of the previous chapter, the war with Amon continues. This time, however, King David stays behind. While strolling on the roof of the palace one evening he sees a beautiful woman bathing. He inquires as to her identity, and is told that her name is Bat Sheva, wife of Uriah, one of David's loyal soldiers. David has Bat Sheva brought to him, and a physical relationship ensues. (11:1-4)

Bat Sheva sends word to David that she has become pregnant as a result of their encounter. King David sends for Uriah to return from the front. When he arrives, the king encourages him to spend some time at home. He rejects the advice, arguing that he cannot enjoy the comforts of his house while his fellow soldiers are out in the battlefield. King David tries again the next day, inviting Uriah to a lavish meal and ensuring that he drinks plenty of wine. Even in this more inebriated state, Uriah declines to sleep at home and spends the night with the rest of the soldiers. (11:5-13)

The next day King David sends Uriah back to the front with a message for Yoav. Yoav is to send Uriah to the most intense point of battle and then command the other soldiers to fall back so that Uriah will be killed. Yoav does

this, and several other soldiers are killed as well. (11:14-25)

Bat Sheva mourns her husband and subsequently marries King David, and gives birth to a boy. (11:26-27)

**Analysis:**

The talmudic sage Rabbi Yonatan declares that, "Anyone who thinks that King David sinned is mistaken." This statement is supported by an intricate legal scenario regarding the laws of divorce by which Uriah was not technically married to Bat Sheva at the time of her encounter with the king. (Shabbat 56a)

Rabbi Yonatan's declaration is confusing in light of the biblical text. Our chapter states explicitly that G-d disapproved of King David's actions, and highlights his betrayal of Uriah by contrasting it with the latter's unwavering loyalty. In the following chapter King David is chastised for, and admits, his sin. And even if Uriah was divorced, the issue here is King David's moral failing, not his technical adherence to Halachah. If so, how can we rightly claim that he didn't sin?

Rabbi Yosef Chaim (Ben Ish Chai) explains that the Talmud does not mean to say that David didn't sin *at all*, but rather that anyone who thinks

that in addition to what is described he *also* committed adultery, is mistaken. (Ben Yehoyada to Shabbat, *ibid.*)

By this reading, the Talmud is teaching us a profound lesson about judging others. Sometimes, especially when it comes to important leaders, we are forced to examine another's moral flaws. Even when we do this, we cannot overstep the bounds of what is demonstrably true and assume further failures. At this point the imperative to judge others favourably kicks in, and we must assume that the other is fundamentally good. We are cautioned against turning others into simplistic moral caricatures on the basis of their perceived mistakes.

*afriedmann@torontotorah.com*

**The Israeli Farmer: Terumah from Peels: Esav's Joke?**

Rambam credits our patriarch Yitzchak as the initiator of the mitzvah of maaser [tithing]. (Hilchot Melachim 9:1) He seems to rely on a verse from our parshah: "And Yitzchak sowed the land, and found in that year a hundred-fold, and he was blessed by Hashem." (Bereishit 26:12) Our Sages understood that Yitzchak took inventory because he wished to separate tithes. (Rashi, *ad loc.*) Therefore, it is not surprising that when Esav was trying to deceive his father, he asked him about tithing from salt and chaff, which concerned Yitzchak's "favourite" mitzvah. (Rashi to Bereishit 25:27)

Of course, salt is exempt from tithing because it does not grow from the land, and chaff is exempt because it is not edible. However, in recent years, there has been an attempt to investigate the possibility of separating tithes from produce that is somewhat similar to chaff, including fruit peels and the external leaves of broccoli, which are not usually eaten, but can be eaten if prepared properly. The motivation to separate from these parts is clear: if these parts would be eligible for use as terumah and maaser, we could separate from them and completely exempt the rest of the produce. This would allow farmers to keep more of the desirable parts of their produce.

A precedent may be seen in Rambam's assertion: "Vetch, although not a human food, is eaten in years of famine, and therefore, the laws of terumah and maaser apply to it." (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Terumot 2:2) It seems from this position that even food that is not usually eaten is under the

obligation to separate terumah, as long as it is edible in some way.

Regarding this question, three different approaches have emerged from major modern halachic authorities:

- Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli (Amud HaYemini 29) thought that Rambam's statement is unique to vetch, and has no consequence for other types of produce. According to him, farmers would not be allowed to give peels as terumah in order to exempt the real produce.
- Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein maintained that vetch is not unique, and can serve as an example for other produce, or parts of it, which can be eaten but usually are not. However, he held that the obligation to separate terumah from this category of food is rabbinic. Thus, tithing such parts of a plant cannot exempt produce which is biblically obligated. (Aruch HaShulchan he'Atid, Zeraim 57)
- Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg held that there is a biblical obligation to separate terumah and maser from vetch and similar produce. Farmers who follow this opinion may tithe via the peels or the external leaves, and keep more desirable produce for the market. (Tzitz Eliezer 1:1)

*bweintraub@torontotorah.com*

## Biography

### R' Yaakov Mecklenburg

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg was born in Lissa, in the province of Posen, Germany in 1785. In his childhood he received an outstanding Torah education from Rabbi Zechariah Mendel, a colleague of Rabbi Akiva Eiger. Rabbi Mecklenburg initially had no intention of taking a career in rabbinics, pursuing business instead. However, eventually his business fell apart and he was offered the position of Chief Rabbi of Koenigsburg in 1831. He served in this position for thirty-four years, until his death in 1865.

The period during which Rabbi Mecklenburg began to serve in Koenigsburg was tumultuous. The Enlightenment movement was spreading across Europe and causing tensions within Jewish communities. Rabbi Mecklenburg was an adamant critic of the approach of the Enlightenment and its resulting changes to traditional Jewish practice. He worked together with Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, commonly known as Malbim, to defend the traditional approach to Torah. Unlike Malbim, Rabbi Mecklenburg appears to have escaped harsh persecution as a result of his views.

The most lasting statement of Rabbi Mecklenburg's protests against Enlightenment changes to Judaism is his commentary on the Torah, *HaKtav V'haKabbalah* ("The Writing and the Tradition"). The driving premise of the commentary is to explain the Written Torah in line with the primary intent of the words and to demonstrate its unity with the Spoken Tradition. Hence the title, *The Writing and the Tradition*. The Written Torah without the Spoken Tradition is untenable, like a body without a soul.

Rabbi Mecklenburg's approach in *HaKtav V'haKabbalah* is to point out the details within the language of the Written Torah from which the explanations of the Oral Torah flow. He utilized many prominent commentaries from earlier generations, as well as ideas from those just prior to his day, such as the Vilna Gaon. *HaKtav V'haKabbalah* was first published in 1839, making it one of the earliest in a group of similar commentaries written in response to the Enlightenment's approach to Torah. It was well-received and it spread quickly across Jewish communities, a testimony to the thirst for such a commentary.

[enrosenzweig@gmail.com](mailto:enrosenzweig@gmail.com)

## Torah and Translation

### The True Firstborn

R' Y. Mecklenburg, HaKtav V'haKabbalah Bereishit 25:31

Translated by Rabbi Sammy Bergman

ויגלה לנו ענין גדול באיזה אופן באה הבכורה ליעקב. לא כאשר יחשבו בתחלת ההשקפה, שבתחבולת מרמה בא יעקב על עשו עת היות עיף וכמעט מוכרח אל המכירה ...

אמנם יעקב התנהג בענין זה כראוי לבחיר האבות, והוא זה, כאשר התאוה נפש עשו אל המאכל וביקש מיעקב בעת עיפותו ויגיעתו להשביע נפשו השוקקה, לא נשתהה יעקב אף רגע מלמלאות מבוקשו, והאכילו מיד כאשר התאוה נפשו, ולא נדבר עמו מאומה מענין הבכורה:

אמנם עשו כטוב עליו לבו במאכלו ובמשקהו התחיל לסבב פני הדבור מענין הבכורה, ונתגלגלו הדברים ממנו להראות קוטן מעלת הבכורה ושאין לה חשיבות בעיניו...

ויהי כאשר שמע יעקב את דבריו אלה מבזיון הבכורה בעיניו, תפסו בדבורו והוכיחו על פניו להראות לו שמיים הזה והלאה אינו בכור עוד, כי בדבריו האלה העיד על עצמו שאינו איש הראוי לתאר יקר וחשוב כזה, כי כמו שלא יתאר אדם בשם חכם... אם אינו מתנהג כפי החכמה... ככה אין נכון לתאר את האדם בשם בכור באמת... אם היא בזויה בעיניו וגם לא יבוש למאסה ולגנותה בפני אחרים... הנה מבחינה זו נסתלקה מעשו חשיבות תאר בכור, כיון שאין זה חשיבות אצלו, ומעצמה היא מסורה לאחיו בכור היצירה שמצד מעשו וממעלת נפשו ראוי אליה.

וזה שנאמר יעקב אליו "מכרה כיום את בכורתך לי", לא שביקש יעקב מעשו למכור לו הבכורה בדרך מקח וממכר, כי אין זה ענין הניתן למכירה, אבל אין במאמר זה כי אם הודעה לאמר לו דע לך אחי, שכיום הזה אחר שגילת דעתך בשפה ברורה ממאיסות ענין הבכורה בעיניך, הנה מזה נשתלשלה ונסתלקה ממך, ובידי היא נתונה מעתה.

This reveals a great matter to us regarding how the birthright came to Yaakov. It was not as one might think at first glance, that in a deceitful tactic Yaakov came to Esav when he was tired and almost compelled to [make] the sale...

Rather, Yaakov behaved in this matter in a way befitting the chosen of the forefathers, and that is this: when Esav's soul desired the food and he requested of Yaakov (when he was tired and weary) to satisfy his lustful soul, Yaakov did not linger for a moment to fulfill his request, and fed him immediately as his soul desired, and didn't discuss the birthright with him at all.

However, as his heart was merry with his food and drink, Esav began to turn the discussion toward the matter of the birthright, and ideas rolled from him demonstrating the smallness of the birthright status and that it had no importance in his eyes...

When Yaakov heard these words of disgrace of the birthright in [Esav's eyes], he grabbed him in his words and rebuked him to his face to show him that from that day on, he was no longer the firstborn, for through his words he testified about himself that he was not a man worthy of such a valuable and important title. Just as a man can't be described as a sage ... if he does not act wisely... so too it is incorrect to describe a person as a true firstborn... if it is despicable in his eyes and he isn't ashamed to disgrace it and denigrate it in front of others... Behold, in this respect, the importance of the title "firstborn" was removed from Esav, since it wasn't honourable to him, and by itself given to his brother the firstborn by conception, who according to his deeds and the exaltedness of his soul was fit for it.

This is what Yaakov said to him: "Your birthright is 'sold' to me today", not that Yaakov asked Esav to sell him the birthright as a business transaction, for this is not something that can be sold, but this statement is merely a proclamation to say: "Know my brother, that from this day, after you have revealed your opinion in clear language how despicable the birthright is in your eyes, it has moved on and been removed from you, and is now placed in my hands."

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**10:00-11:20 AM Sun. Nov. 22: Midreshet Yom Rishon for Women!**  
**Rabbi Seth Grauer, A Canadian Approach to Celebrating American Thanksgiving**  
**Mrs. Judith Hecht, Yaakov and Rachel: Soulmates?**

**7:30-9:00 PM Mon. Nov. 23: Legal Ethics**  
**Bankruptcy and the Jewish Client in the Era of COVID**  
**Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, CPD-accredited, laypeople welcome**

**12:30 PM Wed. Nov. 25: The Ethical Challenge**  
**A 3-part Business Ethics Mini-Series, eligible for CPD credit for Accountants**  
**Week 3: Rabbi Sammy Bergman, Give the Rabbi a (Tax) Break? Taxes for Clergy**

**8:00 PM Wed. Nov. 25: The Eternal Rivalry: Yaakov vs. Esav**  
**Rabbi Yehudah Oppenheimer of the Marlee Shul, Ezer Diena, and Noah Tile (pwd 075425)**

**8:15 PM Wed. Nov. 25: Sports, Entertainment and Halachah, a 5-part mini-series**  
**With Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Week 1: A History of Spectator Sports and Halachah**

### **DAILY**

**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: Shemuel**

### **WEEKLY**

**Shabbat Nov. 21**

**After minchah at Shaarei Shomayim, Rabbi Sammy Bergman, Parshah**

**Sunday Nov. 22**

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

**Tuesday Nov. 24**

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

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

**Wednesday, Nov 25**

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

**7:30 PM Greatest (Halachic) Hits of COVID: Zoom Seder, with Rabbi Alex Hecht (New Series!)**

**Thursday Nov. 26**

**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. 27**

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

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