

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Tzav

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This week's edition of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Roy Muster  
in memory of his mother Irene Muster z"l

### Bad Blood

Not every part of a kosher animal is kosher. Despite coming from a kosher and properly slaughtered animal, various parts of a kosher animal are off-limits for our consumption. Among these forbidden portions is the animal's blood. (Vayikra 7:22-27) The prohibition against consuming blood appears more than once in the Torah (Vayikra 3:17, Vayikra 17:10-14, and Devarim 12:23-25) adding weight to its significance.

The power of this prohibition grows when we consider the way it is presented in other locations in the Torah. In Vayikra 17 the Torah uses rare language to describe G-d's treatment of the transgressor. There, the Torah says, "I will set My face against the individual who consumes the blood." This expression of G-d setting His face against a transgressor appears in only one other place in the Torah, regarding one who commits child sacrifice in the worship of the pagan god Molech. (Vayikra 20:1-3) Given this parallel language, we can understand that consuming blood ranks high on the list of major transgressions.

When this prohibition appears in Devarim, it again has a unique formulation. There, the Torah emphasizes the need to refrain from consuming blood with the following introduction: "Be strong not to eat the blood." (12:23) This is the only mitzvah in the Torah for which this phrase is used. The exhortation to "be strong" in the face of this prohibition again indicates that there is much to be lost by violating this mitzvah.

Yet, what could be so problematic about eating blood, so that it warrants such intense language?

#### 1: Idolatry

Rambam (Guide for the Perplexed Part 3, Chapter 46) asserts that idolators consumed blood, and this prohibition therefore distances us from their practices. He writes, "They would eat blood because they believed it was the food of demons. And by eating it they could commune with the demons. And they would come and reveal the future, as the masses believe demons do." According to Rambam, this mitzvah is part of the broader prohibition against sorcery and paganism. This approach is particularly attractive as it accounts for the comparison to Molech – both are abhorrent due to their association with idolatry.

#### 2: The Essence of the Beast

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his biblical commentary, offers an explanation that sees blood more symbolically. When we consume an animal's blood, we absorb the blood, its life force, into our own bodies. This has the unfortunate effect of lessening our godliness and increasing our animalistic and base selves. He explains, "All the aims of man are holy unto G-d; man must devote himself exclusively to serving G-d, without any selfish motives." (Commentary to Vayikra 7:26-27) The Torah prohibits blood because of its spiritual effect on the consumer. This explanation works well with blood being called the *nefesh*, soul, of the animal (Vayikra 17, Devarim 12), perhaps suggesting that the prohibition has to do with the assimila-

tion of the animal's soul and traits into our psyche.

#### 3: Divine Control

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in *The Emergence of Ethical Man* (pp. 37-47) takes the prohibition in yet another direction. He argues that this prohibition reveals an awareness of G-d's control over the world. Rabbi Soloveitchik points to the fact that G-d is the source and thereby owner of all life; we have no right to spill the blood of any being, human or animal, without G-d's express permission. Indeed, slaughtering an animal for personal consumption, as opposed to sacrifice on the altar, is only permitted as a concession to our human desires. Rabbi Soloveitchik elaborates, "But even as the Torah came to terms with the lusty sensual human being concerning the meat [and thereby permitted eating it], it retained full possession and dominion over the blood." (pg. 44) By refraining from blood, at the very least we remember that all life is sacred.

In truth, there is no real disagreement between Rabbi Soloveitchik's suggestion and those of Rambam and Rabbi Hirsch. Ultimately, all agree that this prohibition forces us to recognize G-d's role over the universe. We may arrive at that by rejecting idolatry (like Rambam) or by holding fast to our personal godliness (like Rabbi Hirsch). However we interpret this mitzvah, through its observance we acknowledge G-d's superiority.

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**Summary**

This chapter begins with the twelve-year-old Menasheh becoming king of Judah. Menasheh followed the bad practices of those who lived in the land before the Israelites. He rebuilt the shrines that his father Chizkiyahu had torn down, in addition to worshipping and building altars for the stars and planets. (21:1-5)

Menasheh also offered his own son to idolatry, practised divination, summoned spirits out of spite towards Hashem, and placed an idol of Asherah in the Beit HaMikdash itself. This was an insult to the promise that Hashem had made to King David and King Solomon that the Jewish people would not be exiled if they only observe Torah. (6-8)

Thanks to Menasheh the people did not observe Torah. The text describes them as even worse than the nations who had been destroyed when the Jews arrived in the land. As such, Hashem told His prophets that He would bring disaster upon Jerusalem and Judah, such that the ears of everyone who heard about it would ring. Hashem went so far as to say that He would wipe Judah off the map, and exile the Jews into the hands of their enemies, because of all of their disappointments since being freed

from Egypt. Furthermore, Menasheh executed so many innocent people during his reign that he is described as “filling Jerusalem from end to end” with bloodshed. (9-16)

After his death, Menasheh was replaced by his son, Amon, who also did things that were displeasing to Hashem, continuing all of his father’s work. Amon’s monarchy was short-lived, as his servants assassinated him in his own palace. (17-23) But the Judean people put those who killed Amon to death and appointed his son, Yoshiyahu, in his place. (17-26)

As with the book of Melachim in general, it is worthwhile to see the parallel passages in Divrei haYamim. Chapter 33 of Divrei haYamim II records that when Menasheh’s campaign of idolatry and bloodshed reached its apex, the Assyrians invaded. They brought Menasheh to Babylon - which was under Assyrian control - in chains. He then repented, and Hashem returned him to Jerusalem, where he made great efforts to undo the impact of his wrongs. [See also Sanhedrin 102a-b.]

**Insight**

This chapter appears to present an eruption into idolatry of both the king

and people at a level that we had not yet seen. Rabbi Alex Israel suggests, based on the work of archaeologist W. F. Albright, that it is not coincidental that this rise in idolatry came at Assyria’s peak as an ancient superpower. Albright noted in *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* that “no other period of cuneiform records has yielded any remotely comparable mass of tablets relating to magic and divination” and that it would have been “practically impossible for a small vassal state to keep from being flooded with such idolatrous and superstitious practices which were under royal Assyrian protection.” In other words, Judah was not only politically tied to Assyria, but culturally tied as well. Allowing Assyria’s culture to influence Judah’s was the first step towards destruction.

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**It Happened in Israel: Hillel’s Devotion to Torah**

The Talmud (Yoma 35b) tells us about Hillel’s extraordinary dedication toward learning Torah.

**They said about Hillel the Elder that each and every day he would work and earn a half-dinar, half of which he would give to the guard of the study hall and half of which he spent for his sustenance and the sustenance of the members of his family. One time he did not find employment to earn a wage, and the guard of the study hall did not allow him to enter. He ascended to the roof, suspended himself, and sat at the edge of the skylight in order to hear the words of the Torah of the living G-d from the mouths of Shemaya and Avtalyon, the spiritual leaders of that generation.**

The Sages continued and **said: That day was Shabbat eve and it was the winter season of Tevet, and snow fell upon him from the sky. When it was dawn, Shemaya said to Avtalyon: Avtalyon, my brother, every day at this hour the study hall is already bright from the sunlight streaming through the skylight, and today it is dark; is it perhaps a cloudy day? They focused their eyes and saw the image of a man in the skylight. They ascended and found him covered with snow three cubits high. They extricated him from the snow, and they washed him and smeared oil on him, and they sat him opposite the bonfire to warm him. They said: This man is worthy for us to desecrate Shabbat for him.** Saving a life overrides Shabbat in any case; however, this great man is especially deserving. Clearly, poverty is no excuse for the failure to attempt to study Torah (Steinsaltz English Translation)

**Insight**

Rabbi Soloveitchik (*Harirei Kedem* Volume I, Section 207) raises the question of how Hillel could spend half of his daily earnings on Torah study. We know that a person may not spend more than one-fifth of his or her income to fulfill a mitzvah! To answer, Rabbi Soloveitchik quotes the Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen (*Likutei Halachot*) who says that one may spend more than one-fifth of one’s income in order to maintain basic living necessities. For that reason, Hillel was permitted to spend half of his income for the sake of Torah learning. For Jews, Torah study is a necessity without which we can’t survive.

There are other examples of mitzvot for which we are allowed to spend more than one-fifth, such as the mitzvah of giving the half-shekel. Rambam writes (Hilchot Shekalim 1:1) that a poor person should even sell his clothing to fulfill this mitzvah. Rabbi Soloveitchik says that this is because the purpose of the half-shekel is “an atonement for your souls.” (Shemot 30:15) Like learning Torah, atonement is considered a necessary living expense, so that one is permitted to spend more than one-fifth.

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## Biography

### Rabbi Pinchas Kehati

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Pinchas Guchtman was born in 1910 in Volhynia, Poland, to Kehat and Esther Guchtman. After learning in a local Cheder and Yeshiva, he continued to the Warsaw rabbinical seminary *Tachkemoni*, which belonged to the Mizrahi movement (in which he was a lifelong active member).

In 1935, as European skies were darkening, Rabbi Pinchas moved to Jerusalem, and began studying mathematics, physics, religious philosophy and kabbalah at The Hebrew University. However, he was unable to pay his tuition, and dropped out after only a year. Following some odd jobs, he eventually settled as an employee of the Mizrahi Bank.

Rabbi Pinchas (now called Kehati, after his deceased father) held a great belief in the need to introduce Torah learning to as many people as possible. An opportunity presented itself in 1953, when Rabbi Kehati became the head of the HaPoel HaMizrahi youth department. In this capacity, he instituted a nationwide learning initiative of two mishnayot per day. But a problem arose – there was no simple commentary for the Mishnah which would enable people who lacked talmudic background to fully grasp and understand it. After several attempts to recruit someone else for the job, Rabbi Kehati decided to tackle it himself. First in daily, and later in weekly installments, he printed an original running commentary in modern, concise Hebrew.

After eight months of printing the commentary with his own funds, Rabbi Kehati was unable to continue to underwrite the project, and he suspended it. Fortunately, during those eight months, his work had accumulated thousands of subscribers and much praise, moving some donors to step in and help him finish his venture. Rabbi Kehati was able to take unpaid leave from the bank, and he concluded his work on the Mishnah in 1964. Rabbi Kehati reprinted the booklets again as books, and for this monumental work, which made the Mishnah accessible to any Hebrew speaking Jew, he received the Rav Kook Prize in 1967. Despite becoming an acclaimed and prized scholar, Rabbi Kehati modestly returned to his position in the bank. He passed away on Rosh Chodesh Tevet, 5737 (1976).

[The [Mishnah Yomit](#) cycle just began anew, with thousands of people using Rabbi Kehati's commentary.]

## Torah and Translation

### Introduction to a Commentary to the Mishnah

Rabbi Pinchas Kehati

Translated by Rabbi Yehuda Mann

מה הם הסממנים המיוחדים של הביאור למשנה?

לא חידושי פירושים, אלא תמצית פדגוגית-פופולרית של המשנה, מבוארת על יסוד הגמרא ועל פי מפרשיה: רש"י, רמב"ם, המאירי, ברטנורא, תוספות יום טוב, מלאכת שלמה, שנות אליהו, תפארת ישראל ועוד ועוד. ואף הפרשנים החדשים משמשים עזר, ובמיוחד לביאור מושגי הריאליה והסברתם בצורה צחה.

עם זאת מגמת המבאר אינה מצטמצמת בהגשת משנה מפורשת ומבוארת בלבד, אלא גם בהעלאת הקשיים והבעיות וחילוקי הדיעות שבפירושה. מכאן ציון המקור ליד כל חידוש שבביאור, והבאת דיעות אחדות בעניינים שנאמרו בהם פירושים שונים.

דרך זו מרחיבה את אופקו של הלומד, מעמיקה את הבנתו, נותנת לו סיפוק לימודי, ואף מעוררתו לעיין במקורות ולעמוד על העניינים בהיקפם ובעומקם.

גם בשולי המשנה יש ובאות "תוספות", להעמיד את הלומד על הבחנות מיוחדות ועל פירושים נוספים, שאי אפשר היה לשלבם בתוך הביאור גופא.

על כל אריכות הדברים שהשיטה האמורה מחייבת, שוקד המבאר על כך, שהביאור לא יפסיד מסממניו הפופולריים-הפדגוגיים, והם שפה ברורה, משפטים קצובים ומפוסקים, גיוון של אותיות להדגשת עניינים, ואף רציפות והרמוניה בין הפסקות השונות, כדי שייקלטו הדברים גם מבחינה אופטית וגם מבחינה פונטית.

הודות לכך, יכול אדם לשבת באוטובוס, או ברכבת ולעיין במשנה היומית על ביאורה ולקלוט את הסוגייה יפה-יפה, אף כשעניינה מסועפים ועמוקים.

What are the special characteristics of my commentary to the Mishnah?

It is not new interpretations, but rather a popular-pedagogical summary of the Mishna, based on the *Gemara* and classic commentators such as Rashi, Maimonides, the Meiri, Bartenura, Tosafot Yom Tov, M'lechet Shlomo, Sh'not Eliyahu, Tiferet Yisrael and many more. Also, more modern commentators play a supporting role, especially in explaining the realia, clarifying them an elegant way.

Nonetheless, the goal of the commentator is not limited to providing an explained and clarified Mishnah, but also raising the difficulties and questions and different opinions in explaining in. For that reason, I brought the source of every novel idea in the commentary, and different opinions in cases where different explanations have been stated.

This way of learning broadens the horizon of the student, deepens his understanding, provides him with satisfaction, and also encourages him to examine the sources and learn the material in their full breadth and depth.

Also, at the bottom of the Mishnah, there are some "additions", in order to bring the learner to observations and other explanations that could not be blended into the commentary itself.

Despite the lengthy explanation which this approach requires, the commentator is diligent to ensure that the explanation will not lose its popular-pedagogical aspects, which are: clear language, precise and punctuated sentences, use of different typefaces to emphasize particular elements, and also [preserving] sequence and harmony between the different passages, so that the material will be absorbed visually as well as phonetically.

Thanks to this, a person can sit on the bus or train and learn the Daily Mishnah with its explanation and understand the issues well, even though its elements are detailed and deep.

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### Shabbat March 18-19

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

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Gruda Beis Medrash (men)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Introduction to Sefer Vayikra, Part 2 of 3, Shaarei Tefillah

### Sunday March 20

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

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, The Thought of Rav Shagar (university)

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, YOC or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613 (univ)

### Monday March 21

A New Parshah Podcast: Parshat Shemini

Apple <http://tiny.cc/apodcast>, Google <http://tiny.cc/gpodcast>, Spotify <http://tiny.cc/spodcast>

8:45 AM Idan Rakovsky, Likutei Moharan of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

7:30 PM Prielle and Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/weeklysng>

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

9:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, The War in Ukraine in the Eyes of the Torah, Mizrahi Beit Midrash at BAYT

### Tuesday March 22

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 5-6), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 13), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

### Wednesday March 23

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Avodah Zarah, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idolsarebad>

10:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, The Foods and Customs of Passover #1 of 3—NEW SERIES!

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7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Introduction to Jewish Philosophy Week 6 of 6, Shaarei Tefillah

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park *not this week*

### Thursday March 24

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 25), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, email [ymannt@torontotorah.com](mailto:ymannt@torontotorah.com) for ZOOM options (advanced, men)

### Friday March 25

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>

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8:15 PM APRIL 4 AT SHAAREI SHOMAYIM

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10:00 AM Torah Completion at Clanton Park Synagogue (11 Lowesmoor Ave.)

11:30 AM Procession to Yeshivat Or Chaim

12:30 PM Hakafot, Dancing and Torah Reading

1:30 PM Dessert Reception

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