

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Ki Tavo

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Jeffrey Silver
in memory of Rabbi Dr. Reuven Bulka zt"l לעילוי נשמת הרב ראובן פינחס בן הרב חיים יעקב זצ"ל

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by the Goldman Family on the yahrtzeit of Mr. Jeffrey Goldman z"l,
לעילוי נשמת ר' יעקב זאב בן ר' ארי' צבי הכהן ז"ל זי"ע

On the Religious Establishment

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

The parshah opens by describing the mitzvah of bikkurim: A farmer brings the first products of his harvest to the Beit HaMikdash and presents them to the kohen. He then traces the history of those fruits from the exile in Egypt, through the redemption, entering the land, and up to growing the tree. This is a deeply personal moment in which the farmer gives voice to his direct relationship with G-d as it arises from his life experiences. (Devarim 26:1-11)

The Torah expresses this personal relationship a little later in the parshah: "Today you have declared (*he'emarta*) Hashem to be your G-d, and to follow in his ways, keep His laws and commandments, and listen to His voice." (ibid. 26:17) Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (ad loc.), citing Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, explains that the word *he'emarta* is a declaration which arises from a relationship. G-d's actions toward us revealed such moral greatness that we respond by declaring, "This is my G-d." The farmer stands in his field, sees his successful crop, and experiences a private moment of closeness to G-d. The Torah demands that the farmer concretize these feelings by publically declaring them in the Temple in front of the kohen who serves "in those days." (Devarim 26:3) The precise significance of "in those days" is debated by Rashi and Ramban.

Rashi (ad loc.) explains that the words "in those days" are an insistence to bring the first fruits to the kohen regardless of his stature. Even if the ko-

hanim of a particular generation are substandard, the commandment remains in place. This is similar to another commandment earlier in Devarim (17:9). Someone seeking judgment should not hesitate on the basis that the judges of his day are at a lower level than those of previous generations. He must submit to the judges who are active "in those days".

Ramban (ibid. 26:3) rejects the comparison between judges and kohanim. We can understand the concerns of someone seeking judgment; if the judges of his day lack knowledge and skill they may fail to properly handle the case. Kohanim, however, serve the purely functional role of carrying out the service in the Temple. Their personal attributes have no bearing on the service's success. Why would anyone be concerned about it?

In terms of our farmer, Ramban's view is clear. The feelings of closeness to G-d need to be expressed to G-d in the most direct way possible. This happens at the Temple, where the presence of G-d is the most tangible. The service there is performed by kohanim, hence the requirement to bring the first fruits to a kohen. How can we make sense of Rashi's position?

Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi defends Rashi's view. He argues that the reason for bringing the first fruits to a kohen is not only as part of the Temple service. The goal is to glorify the kohen and seek his blessing. Therefore, a person who views

the kohanim of his generation as lacking in righteousness, may not want to praise them with his offering of the first fruits. The Torah compels him to do so anyway.

Rabbi Mizrachi's explanation adds depth to our larger discussion. Personal religious experiences are powerful and can drive a unique commitment to G-d, morality, and the truth. Unfortunately, the established religious institutions around us, and their representatives, may not always reflect our ideals. Submitting to them may therefore seem like a betrayal of our own feelings. How can someone compromise on what he feels is the true path of G-d?

Despite the strength of this claim, the Torah compels the farmer to bring the symbol of his personal relationship with G-d and literally lay it at the feet of the kohanim, the religious establishment of his day. This is not because his feelings are invalid. It is because the kohanim of his generation are Divinely ordained. They are the religious leaders that the greater Jewish people need at that moment, in order to shepherd them along their historical path. An individual Jew may speak out and try to improve things based on his own understanding of G-d's will. But ultimately he must submit to the "kohen of his days", for the sake of the Jewish people as a whole.

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Summary

The prophet Yehu ben Chanani informs the wicked King Baasha of the Northern Kingdom (“Malchut Yisrael”) of his and his descendants’ impending demise because Baasha had encouraged the kingdom of Israel to sin, just like Yeravam had done before him. Yehu foretells that Baasha’s descendants who die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the fields will be consumed by birds. (16:1-7)

Elah, Baasha’s son, succeeds his father and rules for two short years before being assassinated by the general of half his chariotry, Zimri. Elah meets his ignoble end whilst drunk, and Zimri proceeds to wipe out every remaining member of Baasha’s family, fulfilling the prophecy of Yehu. (8-14)

Zimri maintains the coup of the Northern Kingdom for only seven days, before the people of Israel get wind and appoint Omri, the general of the army, as king. Omri then leads the people to retake the city of Tirtzah, capturing it. Zimri refuses to surrender, choosing instead to burn the palace to the ground whilst he cowers inside. (15-20)

The Israelite Kingdom then splits, with half following Tivni ben Ginat and the other half continuing to follow Omri. The people supporting Omri overpower Tivni’s followers, killing Tivni, and install Omri as the full king. (21-22)

During his twelve-year reign as king of Israel, Omri rules wickedly like Yeravam ben Nevat. While he manages to buy and build a city in Shomron which he names Shemer after the person from whom he bought it, he does little of note before being succeeded by his son Achav. (23-28)

Achav assumes the throne and rules for 22 years. He sins like Yeravam, and his wife Izevel aids and encourages him to err further. Izevel, daughter of Etbaal the king of Tzidon, a northern neighbor of Israel, leads Achav to worship idolatry, specifically Baal and Asherah. To top it all off, a man named Chiel rebuilds Yericho under Achav’s reign, with his first son dying when laying its foundations and his last son passing away when he hung the doors, fulfilling a curse issued by Yehoshua (Yehoshua 6:26). (29-34)

Insight

Baasha wiped out the line of the wicked Yeravam, apparently fulfilling G-d’s will. However, Yehu includes killing Yeravam among Baasha’s sins! (16:7) Why was that?

Commentators suggest that Baasha’s own wickedness undermined the righteousness of this deed. Thus, Rashi (16:7) explains that Baasha sinned in the same manner as Yeravam, and therefore had no right to kill him.

[Rabbi Alex Israel](#) points out several parallels between the houses of Yeravam and Baasha. They reigned for similar periods (22 and 24 years), and their sons reigned for similar periods (two years each). The words of the prophets describing their sins and punishments, and how both houses were eventually entirely wiped out, are similar as well. These parallels highlight that a prophecy of destruction isn’t a license for brutality, and the punishments will come full circle.

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It Happened in Israel: Managing Shemithah’s Challenges**Rabbi Jonathan Ziring**

Rebbe once saw the desperate need that the poor faced during Shemithah, as food was not being grown. Thus, he considered waiving the laws of Shemithah, ruling that the laws were only rabbinic then. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair came to visit Rebbe at this time. Rebbe tried to engage him in conversation, but was pushed off – he would ask about the state of the produce in the fields, and Rabbi Pinchas responded simply “the chicory is good.” From this conversation, Rebbe concluded that Rabbi Pinchas disagreed with his approach.

Rebbe then invited Rabbi Pinchas to eat at his home. He originally accepted. However, when Rabbi Pinchas reached Rebbe home and saw mules, he expressed shock that one would keep such violent animals around and left. When Rebbe heard, he tried to reconcile by sending messengers to speak to Rabbi Pinchas, but Rabbi Pinchas had the local people surround him to block them. However, when the messengers clarified their purpose, the people left and allowed them to approach.

Rabbi Pinchas then gathered his family around him and a fire descended from the sky to block the messengers. When Rebbe was told about this, he said that since he was not able to benefit from Rabbi Pinchas’ presence in this world, he would in the world to come. (Yerushalmi Demai 1:3, Taanit 3:1)

Yaffa Zilcha analyzes this story in her book, *B’ein Aggadot HaYerushalmi* (pp. 31-46). She contends that Rebbe and Rabbi Pinchas represent two different world views. Rebbe wanted to find a way for people who are forced economically to “violate Shemithah” to act in a permissible way. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, however, did not share this goal, as explained in the Pnei Moshe commentary.

This fits Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair’s identity, in several ways:

- He was an extremely pious person, a *chasid* and showed extraordinary faith that G-d would sustain people. (Mishnah Sotah 9:15)
- He, and even his animals, were extra stringent with the agricultural mitzvot of Eretz Yisrael. (Chullin 7a-b, Yerushalmi Demai 1:3)
- G-d supported him with miracles, such as by ensuring that his animal knew to eat tithed produce exclusively. (ibid)

Zilcha argues that the talmudic conversation should be understood as follows. Chicory is animal food, and Rebbe was hinting that since people were reduced to eating it, the situation was dire enough to require leniency. By saying “the chicory is good,” Rabbi Pinchas expressed that he would rather people eat animal food than be lenient. Zilcha contends that this was due to his greater demand for religious sacrifice. [On the other hand, the *Aleh Tamar* commentary suggests that Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair may have held that Shemithah was a biblical obligation at that time.] Even economically they diverged, as Rebbe was wealthy, expressed here by his mules. The community members surrounded Rabbi Pinchas out of respect, but by then allowing the messengers to approach, they may have showed that they agreed that for the average person, the less pietistic approach of Rebbe was more realistic. The final scene reflects Rebbe’s understanding that their views will never be reconciled in this world.

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Biography
Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe
Mrs. Elyssa Goldschmiedt

Rabbi Shlomo (Wilhelm) Wolbe was born in Berlin in 1914. Raised in a non-observant Jewish home, he attended the University of Berlin, and he became interested in Judaism through his association with the Orthodox Students Union.

After completing university, Rabbi Wolbe learned in the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary, the Montreux Yeshiva in Switzerland, and then the Mir Yeshiva of Poland under the guidance of Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz and Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein. Unable to follow the Mir Yeshiva when it moved into Russia during World War II, Rabbi Wolbe spent the war years serving as a rabbi in Stockholm, Sweden, where he lived with the family of a yeshiva colleague.

After the war, Rabbi Wolbe created a school for Jewish refugee girls and eventually moved to Israel, where he married Rivka Grodzinski. He served as *menahel ruchani* at the Be'er Yaakov Yeshiva for thirty years alongside its Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro. In 1981, he became the mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva in Israel and then opened Yeshivat Givat Shaul.

A unique leader, Rabbi Wolbe placed an emphasis on the importance of individuality; that each Jew should not view himself simply as a member of the herd, trying to conform to the general Jewish population. To quote Rabbi Frances Nataf in a eulogy that appeared [here](#), Rabbi Wolbe was "one of a very few contemporary rabbis who had something unique and important to say to those of us with a Western education." He passed away in Jerusalem in 2005.

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Torah and Translation
Jealousy, Self-Image and Personal Growth
Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur I Shaar 1 Chapter 6
Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

הבה נתבוננה נא. מה גרם לדכאון זה? הגע בעצמך: במשך חדשים למדת, עבדת, היית עליו ומרוצה. ופתאום - כאב, עצבות, חוסר-התרכזות ואי הצלחה. כיצד אתה מסביר בעצמך תופעה זאת?

הנה אתה נמצא בין חברים. כלכם עסוקים בענין אחד, כלכם שומעים שיעור אחד, כלכם מתמודדים יחד להבין ולהעמיק, לזכור, לשאול ולתרוץ. ומתגלים כשרונותיו של כל אחד ואחד מכם... ועם גילוי הכחות החיוביים של כל יחיד - מתגלים גם גבולות יכולתו...

יותר ממה שאתה רואה ומעריך את כחותיך שכלך - אתה רואה כשרונות חבריך. ואצל עצמך אתה רואה רק שאין לך, מה שיש לאחרים. הלימוד המשותף דוחף אותך יום-יום אל גבולות אלה. רשמים שליליים אלה מצטברים יום-יום. בתחילה לא הרגשת בהם. בבואך לישיבה אולי היו לך דמיונות מופרזים על עצמך וכשרונותיך. אבל יום-יום ראתי יותר ויותר: כשרונות של אחרים, מגרעות אצלך... וביום אחד נתמלאה הסאה, הנך חש בעצמך כי אין לך כלום. לא כשרון ולא הצלחה ולא תקווה. רק: אפיסת-כח, עצבות, צער.

הרגשה זו נקראת - קנאה. ותהא זאת נחמתך, ידידי, כי כל צעיר סובל מקנאה, ועל אחת כמה וכמה - בן ישיבה. אין לך מקום בו היגיעה הרוחנית כה מאומצת כמו בישיבה, ולכן אין גם מקום המעמיד את האדם בבהירות כה רבה על כחותיו הרוחניים וגבולותיהם.

המכיר את עצמו ויודע תכונותיו, ויודע כי מה שחננו הבורא יתברך - מתנה גדולה היא, ואם רק ינצל את כוחותיו יגיע לכל מעלה חמודה, וישיג בתורה הקדושה מה שהבורא עולם רצה שישגיח, אדם זה אינו סובל עוד מקנאה...

ראיתי דבר נפלא באור החיים בפרשת קין והבל שהיא סוגיית הקנאה בתורה. הוא מבאר על הפסוק "למה חרה לך ולמה נפל פניך, הלא אם תטיב שאת וכו'": "אם תהיה מבחינת טוב, כל מעשיך שורה עליהם בחינת הטוב ומעצמן הם מתנשאים, כי הקדושה אינה צריכה לאחרים..." כמה גדולים דברים אלו! הקדושה אינה צריכה לאחרים!...

Let us contemplate, what caused this depression? Press yourself: Over the course of months you learned, worked, and were joyous and satisfied. And suddenly, pain, sadness, lack of focus and lack of success. How do you explain this phenomenon to yourself?

You are found among friends, all of you involved in one thing, all of you hearing one lesson, all of you contending together to understand and to analyze, to remember, to ask and to answer. And the talents of each one of you are revealed... And along with the revelation of the positive talents of each one are revealed the limits of his ability as well...

More than you see and value your intellectual talents, you see the talents of your peers, and you see that you don't have what others have. Collaborative learning pushes you against these boundaries daily. These negative impressions accumulate daily. Perhaps, when you came to yeshiva you held exaggerated images of yourself and your talents. But daily you have seen, more and more, the talents of others and your own deficiencies... And one day, the measure is full. You sense that you possess nothing - no talent, no success, and no hope. Only lack of talent, sadness, pain.

This feeling is called: Jealousy. And this shall be your comfort, my friend, for every young person suffers from jealousy. How much more so a student in yeshiva. There is no place where spiritual striving is so strenuous as in yeshiva, and therefore, there is no place which will establish for a person with such great clarity his spiritual talents, and their limits.

One who recognizes himself and knows his traits, and knows that what G-d has given him is a great gift and if he will but use his talents he will achieve every desired level, and he will achieve in the holy Torah that which the Creator of the world wanted him to achieve and in the way that the Creator of the world wanted him to achieve it - such a person will not suffer from jealousy any longer...

I saw something wondrous in [Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar's] Ohr haChaim on the story of Kayin and Hevel, which is the Torah's passage about jealousy. He explained the verse (Bereishit 4:7), "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you will do good, you will receive good, etc." "If you will be good, goodness will be manifest upon all of your deeds, and they will be elevated on their own, for holiness does not require [intervention by] others..." How great is this statement! Holiness does not require [intervention by] others!...

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

Monday-Thursday

10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)
Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook
Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat August 28

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Simcha Suite (men)

Sunday August 29

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Shabbat, 533 Spring Gate or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613

Monday August 30

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>

Tuesday August 31

1:30 PM R' M Torczyner, Iyov, Faith & Loyalty: High Holidays in the Era of COVID ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/hh5782>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 4), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday September 1

10:00 AM R' M Torczyner, The Birthday of Adam or the Birthday of Eve? ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

Thursday September 2

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 20), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

Friday September 3

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*
In-person at 159 Almore Ave (*vaccinated-only*), on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

COMING UP!

Motzaei Shabbat August 28—Pre-Selichot Sessions! LIVE AND IN-PERSON!

All free of charge; All are welcome!; Masks required

9:30 PM R' Chaim Metzger, @BAYT, Perceiving G-d via the 13 Attributes (also @ <http://tiny.cc/musicalselichot>)

10:15 PM R' M. Torczyner, @Bnai Torah, The First Selichah: Closing the Gap (also @ <http://tiny.cc/selichot82>)

11:30 PM Rabbi Jared Anstandig, @Shaarei Shomayim, Kumsitz, "Waking Up for Rosh Hashanah"

11:30 PM Idan Rakovsky, @Shaarei Tefillah, Who Can Write in the Book of Life?

11:45 PM Rabbi Steven Gotlib, @The Village Shul, Selichot: A Brief Introduction

12:00 AM Rabbi Yehuda Mann, @Clanton Park Synagogue, Praying to Angels?

12:30 AM Rabbi M. Torczyner, @Aish TCS, Chanah's Aggressive Prayer & Ours (also @ <http://tiny.cc/selichot82>)

Sunday August 29

TISHREI IN A DAY! Live on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/tishrei>

Rosh HaShanah

10:00 AM Rabbi Jared Anstandig, Ezra's Rosh HaShanah

10:30 AM Idan Rakovsky, A Journey Under the Temple Mount

11:00 AM Rabbi Dr. Moshe Yeres, Happy Days Are Here Again?

11:30 AM Rabbi Yehuda Mann, A Day for *We* or *Me*?

Yom Kippur

12:00 PM Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Yonah: Is Teshuvah Possible?

12:30 PM Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: Jabel Muntar: Rock and Hard Place

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4:30 PM Rabbi Dr. Seth Grauer, Reconciliation and Resolution

5:00 PM Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, The True Birthday of the World?

#### Succot, Shemini Atzeret, Simchat Torah

5:30 PM Mrs. Shyndee Kestenbaum, Kohelet: The Sword of Ambition

6:00 PM Rabbi Jared Anstandig, The Transformation of Israel

6:30 PM Rabbi Steven Gotlib, Of Capitals and Consulates

7:00 PM Rabbi Yehuda Mann, The Whale in the Succah

All are welcome! Free of charge! For more details - <https://torontotorah.com/tishrei>