

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshiyot Matot-Masei

1 Menachem Av, 5781/July 10, 2021

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This issue of Toronto Torah is sponsored by Esther and Craig Guttman and Family
in honour of the upcoming yahrtzeit of Sheila Guttman ז"ל ו"ה ירושע ז"ל

This is the last issue of Toronto Torah for the summer; we expect to return for Parshat Ki Tavo (August 28)

Once You Are Gone, We Will Praise You

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

"These were the marches of the Israelites who started out from the land of Egypt, troop by troop, in the charge of Moses and Aaron." (Bamidbar 33:1, JPS) The commentaries struggle to understand the detailed list of the forty-two encampments of the Jews in the desert that opens Parshat Masei.

Divine Love

Rashi offers two notes:

- Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan suggests that since the Jews camped in 22 of those places during the first and last years of their travels, we discover they travelled minimally during the majority of the forty years. This illustrates that even though these wanderings were punishments, G-d minimized the pain of the journey, demonstrating His mercy.
- Rashi provides a parable of a king who takes his ill son on a journey to heal him, and on the return trip explains to his son what happened at each stage. This seems to indicate that noting every stage is an expression of G-d's love for the Jews, like the parent taking care of his son.

In truth, in a midrash (Tanchuma, Masei 3), the source for Rashi's parable, the rationale for enumerating the sites seems different. The midrash adds that G-d detailed each place in which the Jews angered G-d. One could argue that this shows G-d's mercy for having brought them to Israel despite it all. Alternatively, this may be a hidden rebuke for the Jews, ensuring they remember their sins and avoid them in the future.

A Positive View of the Jews

Rabbi Ovadia Seforno offers another interpretation for the list, arguing that it balances the negative portrayal of the Jews in Bamidbar. In Yirmiyahu (2:2), the willingness of the Jews to journey into the desert is described by G-d as, "The devotion of your youth, your love as a bride— How you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown." (JPS) In this spirit, Seforno contends that sometimes the Jews were given short notice to get ready to travel, and sometimes they were forced to leave comfortable places for less comfortable ones. By detailing their travels the "Torah shows us both sides of the coin. We have been shown an Israel composed of rebels and grumblers, having degenerated from the lofty spiritual plane of their religious experience at mount Sinai, having become slaves to their selfish passions, ungrateful and quarrelsome... Now the Torah changes its note and shows us the other side of the picture, Israel loyal to their trust... They follow Him in spite of all the odds..." (Nehama Leibowitz, Studies in Bamidbar, pp 393-4)

What neither the Seforno nor the comment by Nehama Leibowitz explain, however, is why this counterpoint is only provided at the end of the forty years. After the sins of Korach and the subsequent rebellion, we hear nothing from the first generation. Parshat Korach ends in the second year, and the next narrative picks up in the fortieth year. In almost all of Bamidbar, the entire story of the desert, the Torah presents the negative picture. Only the retrospective at the end balances the

picture. Why wait, only offering this perspective once the Jews who lived through that experience died?

A few possibilities suggest themselves:

- 1) Perhaps this passage provides contrast rather than balance. The first generation was sinful, and only the second generation who entered the land deserved the implicit praise. However, this is difficult, as it seems that G-d praises the initial leap of faith, of following G-d into the desert from Egypt, which was taken by the first generation.
- 2) Perhaps only in retrospect is this balance proper; while the sinners died for their sins, the focus needed to be on their punishment. However, this seems unfair, if in fact they continued to express their faith in G-d.
- 3) Perhaps, therefore, the balanced picture is a message directed toward the second generation. While they might have been tempted to think that entering Israel was their privilege, as they had not sinned, G-d reminds them that flawed though their parents may have been, their faith and sacrifice was essential to getting them through the desert.

All people are complex, and we sometimes focus on the negatives of those who brought us to our place in life and attribute the positives to ourselves. The Torah teaches that, no matter how complex, we must appreciate that which others have given us, even as we try to learn from their mistakes.

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Summary

The chapter begins by describing the kings of Yehudah after Rechavam. Rechavam's son Aviyam succeeds him as king over Yehudah for just three years. Aviyam follows in his father's wicked ways, instead of acting like the exemplary Dovid HaMelech. He fights against Yeravam and the northern kingdom of Yisrael throughout the duration of his reign. Upon his passing, his son Asa takes over the kingdom of Yehudah. (15:1-8)

When King Asa takes the throne, he acts righteously, akin to Dovid HaMelech, for 41 years. He resolves the issues of prostitution and idolatry that had been rampant in his father's time. King Asa remains just and true to G-d by removing his own mother from her respected position as the former queen, uprooting her idols and burning them in Nachal Kidron. His only shortcoming is that he didn't remove the bamot, personal altars that people used to worship G-d in their own home, which were prohibited after the construction of the Beit HaMikdash. He also restores the treasury of the Beit HaMikdash that had been ransacked in his father's time. (15:9-15)

Basha, king of Yisrael, attempts to construct a fortress by Ramah, to prevent passage between Yehudah and Yisrael. In response, King Asa takes all the gold and silver that remain in the coffers of the Beit HaMikdash and uses them to bribe Ben-Hadad, the King of Aram, to attack the northern kingdom. Ben-Hadad's army attacks the Israelite countryside, preventing Basha from completing the fortification, and forcing him to retreat. King Asa then repurposes the abandoned building materials to construct Geva Binyamin and HaMitzpah. He is ultimately succeeded by his son Yehoshafat. (15:16-24)

The text then takes the reader back in time, to show the succession of kings in the northern kingdom after Yeravam. Nadav succeeded his father Yeravam, ruling Yisrael for only two years, sinning as his father had. Basha from the tribe Yissachar successfully leads a rebellion against Nadav, ruling for the next 24 years; this is the same Basha we mentioned above. Basha wipes out every last descendant of Yeravam, fulfilling the prophecy of Achiyah HaShiloni recorded previously. Unfortunately, Basha is no better than

his predecessors as kings of Yisrael, and continues to sin like Yeravam. (15:25-34)

Insight

King Asa's portrayal is quite positive in our chapter, with only a small mention of his being afflicted with a sickness in his legs in his old age. But in Divrei HaYamim II 16, Chanani the Seer rebukes King Asa for hiring Aram to fight Yisrael instead of relying on G-d. King Asa then arrests Chanani and oppresses the people. The text also states that Asa never turns to G-d to heal his legs – and Rabbi Levi ben Gershon comments that the illness itself was punishment for failure to run to battle against Yisrael, sending Ben-Hadad instead. (Commentary to 15:17)

Rabbi Alex Israel, based on Jeremiah 41:9, suggests that Asa's act of betrayal towards Yisrael, together with the assassination of Gedalyah, rank "in Jewish history as twin landmarks of heinous killing and devastating infighting."

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The Israeli Farmer: Ma'aser Rishon Today?

Ezer Diena

Note: This column is based on an article [here](#).

The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 331:19) rules that during years 1, 2, 4 and 5 of the seven-year *shemita* cycle one must separate one-tenth of their produce as *ma'aser rishon*. When one fulfills this mitzvah nowadays, what should be done with the *ma'aser rishon*? Should one, as the Shulchan Aruch (ad loc.) rules, give the produce to a Levi, or as ruled by the Rama ad loc., to a Kohen, or is there some reason to refrain from doing so?

Give it to a Levi

Rabbi Yosef Trani (Responsa Mahari"t 1:85) writes that in his day (the 16th-17th centuries, in Israel and Constantinople), many people kept *ma'aser rishon* for themselves and did not give it to Levites. Apparently, they rationalized this practice by challenging any Levi who had an interest in receiving the *ma'aser* to bring proof that they were actually a Levi. Rabbi Trani strongly criticizes this practice, writing that all Kohanim and Leviyim nowadays are presumed to be valid, even if they don't have absolute proof of their lineage. As support, he cites common practice in regards to *pidyon haben*, a ceremony in which one redeems their son from a Kohen. We rely on a *chazakah* that the Kohen is actually descended from Aharon, even if he does not bring explicit proof. Thus, even nowadays, one must give any separated *ma'aser rishon* to a Levi whom they know.

Set it aside until Mashiach

Rabbi Yehosaf Ashkenazi (cited in Responsa Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi #2) writes that even if we accept the premise that a Levi must bring proof to their status prior to taking *ma'aser rishon*, a non-Levi is still prohibited from using or

consuming it, since it is owed to members of the tribe of Levi. If so, one must evaluate the worth of the *ma'aser rishon* produce, and set an equivalent amount of money aside until Eliyahu clarifies who the true Levites are.

One need not give it to a Levi

Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz (Chazon Ish, Shevi'it 5:12) argues that it is not a good idea to establish a communal ruling requiring people to give their *ma'aser rishon* to Levites, since if that happens, many non-Levites will immediately begin to claim that they are legitimate Levites, which has many potential pitfalls. He also does not require one to set aside the money until Eliyahu arrives. [See Derech Emunah Hilchot Terumot 6:20 and Tziyun Hahalachah 6:77.] This is followed by many individuals nowadays, who are lenient in not giving their *ma'aser rishon* to Levites.

Conclusion

Although the Chazon Ish was lenient in writing that individuals need not give their *ma'aser rishon* to a Levi, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky (Derech Emunah Hilchot Terumot Tziyun Hahalachah 6:78) writes that the Chazon Ish himself would give *ma'aser rishon* to Levites as a *middat chassidut*, a pious act. This was also the practice of many great rabbis, such as Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, who ruled that ideally, *ma'aser rishon* should be given to a Levi nowadays. [Note: Ezra fined the Leviyim, removing from them the right to collect *ma'aser rishon*, but Rambam rules that that was only for the period of the second Beit haMikdash. See Derech Emunah Hilchot Ma'aser 1:35.]

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Biography

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was born in the city of Uzda, near Minsk, Belarus, on the 7th of Adar in the year 5655/1895. He was born into a rabbinic family, descendants of Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller. Rabbi Feinstein studied in several yeshivot before becoming rabbi of Luban, where he served for sixteen years. During his time in Luban, Rabbi Feinstein wrote prolifically, sending responsa to communities far and wide and to the Torah giants of the day. He also led his community despite the crushing persecution of the Communist regime.

Rabbi Feinstein fled the Soviet regime in 1936, barely escaping a pogrom in which his home was destroyed. Along with his wife Sima and three children (another died of whooping cough), Rabbi Feinstein came to New York and became rosh yeshiva of Mesivta Tiferet Yerushalayim in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Rabbi Feinstein was already known for his erudition and analytic skill; on American shores, his reputation only grew.

Recognized across the broad spectrum of Orthodoxy as the generation's leading *posek* (halachic authority), Rabbi Feinstein was consulted on every major issue of his day. Among his most widely circulated responsa and public letters on popular issues were his positions on the role of Jews in a non-Jewish society (such as vis-à-vis holiday celebrations and political involvement), on the status of Reform and Conservative approaches to Judaism, and on the evolving roles of women in the Jewish community.

Communal organizations sought out Rabbi Feinstein for leadership roles. He served as president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada, and he chaired the Moetzes Gedolei haTorah of Agudath Israel of America for the last quarter-century of his life.

Rabbi Feinstein passed away on Taanit Esther 5746/1986, but his halachic legacy lives on. First, his sons Rabbi Dovid Feinstein z"l and Rabbi Reuven Feinstein yb"l^c, as well as his son-in-law Rabbi Dr. Moshe Tendler, are recognized as halachic authorities of the first order. Second, his volumes of published responsa (*Igrot Moshe*), as well as his commentaries to Talmud (*Dibrot Moshe*) and Chumash (*Darash Moshe*) are studied around the world. To this day, resolution of major issues like determining the moment of death and engaging in artificial insemination hinges upon how his writings are parsed.

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Torah and Translation

Joining a Synagogue With Another Nusach

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 4:33*

Translated by Rabbi Alex Hecht

הנה בדבר בית כנסת שמתפללים בה נוסח ספרד, וארבע משפחות שמתפללים נוסח אשכנז לעצמן בבית כנסת זה כי בבית כנסת זה הם שומרי תורה ויש גם רוח של תורה שלכן אין רוצים לילך למקום אחר שאינו טוב כזה, ורוצים להעשות חברים (מעמבערס) קבועים ככל המתפללים וגם שיהיו להם כל הזכויות שיש לחברים (למעמבערס) הקבועים גם להיות גבאים וכדומה.

ברור ופשוט שרשאיין ואין שינוי הנוסח מעב לזה, וממילא נראה שגם צריכין להעשות כי מצוה גדולה להתחבר לשומרי תורה כמאמר הקרא בתהלים "חבר אני לכל אשר יראוך" ... שלכן אם האמת שבית כנסת זה אשר בחרו להתפלל שם וללמוד בהשיעורים שלומדים שם הוא מחמת העדיפות לתורה ויראת שמים שהן שומרי תורה ורוח של תורה יש להם להיות מעמבערס שוין לכל הענינים, ואין ענין הנוסחאות עושה חלוק בזה דכל הנוסחאות הם שוין לקיום מצות התפלה ולהקדושה ויש לכל נוסח מקור על כל תיבה ותיבה, בין ע"פ הנגלה בין ע"פ הנסתר, ומטעם זה איתא בירושלמי "אע"פ ששלחנו לכם סדר תפלות אל תשנו ממנה אבותיכם."

ולכן בדברים שא"צ לומר בקול רם ואין הדרך לומר בקול רם יעשה כמנהגו, ובדברים שנאמרים בקול רם בין מדינא בין מדרך העולם צריך להתפלל בנוסח הצבור, וכשהוא ש"צ צריך לומר כנוסח הצבור אף בתפלת הלחש שלו כיון שהוא להסדיר תפלתו.

Regarding a synagogue in which they pray [according to] *Nusach Sefard*, and four families pray in *Nusach Ashkenaz* themselves in this synagogue, because in this synagogue they are Torah observant, and there is an atmosphere of Torah there, and therefore [these families] do not wish to pray elsewhere where [the environment] is not as good. And they wish to become full members like all who pray there, and to obtain all the benefits granted to full members, and also to become *gabbaim* and the like.

It is clear and obvious that they are permitted to do so, and that the difference in *nusach* (prayer text) should not prevent this. [In fact], it seems that they need to do this, for it is a great mitzvah to attach oneself to Torah observant Jews, as the verse states, "I am a friend to all who revere You." (Tehillim 119:63)... Therefore, if it is true that they have chosen this synagogue to pray and to learn in the classes they hold there due to the superior Torah and fear of Heaven, and that [its members are] Torah observant and there is an atmosphere of Torah, it is appropriate for them to become full members in all matters. And the issue of *nusach* should not make a difference in all of this, for all of the *nuschaot* are equal regarding fulfillment of the mitzvah of prayer and sanctity, and in every *nusach*, there is a source for each and every letter, through the revealed or hidden [Torah], which is why the Talmud Yerushalmi says, "Even though we have sent you the order of prayers, do not deviate from your ancestral custom." [This appears to be based on Yerushalmi Eruvin 3:9.]

Therefore, for those parts [of the service] that need not be recited aloud - and that are not customarily recited aloud - one should say according to his custom. And for parts that are recited aloud - whether by law or common custom - it is necessary to pray according to the *nusach* of the congregation. And when he is the prayer leader, he must say according to the custom of the congregation, including his silent Amidah, since this is arranging his prayer [i.e., the repetition].

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All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.**

***We thank Rabbi Baruch Weintraub (10 years), Rabbi Alex Hecht (3 years),
Ezer Dena (3 years) and Rabbi Sammy Bergman (2 years), for their many articles in Toronto Torah!***

A Message from Rabbi Weintraub

As I retire from ten years of writing for Toronto Torah, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Beit Midrash Zichron Dov, its avreichim, chavreim, office staff, supporters, and our wonderful Rosh HaKollel, dear Rav Mordechai Torczyner. The Toronto Jewish community is truly blessed to host and support such a wonderful endeavour. May Hashem bring us all together again in our homeland, speedily in our days!

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

**Do you want to watch our Tribute to the Bergmans, Hechts and Kleins, and
Rabbi Michael Rosensweig's shiur on *The Principle and Ramifications of Tzelem Elokim*?
Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKyoqaqiouk>**

**Did you miss Toronto Torah #500, with articles by 12 Community Rabbis & our Past Sganim?
Go to <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/1005171/>**

**7:30 PM Wed. July 14: Religious Zionism, a mini-series
Rabbi Sammy Bergman, The State and Shabbat**

**8:00 PM Wed. July 14: Jewish Art, a mini-series
Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Verses from Tanach**

**3:00 PM to 5:00 PM Sunday July 18: Education & Inspiration for Tishah b'Av
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/tb5781>**

**3:00 PM Who Asked You to Trample My Yard? 3:45 PM The Importance of Empathy
4:30 PM Insights into the Kinnot of Tishah b'Av**

Monday July 19 through Friday August 20

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DAILY

Mon-Thu 10 AM to Noon, Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, via ZOOM (men)

Mon/Wed: Gemara Succah, Orot haTeshuvah Tues/Thurs: Parshah, Tanach: Melachim

WEEKLY

Most of our regular classes are now on summer hiatus, but options remain!

Shabbat July 10

After minchah at Shaarei Shomayim, Pirkei Avot, R' Sammy Bergman

After minchah at BAYT, Gemara Ketuvot, R' Mordechai Torczyner (men)

Monday July 12

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

Tuesday July 13

7:30 PM Shemuel Ch. 4, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) Last one before the summer!

Wednesday July 14

6:15 AM Talmud Eruvin, Rabbi Sammy Bergman

Thursday July 15

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

8:00 PM Gemara Beitzah, Ezer Dena (men, advanced)

Friday July 16

10:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman & Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Last one before the summer!