

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayera

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This issue of Toronto Torah, his Bar Mitzvah parshah, is dedicated by Nathan Kirsh in loving memory of the guidance and inspiration of his dear parents and brother z"l

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

### Can We Fight G-d in Our Prayers?

Idan Rakovsky

Parshat Vayera is packed with many stories that are built into the very essence of our nation. We will highlight one of them :Avraham's prayer when he acknowledges that Hashem is willing to destroy S'dom and Amorah: "Abraham came forward and said, 'Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it?'" (Bereishit 18:23-24, JPS 1985 tr.)

The Hebrew word that is used to introduce the prayer ("Abraham came forward") is *Vayigash*. A midrash offers an explanation for the meaning of this word, as it appears in various places in Tanach:

We find the verb *nigash* - "to come forward" - used in three different ways. First, in the sense of coming near to wage war "So Joab ... drew near unto the battle. (Samuel II 10:13)" Second, coming near to persuade by entreaty "And Judah came near to him. (Bereishit 44:18)" Third, coming near to pray "And Elijah the prophet came near. (Kings I 18:36)" Abraham employed all of these methods — to fight by speaking sternly, and to persuade by entreaty, and to pray. (Bereishit Rabbah 49:8, Steinsaltz tr.)

With great passion, Avraham pleads with Hashem not to destroy the two cities. By speaking sternly, he accuses Hashem of acting immorally. This is an

unusual form of prayer, which we don't necessarily encounter in our daily prayer routine. At one point, he even proclaims what appears to be a threat aimed at Hashem, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Bereishit 18:25, JPS 1985 tr.)

Rabbi Judah Loew, also known as the Maharal of Prague, adds that Avraham addressed his prayer to three different names of Hashem, each name with its own meaning: E-lohim, E-l, and the four letter Name which we do not pronounce. E-lohim refers to a prayer of *midat hadin*, a prayer that derives from feelings of strict justice and intolerance towards the immoral. [See Shemot 22:7, where this Name is borrowed to refer to a judge.]

When it comes our intimate, deep prayers, we must ask ourselves this profound question: **is there any place for demanding justice in our prayers? Is it not sacrilege to argue against G-d?**

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler answers this question with a unique perspective on the essence of prayer. In his book *Michtav mei'Eliyahu* he writes that by approaching Hashem in this specific way, Avraham does not accuse Hashem of acting in a way that might seem as desecrating His own Name. Rather, Avraham pleads with Hashem to change His decision **so that Avraham himself will not view Hashem in a negative**

**light** – which would desecrate Hashem's Name. This prayer of war, explains Rabbi Dessler, is not a prayer against Hashem, but rather a prayer against the possibility of desecrating Hashem's Name - *Chillul Hashem*.

Using this idea, we might also better understand the following words of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in *Mesillat Yesharim* (11), "The branches of the sin of Chillul Hashem (of desecrating Hashem's Name) are also numerous and great. For a person must be exceedingly concerned of Hashem's honour. In everything he does, he must look and contemplate exceedingly that there will not come out of this something which may cause a profanation of the honour of Heaven, G-d forbid." (Rabbi Yosef Sabba tr.)

Our sages have taught us (Berachot 26b) that our prayers were instituted along the lines of the prayers of our ancestors. Perhaps our ancestors inspired not only the **existence** of the prayers, but also **the way** we approach prayer. Even if this prayer of Avraham stands in contradiction to our basic perception of gentle prayer, we should ask ourselves - can we incorporate pieces of the prayer of Avraham into our own prayers?

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**Summary**

The chapter opens with the parenthetical note that after King Achav's death, the Moabite cities that were under his dominion began to rebel against Jewish rule. (1:1)

King Achazyah falls through the lattice-work in his palace and is badly injured. He sends messengers to ask *Ba'al Zevuv*, an idol, whether he will recover from this injury. An angel of Hashem appears to Eliyahu and sends him to intercept Achazyah's messengers with a message for the king. Eliyahu asks why Achazyah needed to ask a foreign god about his injury. Why didn't he just ask Hashem? Because of his unfaithfulness, Achazyah will not recover and will die on the bed where he lies. (1:2-4)

The messengers return too quickly, and Achazyah quickly figures out that it was Eliyahu who met them. The king sends a group of soldiers to arrest Eliyahu. (1:5-8)

They find Eliyahu sitting on top of a hill, and they command him: "Man of G-d, descend in the name of the king." Eliyahu retorts that if he is really a

"man of G-d" then fire should come down from the sky and burn up the soldiers, which it does. Achazyah sends a second group of soldiers who suffer the same fate. When the third group arrives, the commander begs Eliyahu to have mercy on him and his men. An angel then tells Eliyahu that the king will not harm him, and he can go with men. Eliyahu repeats his initial message to the king in person. The prophecy is fulfilled. Achazyah dies from his injuries and is succeeded by his brother Yehoram. (1:9-17)

**Insight**

Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser ("Malbim") notes subtle differences in the interactions between Eliyahu and the three different groups of soldiers. The first group's commander confronts Eliyahu alone on the top of the hill and commands him directly to descend. The second commander is wary because of what happened to the first group. He stays at the bottom of the hill and calls to Eliyahu from there. This is why his speech is described with the word *vaya'an*, which the Malbim interprets as calling out loud. The second commander also commands Eliyahu less

directly. He also formulates his demands differently, stating that the king (and not the commander himself) is asking for Eliyahu to come down. The third commander begs Eliyahu to spare him, twice. The first time is to spare him from death by fire, and the second from the punishment he will receive from the king if he returns without Eliyahu.

The episode with the groups of soldiers illustrates one of the key themes in Sef'er Melachim: the central place that G-d plays in the political reality of the Jewish kingdoms. The recognition of Eliyahu as a "man of G-d" contradicts the condescending orders given to him by the first and second commanders. It demonstrates a superficial use of that title, and an overinflated sense of the king's power. Through repeated exposure to the miraculous, the soldiers are educated about Who is actually dominant in this situation.

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**It Happened in Israel: The Spirit of Onkelos**

Located on the inside margin in many editions of Chumash, Targum Onkelos appears to be another unassuming commentator translating the Torah into Aramaic, but his story reveals much more. Onkelos bar Kalonikos was Roman nobility, nephew of an emperor, and yet he converted to Judaism.

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 11a) reports that the emperor sent a troop of Roman soldiers to forcibly bring him back to Rome. Onkelos drew them closer to him by teaching them various verses of Tanach, and converted them.

The emperor dispatched another troop, commanding them not to say anything to Onkelos. As they were escorting Onkelos out, he said but one statement: each military officer typically holds a torch before someone one rank above them, until you reach the ruler. Does the ruler ever hold a torch before people? The soldiers replied that the ruler holds a torch for no one. Onkelos continued to explain that G-d held a torch before Israel in the desert, giving them illumination by a pillar of fire. The soldiers converted.

The following troop was sent with explicit instructions not to converse with Onkelos at all. The soldiers successfully grabbed him and were on the way back, Onkelos saw a mezuzah placed on a doorway. He placed his hand on it and asked the soldiers, "What is this?" They replied, "You tell us." Onkelos responded that typically a king of flesh and blood sits inside his palace and the guards stand outside, but G-d guards from the outside while the Jewish people sit in their homes, as in Tehillim 121:8, "G-d will guard you, going out and coming in, from now and forever." These soldiers too are convinced and convert to Judaism. Admitting defeat, the emperor sends no more soldiers after Onkelos.

The emperor's sending three sets of soldiers to retrieve Onkelos is reminiscent of King Shaul sending three sets of messengers to try and catch King David in Shemuel I Chapter 19. In Shemuel I 19, David had escaped Shaul and was hiding in Ramah, where Shemuel HaNavi lived. As each group of messengers came in, they saw Shemuel and his prophets and were overcome with Ruach Elokim, the Divine spirit of G-d, and they too became prophets. Shaul decided to chase after David himself, and upon arrival he too became a prophet prophesying day and night, thus allowing David to escape.

Onkelos' Torah, eloquence, and skill resolve the conflict just like the Ruach Elokim did in Shemuel, with each now having gained and become closer to G-d as a result of the encounter. Onkelos utilized the Torah he had learned not only for his own benefit, but also to reach others. While we may not speak fluent Aramaic, there is no question that Onkelos and his Targum aided and guided Jews for centuries just as he did for the soldiers in the story.

(Note that not everyone agrees that Onkelos of this story is the same person as the Onkelos who authored the standard Aramaic translation of the Torah. For more on Onkelos, see Rabbi Metzger's upcoming series on *Artscroll Through the Ages*. For more on the link between the stories of Onkelos and Shaul, as well as Eliyahu and Achaziah's soldiers in the Tanach column above, see a class by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner [here](#).)

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## Biography

### Rabbi Yissachar Tamar

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Rabbi Yissachar Tamar was born in Poland in 1896. He was a descendant of many great scholars, such as Rabbi Natan Nata Shapira, author of *Megaleh Amukot*, and Rabbi Avraham Gombiner, author of the *Magen Avraham* commentary to Shulchan Aruch. He studied in yeshivot in Poland and Galicia and was a student of Rabbi Shaul Moshe Zilberman, his wife's grandfather, Rabbi Meir Yechiel Halevi Halstock (the Ostrovtser Rebbe), Rabbi Meir Dan Plotzky, and Rabbi Pinchas Yehoshua Bombach.

When the First World War broke out, Rabbi Tamar went to study in Breslau, Germany. For nine months, he moved to England on the invitation of Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung and served as Rabbi in several communities. In 1933, he moved to Israel through the help of Rabbi Avraham Kook, and he served as a Rabbi in Tel Aviv.

From a young age, he felt a deep affinity for the Talmud Yerushalmi. Over the years, he wrote many comments and insights on the Yerushalmi, which were eventually compiled into a work entitled *Alei Tamar*. The work is not a line-by-line commentary on the Talmud Yerushalmi. Rather, it is a collection of comments of various lengths on different passages in the Talmud. It includes essays on Talmudic reasoning, law, history, language and even academic research. The books were edited by his son-in-law, Rabbi Avraham Zvi Rabinowitz. The first volume of *Alei Tamar* was printed in his lifetime in 1979, and the remaining six volumes were published posthumously. For the work, Rabbi Tamar was awarded the Rabbi Toledano award for excellence in Torah scholarship.

Rabbi Tamar drew on an incredible wealth of sources. When he passed away, his extensive library was donated to Yeshivat Har Etzion, where it is maintained as a separate section as the "Tamar Library." (This author was a frequent beneficiary of the rare volumes that are stored there.) Rabbi Tamar passed away in 1982.

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## Torah and Translation

### On the Methods of the Two Talmuds

Rabbi Yissachar Tamar, Introduction to Alei Tamar

Translated by Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

הערה כללית בפירוש הירושלמי בכל מקום. הנה בחגיגה י. [על הפסוק] 'וליוצא ולבא אין שלום מן הצר' אומר רבי יוחנן היוצא מתלמוד לתלמוד. "ופירש ר"ח אפילו יוצא מתלמוד בבלי לתלמוד א", אין שלום שאין דרכן אחת עכ"ל...

ור"י, שהיה מסדר תלמוד הירושלמי ביסודו וראש אמוראי א", אבל גם מראשי תלמוד בבלי שכן כל תלמוד בבלי מלא מתורתו, והיה בקי ומומחה בדרכם של שני התלמודים, שבהרבה מקומות אינם מתאחים בפירושי המשנה והברייתות ובקבלת השמועות, שכן דרכם והלך דעותיהם שונות זו מזו, ולפיכך הוא אומר שאמוראי בבלי שהתלמוד בבלי נבלע בדמו ונשמתו, כשהוא בא לתלמוד ירושלמי אין שלום במשנתו שצריך להתאמץ שלא יהיה מושפע מתלמוד בבלי בלימוד הירושלמי שכן אין דרכם אחת. ואם כי שניהם ממעיין אחד נובעים, הם מתפשטים בהליכתם לשני ימים ימי התלמודים.

ובזה יש לבאר בב"מ פה. "ר' זירא כי סליק לארעא דישראל יתיב מאה תעניתא דלשתכח תלמודא דבבלאי מיניה כי היכי דלא נטרדיה." ואין להעלות על הדעת כי התענה על דבר בזה, ועוד הרי ר' זירא כשעלה לא"י כבר מגדולי הדור היה ומגדולי אמוראי בבל שתלמוד בבלי נבלע בדמו ובנשמתו, וכמו שלא נפרד מנשמתו כך לא יתכן שיפרד מתלמוד בבלי ואף אם יצום אלף תענית. אלא הפירוש הוא כי ר' זירא הדייקן הגדול ואיש אמונים בתלמוד התענה ע"ז שיהיה בכוחו לתפוס תלמוד ירושלמי אמיתי ומדויק לפי שיטתו ודרכו מבלי שיהיה מושפע בלא יודעים מהלך מחשבתו של התלמוד הבבלי.

A general note about the interpretation of the Jerusalem Talmud in all places. In Chagigah (10a) the Talmud states [regarding Zechariah 8:10] "Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in due to the adversary," "Rabbi Yochanan said: this applies even to [one who leaves the study] of [one] Talmud for [the other] Talmud." Rabbeinu Chananel explains that even if one leaves the Babylonian Talmud for the Talmud of Israel, there is no peace, as their approaches are not the same.

Rabbi Yochanan, who arranged the main part of the Jerusalem Talmud, was of the heads of the Talmudic sages of the Land of Israel but was also among the leaders of the Babylonian Talmud, for the Babylonian Talmud is full of his teachings. He was knowledgeable and expert in the approaches of the two Talmuds, that in many places do not reconcile with each other in their commentaries on *mishnayot* and *b'raitot*, and the accepted tradition, for such is their approach, and the flow of their opinions differs from each other. Therefore, he says that when a Babylonian scholar, for whom the Babylonian Talmud is absorbed in his blood and soul, approaches the Jerusalem Talmud, he has no peace in his study, for he must struggle not to be influenced by the Babylonian Talmud in his study of the Jerusalem Talmud, as their approaches are not the same. Though both flow from one spring, they spread in their paths into the two Talmudic seas.

With this we can explain Bava Metziah 85a, that Rabbi Zeira, when he went to the Land of Israel, fasted one hundred fasts to forget the Talmud of the Babylonians so that it would not preoccupy him. It is inconceivable that he fasted for this! Further, when Rabbi Zeira moved to Israel, he was already from the greatest of the generation and of the greatest Talmudic scholars in Babylon, such that the Babylonian Talmud was absorbed in his blood and soul. Just as he did not part from his soul, it would have been impossible for him to separate from the Babylonian Talmud, even if he fasted one thousand fasts. Rather, this means that Rabbi Zeira, the great precise scholar, the man of faith in his Talmud, fasted so that he would have the ability to grasp a true and accurate [understanding of the] Jerusalem Talmud according to its method and way, without being influenced unknowingly by the thought process of the Babylonian Talmud.

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Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook

Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

### Shabbat October 23

After 8:00 AM shacharit R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Simcha Suite (men) *not this week*

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Weekly Class, Shaarei Tefillah

### Sunday October 24

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, Postmodernist Jewish Thought, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, 533 Spring Gate or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/iliczoom> 613613 (univ)

### Monday October 25

**7:30-9:30 PM Tribute to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l on his first yahrtzeit**

**Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Judaism: No Longer Mainstream**

**Rabbi Steven Gotlib, Dignity of Difference, Strength of Solidarity**

**Rabbi Jared Anstandig, The Great Partnership: Science and Torah**

**Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Changing the Conversation**

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

### Tuesday October 26

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 1), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

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

### Wednesday October 27

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Eruvin, Shaarei Shomayim and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/eruvim>

10:00 AM R' M Torczyner, The Philosophers of Medieval Spain, #3 of 3 ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Introduction to Talmud, Week 4 of 5, Shaarei Tefillah

8:15 PM R' Chaim Metzger, Artscroll Through the Ages, BAYT and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/translated>

### Thursday October 28

8:30 AM R' Chaim Metzger, Trei Asar, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/trei> (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 21), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, email [ymanntorontotorah.com](mailto:ymanntorontotorah.com) for location (advanced, men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Gemara Bava Batra, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

### Friday October 29

8:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*  
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

**Coming Up!**

**SHABBAT NOVEMBER 6-7 - SHABBATON AT SHAAREI SHOMAYIM!**

**Theme: When Does Judaism Change?**