

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Shemot

21 Tevet, 5782/December 25, 2021

Vol. 13 Num. 17 (#518)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Mimi and Byron Shore in memory of Mimi's mother, Chaya Dabrusa bat Shneur Zalman z"l, whose yahrtzeit is 21 Tevet

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Miriam and Moishe Kesten in memory of their mothers, Rose Kesten ז"ל רחל בת שלמה אליעזר הלוי ז"ל, whose yahrtzeit is 22 Tevet and Edith Galet ז"ל חנה בת נתן ז"ל, whose first yahrtzeit is 24 Tevet

The Anti-Leader

The book of Shemot marks the beginning of G-d's relationship not with individual Jews, but with the Jewish nation as a whole. This kind of interaction called for a new type of personality: a messenger-prophet who would communicate G-d's will to the people. The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:39) argues that while there were prophets before Moshe, none of them was ever told to relay a **commandment** to other people. G-d communicated ethical ideals to the prophets and if other people followed them, it was because they were successfully convinced. Only through Moshe Rabbeinu, a special kind of prophetic leader, did G-d begin to communicate mitzvot.

What was it about Moshe's personality that suited him to this role?

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (Commentary to Shemot 2:12, 3:12-13) argues that there was a fundamental tension in Moshe's personality between a radical commitment to justice and truth, and an aversion to public life, that made him the perfect candidate for prophet.

We encounter Moshe's commitment to justice throughout this parshah. His first act was to save a Jewish slave from his Egyptian slavemaster. He saved the daughters of Yitro at the well. The parshah ends with Moshe arguing with G-d on behalf of the Jews; he asked why their situation had gotten worse since he was sent to remove them from slavery. Moshe's brav-

ery in these actions was staggering. He was willing to risk his reputation, put his life in danger, and even face G-d Himself in the pursuit of justice.

At the same time, Moshe completely lacked the drive to take his place at the head of a group and lead. He actively sought to avoid public exposure of his deeds, and so his eventual rise was clearly Divine.

We may see this from Moshe's first act with the Egyptian, where he carefully checked to see if anyone was looking before making a move. But the clearest example of this is Moshe's obstinate refusal to become G-d's messenger, and, by extension, the leader of the Jews. Ultimately, G-d Himself testified to Moshe's unsurpassed humility. (Bamidbar 12:3)

Moshe's personality thus combined a relentless drive to do good and help others, especially his own people, and complete avoidance of engaging in public life. These features are encapsulated by a midrash (Shemot Rabbah 1:26) that explains how Moshe developed his speech impediment: Pharaoh's soothsayers were worried that Moshe might be the leader they predicted would usurp Pharaoh's crown. They advised Pharaoh to kill him. Yitro argued that Moshe was unintelligent, and proposed a test that would prove this. Moshe was presented with two bowls, one filled with gold and the other with burning coals. Choosing the gold would indicate

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

that he desired wealth and power and would be a danger to Pharaoh. Choosing the coals would prove that he didn't know what was good for him, as Yitro had argued. Moshe initially reached for the gold, until the angel Gabriel pushed his hand into the coals. Placing his burning hand into his mouth to cool it down, Moshe injured himself, which resulted in his speech impediment.

In fact, choosing the coals was not a sign of foolishness. The coals symbolize Moshe's personality. Gold is a substance that presents its luster and great worth to the world. Coals are the opposite: on the outside they are dull and gray, and their powerful fire is concealed beneath the surface. This dichotomy manifested physically in Moshe's speech impediment. The most important messages ever communicated were to be presented by a man who physically struggled to speak them.

For Rabbi Hirsch, this tension is what made Moshe Rabbeinu the ultimate prophet. He had the ideological engine, the unwavering commitment to justice, kindness, and truth. And his lack of the outward trappings of a leader demonstrates that only Divine intervention could have enabled his success. In this way, Moshe's humility made space for G-d. He straddled the line between embodying G-d's message, and revealing G-d's presence.

afriedmann@torontotorah.com

OUR BEIT MIDRASH

ROSH BEIT MIDRASH	RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER
SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH	RABBI JARED ANSTANDIG, RABBI YEHUDA MANN
AVREICHIM	RABBI STEVEN GOTLIB, IDAN RAKOVSKY, RABBI CHAIM METZGER
SEDER BOKER DIRECTOR	RABBI MOSHE YERES
WOMEN'S BEIT MIDRASH	MRS. SHIRA METZGER
ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS	RABBI ADAM FRIEDMANN, RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING
CHAVERIM	EITAN MARKUS, DANIEL SHEINIS, NATAN SNOWBELL, ELI WELTMAN
CHAVEROT	ORLY AZIZA, ARIELLA MARKUS, YEJIDE OMOTOSO, KINNERET WITTY



An affiliate of
Torah MiTzion and YU
Find Toronto Torah online at
tiny.cc/torontotorah
We are grateful to
Continental Press

Summary

We are now in the throes of the collapse of the northern kingdom, Yisrael. Our chapter begins as Yehu, fresh from murdering Achaziah (king of Yehudah) and Achav (king of Yisrael), launches a bloody campaign against the remaining heirs of King Achav and the worshippers of the Baal.

Yehu sends letters to each of the elders in charge of raising Achav's seventy heirs, goading them to utilize their armies and supporters to vie for the vacant throne. Yehu's letter and previous actions frighten them so much that they simply surrender, saying they will do whatever Yehu wants. (1-5)

Yehu sends a second letter to the elders, asking them to prove their loyalty by sending him the heads of Achav's heirs by noon the next day. The elders behead their charges, placing Achav's sons' heads in baskets and sending them to Yehu in Emek Yizre'el. Yehu instructs a messenger to pile the heads of the princes by the city gate in two heaps. The next morning, Yehu tells the people "You think you're righteous? I committed regicide, but look at who killed the princes, was it not the elders?" Rashi and Radak explain that Yehu's point was to argue that all that

was happening was from G-d; the fate of the House of Achav was exactly as Eliyahu had predicted.

Yehu then strikes down every remaining member of Achav's House, including the notables, acquaintances, and priests. (6-11)

On Yehu's way to Shomron, he meets relatives of King Achaziah of Yehudah, who by their admission are on the way to pay respects to the family of Achav and Izevel. Yehu demands their capture, and then slaughters all 42 of them. (12-14)

Yehu then meets a man named Yehonadav, who joins him. Yehu continues to wipe out any remaining members of the house of Achav. (15-17)

Yehu lays a trap for Baal worshippers, inviting all of them and their priests to join him at Baal's temple for a solemn assembly with the threat of death for those who fail to attend. Yehu provides clothing for all of the Baal worshippers and cunningly tells them to make sure no one amongst them serves G-d. Once they finish making their offerings, Yehu orders his men stationed outside to slaughter every last Baal worshipper. Yehu and his men proceed

to burn and destroy the temple of Baal and turn it into latrines. Yehu's only shortcoming is not removing the Golden Calves of Yeravam. (18-29)

G-d promises Yehu that four of his generation will be king of Israel. However, Yehu does not follow G-d's Torah wholeheartedly, following Yeravam's sins. (30-31)

King Chazael of Aram attacks Israel on the east side of the Jordan River (32-33).

Yehu reigns for 28 years, and his son Yehoachaz succeeds him (34-36)

Insight

Yehu leaves behind a difficult legacy: filled with carnage and yet receiving Divine approval, bookended by a mission to destroy the House of Achav (9:6-10) and with Divine reward (10:30). The book of Hosheia opens by prophesying Yehu's house's destruction for his actions in Emek Yizre'el. [Rabbi Alex Israel](#), based on Rashi, explains that although Yehu followed G-d's mission, he failed to live up to the lofty expectations he demanded of others, and therefore he was punished.

cmetzger@torontotorah.com

It Happened in Israel: Praying for the Wicked

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

One of most colourful figures found in the Talmud is Beruriah, the daughter of Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon and the wife of Rabbi Meir. She is often presented as intellectually sparring with various interlocutors, be they rabbis, heretics, or her husband. In a celebrated story, she teaches her husband about the proper way to relate to the wicked.

The Talmud records that there was a group of wicked people who were causing Rabbi Meir great pain. To stop them, he prayed for G-d to kill them. Beruriah challenged this approach, based on her interpretation of a biblical verse:

What is your thinking? On what basis do you pray for the death of these hooligans? Do you base yourself on the verse, **as it is written: "Let sins cease from the land"** (Psalms 104:35), which you interpret to mean that the world would be better if the wicked were destroyed? **But is it written, let sinners cease?** Let **sins** cease, **is written... Rather, pray for G-d to have mercy on them, that they should repent**, and if they repent, then the wicked will be no more, as they will have repented. (William Davidson [Koren] Talmud, Berachot 10a)

Beruriah contended that when Tehillim expresses the hope that sinners should perish, it says *chata'im*, which can mean "sins", rather than *chotim*, which means "sinners." From this she derived that the proper way to deal with the wicked is to eliminate their sins by making the wicked righteous. Rabbi Meir accepted this lesson and prayed for them to repent, and, in the end, they did. It is worth noting that Beruriah's interpretation of this verse is not accepted by all commentaries,

and it is not clear whether she meant to convey the actual meaning of the verse or to use it to teach a moral lesson.

Insight

Many traditions teach versions of the concept "Hate the sin, not the sinner" or "Hate the sin, love the sinner." However, how does one achieve this? C.S. Lewis offered [a brilliant insight](#):

"For a long time I used to think this a silly, straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man? **But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life—namely myself.** However much I might dislike my own cowardice or conceit or greed, I went on loving myself. There had never been the slightest difficulty about it. In fact the very reason why I hated the things was that I loved the man. Just because I loved myself, I was sorry to find that I was the sort of man who did those things..."

We should extend the approach we have towards ourselves to others by, as Lewis said, "being sorry that the man should have done such things, and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere, he can be cured and made human again."

jziring@torontotorah.com

Biography

Rabbeinu Nisim

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Based on a column by
Rabbi Dovid Zirkind

Rabbeinu Nisim son of Reuven (“Ran”) was one of the great Spanish sages of the 14th century. Born c. 1310 in Girona or Barcelona, Rabbeinu Nisim earned recognition as a royal physician, astronomer and public activist in addition to his achievements in Torah scholarship. Although he never served formally as his community’s Rabbi, Rabbeinu Nisim, like many of his predecessors (i.e. Ramban and Rashba), filled that role for all intents and purposes. The government recognized his brilliance and influence; they even sent him cases to judge. However, jealousy of wealthy Jewish community members led to his imprisonment - twice - due to false accusations.

A great teacher of Torah, Ran founded a yeshiva which produced a number of future leaders including Rabbi Yitzchak bar Sheshet (Rivash) and Rabbi Chasdai Crescas. Interestingly, there is some debate as to the identity of Rabbeinu Nisim’s own teacher. Scholars have suggested it was Rabbeinu Peretz the Tosafist, to whom he refers with the words, “Our teacher, the Rav, the great Kohein.” Ran was also taught by his father, and he was heavily influenced by the teachings of Rashba, although he was born too late to meet him. Ran was father to two sons, Chisdai and Reuven.

Rabbeinu Nisim was a prolific author and commentator; his works include a commentary to the Talmud, a commentary to the Rif and a collection of derashot (see translation). Scholars believe he wrote more than one thousand responsa, although fewer than one hundred have been preserved. He heavily opposed involvement in mysticism. His contemporaries’ writings as well as later rabbinic literature show the great weight assigned to his opinion on halachic matters, and the influence it had on future generations.

In particular, Rabbeinu Nisim is known for his political thought, which included a formula for Jewish government involving an elegant system of checks and balances resembling today’s political structures. For a thorough analysis of Rabbeinu Nisim’s theories, see Dr. Gerald Yaakov Blidstein’s *On Political Structures* and Dr. Warren Zev Harvey’s *Rabbi Nisim of Girona on the Constitutional Power of the Sovereign*.

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Torah and Translation

Religious Law Is Not Politically Correct

Rabbeinu Nisim, Derashot haRan #11

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

ואני מבאר עוד זה, ואומר שכמו שנתחדה תורתנו מבין נימוסי אומות העולם במצות וחוקים, אין ענינם תיקון מדיני כלל, אבל הנמשך מהם הוא חול השפע האלקי באומתנו והידבקו עמנו, בין שיראה הענין ההוא לעינינו כעניני הקרבנות וכל הנעשה במקדש, בין שלא יראה כיתר החוקים שלא נתגלה טעמם, מכל מקום אין ספק שהשפע האלקי היה נדבק בנו, וחל בפעלים ההם, עם היותם רחוקים מן הקש השכל...

ולפיכך אני סובר וראוי שיאמן, שכמו שהחוקים שאין להם מבוא כלל בתיקון הסידור המדיני, והם סיבה עצמית קרובה לחול השפע האלקי, כן משפטי התורה יש להם מבוא גדול, וכאילו הם משותפים בין סיבת חול הענין האלקי באומתנו ותיקון ענין קיבוצנו. ואפשר שהם היו פונים יותר אל הענין אשר הוא יותר נשגב במעלה ממה שהם היו פונים לתיקון קיבוצנו, כי התיקון ההוא, המלך אשר נעמיד עלינו ישלים ענינו.

אבל השופטים והסנהדרין היה תכליתם לשפוט העם במשפט אמיתי צודק בעצמו, שימשך ממנו הידבק ענין האלקי בנו, יושלם ממנו לגמרי סידור ענין ההמוני או לא יושלם. ומפני זה אפשר שימצא בקצת משפטי ודיני האומות הנ"ל, מה שהוא יותר קרוב לתיקון הסידור המדיני, ממה שימצא בקצת משפטי התורה. ואין אנו חסרים בזה דבר, כי כל מה שיחסר מהתיקון הנזכר, היה משלימו המלך...

ומפני זה היה ראש השופטים ומבחרם, עומד במקום אשר היה נראה בו השפע האלקי, והוא ענין עמוד אנשי כנסת הגדולה בלשכת הגזית (מדות פ"ה מ"ד)... ומזה הצד נמשך כל מה שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל (סנהדרין ז א) כל דין שדן דין אמת לאמיתו ראוי שתשרה שכינה עמהם, שנאמר...

I will explain further, saying that [even] as our Torah is set apart from the laws of the world’s nations in its commandments and laws [which] are not for the sake of improving society at all, but rather to draw through them the Divine influence in our nation, and our sticking to Him – whether when that [manifestation] is visible to our eyes as in the case of sacrifices and all that is done in the Temple, or whether it is not visible, like with the laws which do not have revealed reasons – still, there is no doubt that the Divine influence sticks to us and is manifest via those deeds, even as they are remote from intellectual logic...

And therefore I think, and it should be believed, that just as these [religious] laws have no entrée at all into improving society, and they are the proximate cause for Divine influence, so the Torah’s [interpersonal] statutes have great entrée [into improving society], as though they merged the purpose of making G-d manifest in our nation with improving our society. And perhaps they may turn more toward the loftier goal than they turn to improving society, for regarding that improvement, the king we will appoint will complete that matter.

But the purpose of judges and the Sanhedrin is to judge the nation with the true, inherently righteous law, which leads to the Divine adhering to us, whether or not it leads to improving community affairs. And therefore it is possible that some of the aforementioned laws and statutes of the nations might be closer to improvement of society than is found in some of the Torah’s laws. In this we lack for nothing, for all that is lacking from that improvement is completed by the king...

And because of this, the head of the judges and their best would stand in the place where the Divine influence was visible, and this is why the Great Assembly stood in the Chamber of Hewn Stone [in the Temple]. (Middot 5:4)... And this is what leads to all that our Sages said, “Any judge who judges true law in its truth is worthy to have the Divine Presence manifest with them, as it says...” (Sanhedrin 7a)

COME LEARN WITH US!

Click Underlined Lines to Open Zooms. Clickable links also at www.torontotorah.com/letslearn

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

All in-person indoor classes require vaccination and other protective measures

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 December 24-25

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)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

Sunday December 26

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

9:30 AM to 4:00 PM A TANACH TOUR OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL!

On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/tanachday> or Zoom Session ID 791 3810 0918 Password 18

For the full program and registration to receive materials: <https://torontotorah.com/tour>

Free of Charge

9:30 AM	R' Jared Anstandig	Mount Grizim, Mount Eval	Mountains, Blessings & Curses
10:00 AM	R' Steven Gotlib	Jordan River	Out of Egypt, Into Israel
10:30 AM	R' M Torczyner	Yericho	Israel Rebranded
11:00 AM	R' Yehuda Mann	Yam haMelach	When was the Dead Sea Born?
11:30 AM	R' Chaim Metzger	Shechem	Shouldering the Fate of a Nation
BREAK			
1:00 PM	R' M Torczyner	Valley of Yehoshaphat	Home of Judgment Day
1:30 PM	R' Moshe Yeres	The Cave of Machpelah	Who is Buried in the Cave of Machpelah?
2:00 PM	Idan Rakovsky	Gilgal	Saul: A King or a Satire?
2:30 PM	Miriam Bessin	Sdom	The City That Burned
3:00 PM	R' Hillel Horovitz	Shilo	The Destruction You Never Heard Of
3:30 PM	R' Seth Grauer	Mount of Olives	Past, Present and Future

Our Beit Midrash is on break from December 27-January 2, but some learning opportunities remain!

Note: Adult Seder Boker (above) remains open throughout

Monday December 27

Parsha Podcast, Parshat Vaera! "Listening Can Be Hard" with R' Yehuda Mann and R' Mordechai Torczyner
Apple <http://tiny.cc/apodcast> ∞ Google <http://tiny.cc/gpodcast> ∞ Spotify <http://tiny.cc/spodcast>

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

Wednesday December 29

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park

Thursday December 30

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

Coming Up!

Introduction to Talmud: A 3-Part Series

2 PM Mondays January 10, 17, 24, with Idan Rakovsky on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

Free of Charge, register at <https://torontotorah.com/mondays>

The Biblical Hannah: Fighter and Prophet

10 AM Wednesdays January 12, 19, 26 with R' Mordechai Torczyner on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

\$30 (or whatever you can pay), register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>