

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayishlach

19 Kislev, 5781/December 5, 2020

Vol. 12 Num. 13 (#474)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Malka and Allan Rutman  
in memory of Yoseph Matityahu ben R' Avraham Yitzchak z"l and Laya bat R' Chaim Dovid z"l

### The Edomite Kings

Our parshah ends on a somewhat strange note, listing the eight Edomite kings who ruled "before a king ruled the children of Israel." (Bereishit 36:31-43) This enigmatic paragraph perplexes the common reader, as it is difficult to immediately understand why the Torah would want to detail, at such length, the rulers of Edom.

Of course, commentators have suggested different reasons for including this section in the holiest of books:

- Rambam suggested that the list hints at the explanation for the Torah commandment to appoint a Jewish king and not a stranger (Devarim 17:15). Rambam explains that "Of these kings, none was an Edomite, wherefore each king is described by his native land... It was then well known how these kings... humiliated and oppressed the sons of Esav. Thus G-d reminded the Israelites of the fate of the Edomites, as if saying unto them, look unto your brothers, the sons of Esav, whose kings were so and so, and whose deeds are well known" (Guide of the Perplexed 3:50, Friedlander translation).
- Ramban took a different route. He noted that while the Edomites – Esav's offspring – were able to conquer Seir from its natives, they failed to establish a dynasty; not one of their kings was the son of his predecessor. This fact teaches us that Yitzchak's blessing – "By your sword you shall live" (Bereishit 27:40) – fully materialized, for better

and for worse. (Commentary to Bereishit 36:31)

In Midrash Rabbah (Bereishit Rabbah 84:5), however, we find two different stories used as parables to explain the role of this puzzling list of kings. They are similar in reading the list in the context of Yaakov's family stories, but their messages are distinct:

Rabbi Chunya stated a parable: A person was walking in the road, and saw a group of dogs and feared them, and [then] settled between them. So, our father Yaakov saw Esav's kings and feared them, and then settled between them.

Rabbi Levi stated a parable: A blacksmith's shop was open to the street, and his son opened a goldsmith shop across from his. The blacksmith saw many bags of thorns brought into the city. He asked in amazement: "Where will it be possible to store all of these?" A wise man standing there responded, "Are you worried by these? After all, a single spark from yours and your son's [forge] will burn them all. Similarly, Yaakov saw Esav and his kings and was worried, so G-d said to him: "Are you worried by these? After all, a single spark from yours and your son will burn them all."

These two stories convey different messages regarding the relationship between Esav and Yaakov. According to the first story, Yaakov is required to overcome his fear and learn to live with the dogs, and maybe even to be helped by them. According to the second

parable, Yaakov is called to send a single spark of his and his children, and thus will Esav and his kings be consumed.

My teacher and Rabbi, Rav Yehudah Amital zt"l, understood these stories as teaching two different strategies for our fearful dealings with the culture of Esav – the western world. Sometimes it is correct to 'dance with wolves', to engage in the broader culture, to contribute to it and to let it contribute to us. At other times, places or subjects, the right attitude is to ignore, or even to openly confront what seems to be strong and stable, but in truth is only thorns and chaff.

Continuing this line of thought, one may suggest that the list of Edomite kings who "ruled before there was a king in Israel" represent both potential and danger. Esav's children, the men of the field, may be builders of infrastructure and institutions, developing science and technology. All of these can be harnessed by the man of G-d, when "an Israelite king will rule", in the service of good and kindness. However, if the Edomites king will continue to reign without the rule of "an Israelite king", the same advances may lead to destruction, both in the moral and the physical sense. The debate as to whether we should fully embrace the challenge, or perhaps we should avoid the critical danger it brings, continues from the time of this midrash to our own era.

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At the beginning of the chapter, Amnon, son of King David, has fallen in love with Tamar, his half-brother Avshalom's beautiful sister, but he feels incapable of acting upon his desire for her. Amnon yearns for Tamar so strongly that he appears physically ill. (Shemuel II 13:1-2)

Sensing Amnon's distress, Amnon's clever friend Yehonadav devises a plan. He advises Amnon to lie in bed as a sick man. When his father King David visits him, Amnon should tell his father to have his sister Tamar bake bread in front of him and feed him the bread (13:3-5, Radak ibid.). Amnon proceeds with Yehonadav's plan and lies in bed while pretending he is ill. When King David visits him, Amnon asks King David to summon Tamar so that she will prepare two rolls in front of his eyes and Amnon will eat from her hand. (13:6)

Tamar graciously follows King David's command. She travels to Amnon's house, prepares fresh rolls in front of Amnon's eyes, and hands the pan to Amnon's waiter. However, Amnon refuses to eat, and he commands everyone present, aside from Tamar, to

leave the room. (13:7-9, Malbim ibid.)

Amnon asks Tamar to bring the food to him, so that he will eat from her hand. Tamar listens to Amnon's request and brings the meal to Amnon's bedside. As Tamar approaches, Amnon grabs her and tells Tamar: "Lie with me my sister." (13:10-11) Tamar responds by pleading with her brother not to abuse her. Furthermore, if Amnon would simply ask, King David wouldn't withhold Tamar from him. However, Amnon refuses to listen. He overpowers Tamar and rapes her. (13:12-15)

After violating her, Amnon develops an intense hatred for Tamar and commands her to leave his house. Tamar pleads to Amnon that sending her away would create an even greater evil than having raped her. But Amnon refuses to listen and has his attendant send Tamar out of the room and lock the door behind her. Tamar puts ashes on her head, tears her royal robe, and walks away wailing in anguish until she ultimately settles in the house of her brother Avshalom. (13:16-20)

King David is outraged, but takes no action, while Avshalom plots Amnon's

punishment. Two years later, Avshalom invites his father King David to accompany him on Avshalom's journey to Baal-Chazor to shear his sheep. King David refuses, but ultimately agrees to send Amnon and his other sons on the journey. Avshalom instructs his attendants to slay Amnon while he is intoxicated. Avshalom's attendants follow his orders and murder Amnon, causing the rest of the king's sons to flee the scene. (13:21-29)

At first, King David hears that Avshalom had slayed the rest of his sons. However, he ultimately learns from his nephew Yonadav that Avshalom had only conspired to kill Amnon. Soon David's other sons return and they all weep together. Avshalom flees to Geshur, remaining there for three years until King David is consoled over Amnon's death. (13:30-39)

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## **The Israeli Farmer: The Need for Rain**

**Rabbi Jonathan Ziring**

In biblical times, the utter dependence of farmers in Israel on rain defined the unique nature of the land. "For the land, where you go in to possess it, isn't as the land of Egypt, that you came out from, where you sowed your seed, and watered it with your foot, as a garden of herbs; but the land, where you go over to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys which drinks water of the rain of the sky, a land which Hashem your G-d cares for: the eyes of Hashem your G-d are always on it, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year." (Devarim 11:10-12, alhatorah.org) Rashbam (ad loc. 11) explains that from a natural perspective, having agriculture depend on irrigation is superior to relying on rain, as the former is more predictable and consistent. However, G-d wanted the Jews in Israel to be constantly cognizant that their sustenance came from G-d. Thus, Israel's water supply came from rain, and G-d would provide it if the Jews merited it.

This vulnerability inherent in the agricultural reality, and the theological basis for it, explain the extensive series of fasts outlined in the first two chapters of Tractate Taanit in response to the lack of rain. In the modern period, however, the propriety of these fasts is questionable, as the reality in Israel is drastically different from what it once was. Israel has mastered technological methods that overcome the natural limitations of its climate, such as drip irrigation and desalination. Additionally, modern Israel is hardly agrarian, and thus dry years are no longer felt as an existential threat. In light of this, what should the halachic response be to a dry spell?

While not following the exact model outlined in Taanit, the approach of the Chief Rabbinate is to decree part-day fasts

and prayers, when it does not rain by the expected time on the calendar. Many communities throughout Israel follow this practice. Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein (translated [here](#)), however, expressed his opposition to this practice. He argued that:

1. Lack of rain is no longer life-threatening, due to technological advances.
2. Fasting was a response to the loss of livelihood caused by a drought. In the modern reality, the correlation between lack of rain and unemployment is negligible, and it would be more proper to fast when unemployment rises.
3. The theological assumption, that providence is direct enough that a lack of rain indicates Divine displeasure, may no longer be true.
4. Due to the disconnect of most people from agriculture, people are not sincere in their "desperate prayers" for rain.
5. Fasting when the situation is not desperate cheapens this method of turning to G-d.

Ultimately, Rabbi Lichtenstein's approach was rejected even within his own yeshiva. This indicates, it seems, that the theological and halachic centrality of agriculture/rain in Israel remains, despite the "Israeli farmer" being the exception rather than the rule.

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**Biography**  
**Rabbi Gedalia Felder**  
Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Rabbi Gedalia Felder was born in Iczuki-dolne, Galicia in 1921. After beginning his studies locally, he moved to study in Yeshivat Keter Torah (Radomsk) in Krakow, Poland. He moved to Winnipeg in 1937, and subsequently to Montreal and Toronto. In Toronto, he went to learn at Yeshivas Toras Chaim under Rabbi Avraham Price, who was a student and colleague of Rabbi Yoav Weingarten, the Chelkat Yoav, a renowned Polish Rabbi. Rabbi Felder served as a Rabbi in Sarnia, Belleville and Brantford, where he influenced many people to become more religiously observant. Rabbi Felder also served as a chaplain for the Royal Canadian Air Force from 1943 to 1945.

When he returned to Toronto in 1949, Rabbi Felder took up the pulpit at Shomrai Shabbos and served as Rabbi until his death in 1991 (today, that synagogue is led by his son Rabbi Yacov Felder). Rabbi Felder also taught at Yeshivas Toras Chaim during that time.

Rabbi Felder was deeply involved in and committed to the Toronto Jewish community. In addition to his positions at Shomrai Shabbos and Torat Chaim, he was one of the founding members of the "Council of Orthodox Rabbis" (COR), and served as its chairman from 1954. Rabbi Felder played a pivotal role in making the COR the widely respected and accepted organization it is today. While it may seem obvious today, Rav Felder spearheaded the effort to have Shechitah in Canada recognized by the government. He had great erudition and was elected a Member of the Beit Din in America, despite his living in Canada.

Rabbi Felder wrote *Yesodei Yeshurun* on Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, which deals with laws relating primarily to prayer, Shabbat and holidays. Rav Felder also authored *Nachalat Tzvi* (on conversion and adoption) and his responsa are published in *She'eilat Yeshurun*. He weighed in on a wide array of topics ranging from changing synagogue practices, complex conversions, intermarriage, to halachic ramifications of the Holocaust.

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**Torah and Translation**  
**Building a Different Synagogue**

**Rabbi Gedalia Felder, She'eilat Yeshurun, Orach Chaim 1**  
Translated by Rabbi Chaim Metzger

האם מותר לבנות ביה"כ"נ בסביבה שכבר  
בנה שם ביה"כ"נ?

...אחרי שביארתי דבעוד זמנים קדומים  
קיימו בתי כנסת של דעות מיוחדות, יש  
להתבונן אם יכולים חברי ביה"כ"נ אחד  
למחות ולמנוע אחרים מלפתוח ביה"כ"נ  
בשכונתם בעד חבריהם שהתישבו באותה  
סביבה ואינם מקושרים עם ביה"כ"נ  
המתקיים ואף לא מתפללים שמה.

מקור מוצאו של האי דינא הוא הריב"ש  
שכתב (סי' רנ"ג וכן של"א) דהמעכב  
מלבנות ביה"כ"נ במקום שיש כבר ביה"כ"נ  
הוא מעכב הרבים מלעשות מצוה. ודברי  
פסקו הביא הרמ"א להלכה, (ח"מ קסב:ז)  
וחייב המעכבים נזיפה (ראה גם כן מג"א  
סו"ס קנ"ד), והוא ממחייבי נידוי שמנה  
הרמב"ם, (ראה פ"ו ה' י"ד מהלכות תלמוד  
תורה) בכ"ד דברים שמנדין עליהם. ואפילו  
לפי דברי הסוברים דיכולים לעכב כמבואר  
בפ"ת, (שם), זה נאמר רק אם כבר היו  
מאוחדים בקהלה אחת ונפרדו, משא"כ  
היכא דמעולם לא היו מאוחדים ואין קהלה  
מאורגנת וחלוקים הם בנוסח התפלה  
ובמנהגים וממדינות שונות מקום מוצאו  
של אלו האנשים, דאז נאמר עליהם:  
”הזירו במנהג אבותיכם  
בידיכם” (ירושלמי עירובין פ"ג ה"ג). בודאי  
במקרה כזה אין האנשים האלה שמעולם  
לא התחברו להאי ביה"כ"נ אחראים לסייע  
לביה"כ"נ שעומד שם ונבנה ע"י יחידים  
שהתארגנו, ושפיר יכולים לבנות ולהעתיק  
ביה"כ"נ שלהם בהיחא סביבה...

...ולכן חוב ומצוה לבנות האי בית הכנסת  
ולחדש בית הכנסת זה כימי קדם לפי  
המסורה שמסרו להם הראשונים, ובה  
יהי' להם תקומה שלא יבוטל מעשה  
המיסדים והבונים ויאמרו: חי ד' אשר  
העלה אבותינו ואבות אבותינו והם מסרו  
התורה והמצוה לבניהם אחריהם ושמרו  
דרך ד'.

May one build a synagogue in an area  
that already has a synagogue?

...Now that I have explained that in yes-  
teryear there were different synagogues  
for different groups [of Jews] **of different  
views**, one should consider if the mem-  
bers of one synagogue may protest and  
prevent others from opening another syn-  
agogue in their neighbourhood for their  
friends who have moved into that neigh-  
bourhood, who have no connection to the  
existing synagogue and don't pray there.

The source of this ruling is the Rivash  
(Rabbi Yitzchak ben Sheshet Perfet, Re-  
sponsa 253 and 331) who writes that  
whomever prevents the construction of  
another synagogue when there is already  
one in the area is preventing the public  
from doing a mitzvah. The words of his  
ruling are cited by the Rama as law  
(Choshen Mishpat 162:7), and he said  
that those who prevent its construction  
are liable for *nezifah* [being reprimanded  
vociferously] (see also Magen Avraham  
ibid. 154) and this one of the [actions] for  
which one is liable for excommunication,  
in the Rambam's list of twenty-four rea-  
sons for excommunication (Laws of Torah  
Study 6:14). Even according to those who  
allow them to prevent the construction of  
the other synagogue, as explained in the  
Pitchei Teshuvah (Shulchan Aruch ibid.),  
this is only when they were one commu-  
nity and then they split, but that isn't the  
case where they were never united and  
there is no organized community, and  
they disagree regarding the correct text of  
prayer, and practices, and these people  
come from different countries of origin.  
Then we tell them to "carefully keep to  
the customs of your forefathers that you  
have." (Talmud Yerushalmi Eruvin 3:3)  
Certainly in this case, these people who  
had never been members of that syna-  
gogue are not responsible to aid the syna-  
gogue that was built and constructed by  
individuals that coordinated on their  
own, and they are able to build and move  
the synagogue that they used to have to  
this neighbourhood...

Therefore it is a requirement and mitzvah  
to build this Synagogue and renovate this  
synagogue as it was, according to the  
tradition that was given to them by previ-  
ous generations, a monument, so that  
the actions of the founders and the build-

ers will never be erased, and they will say: As G-d lives, Who brought our fathers  
and grandfathers up, and they transmitted the Torah and mitzvot to their sons af-  
ter them and they followed in the way of G-d.

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### SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

**8:00 PM Motzaei Shabbat Dec. 5: Halachah in Modern Israel  
Rabbi Alex Hecht, Religious Protests: Would the Maccabees Approve?**

**10:00 AM Sun. Dec. 6: Midreshet Yom Rishon for Women  
Dr. Ahuva Bergman, Yehudit: A Chanukah Heroine  
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Chanukah's War on the Aristocracy**

**8:00-10:00 PM Sun. Dec. 6: Pre-Chanukah Learnathon!  
Rabbi Dr. Moshe Yeres, Haftorah: Did the Rabbis Choose the Right Haftorah?  
Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Torah Reading: Why do the Princes Get a Holiday?  
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Music: More than "Rock of Ages"  
Rabbi Sammy Bergman, Jewish Law: Learning by the Chanukah Lights?**

**10:00 AM Wed. Dec. 9: The Kabbalists of Safed, a 3-part series  
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Week 2: Rabbi Isaac Luria - the Ari z"l  
Register at <https://torontotorah.com/safed>**

**8:00 PM Wed. Dec. 9: Why Do We? Part 2 of 2  
Ezer Diena, Why do we eat dairy and oily foods on Chanukah?**

**8:15 PM Wed. Dec. 9: Sports, Entertainment and Halachah, a 5-part mini-series  
With Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Week 3: Exercise to Serve G-d**

### DAILY

**Mon-Thu 10 AM to Noon, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, via ZOOM (men)  
Mon/Wed: Gemara Succah, Orot haTeshuvah, Tues/Thurs: Parshah, Tanach: Shemuel**

### WEEKLY

**Shabbat Dec. 5**

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

**Sunday Dec. 6**

**9:20 AM Contemporary Halachah: The Miracles of Chanukah with Netanel Klein**

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

**7:00 PM Gemara Ketuvot with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) note special time**

**7:00 PM Uncovering Midrash with Rabbi Chaim Metzger note special time**

**Tuesday Dec. 8**

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

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

**Wednesday, Dec. 9**

**7:30 PM Genesis Journeys: Free Will and the Tree of Knowledge, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman**

**7:30 PM Greatest (Halachic) Hits of COVID: Care on Shabbat, with Rabbi Alex Hecht (not this week)**

**Thursday Dec. 10**

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

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

**8:00 PM Gemara Beitzah, with Ezer Diena (men, advanced)**

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

**Friday Dec. 11**

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

**10:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (advanced)**