

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Tazria/HaChodesh

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for the yahrtzeit of Esty's mother, Rebbetzin Faigie Frankel ז"ל "ל' צבי זצ"ל

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Jeffrey Silver
in honour of the 70th wedding anniversary of his parents, Label and Leona Silver.
70 in gematria is לאחד - may you forever be one.

The Path to Happiness

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

This week we learn about the different types of *metzora'im* – people who experience a skin ailment called *tzara'at* as a form of Divine punishment for sin. Our Sages teach us that *tzara'at* comes upon a person who speaks harmfully about other people. (Arachin 15b)

A midrash discusses the verse "Who is the one who is eager for life? (Tehillim 34:13)" and relates a story. Once there was a peddler who went from town to town, announcing, "Who wants an elixir of life?" Rabbi Yannai heard the peddler and was intrigued about this so-called elixir of life, and asked the peddler to come sell him some of it. However, the peddler told him that Rabbi Yannai and "those like him" didn't need this elixir of life. Rabbi Yannai asked him why not. The peddler read to him from Tehillim 34, "Who is the one who is eager for life, who desires years of good fortune? Guard your tongue from evil, your lips from deceitful speech." Rabbi Yannai was extremely impressed and said that this is also the meaning of the words of King Solomon, "He who guards his mouth and tongue guards himself from trouble. (Mishlei 21:23)" He added that for many years he had not understood this verse, but thanks to the peddler he now understood it. (Vayikra Rabbah 16:2)

What is the great insight of the peddler? What novel idea did he present? He simply recited a verse from

Tehillim; why was Rabbi Yannai so impressed?

One answer, is given by Rabbi Asher Weiss (*Sichot on the Torah* pp. 220-222). Rabbi Weiss says that the insight is not in the **words** of the peddler but rather in the **profession** of the peddler. Peddlers speak a lot in order to convince others to purchase their merchandise. For that very reason the root of the Hebrew word of gossip - *rechilut* - comes from the word *rachil*, which means "peddler". On the other hand, one would expect those who are careful of slander and gossip to be people with less of a talkative nature, barely speaking, out of concern lest they speak harmfully of others. That fear causes us to give up on the challenge of avoiding slander. Rabbi Weiss says that this is why Rabbi Yannai was deeply impressed by the peddler: he managed to live normally, to carry on talking, building relationships and being involved in the world, and to carry on being a *frum*, Torah observing Jew.

Another answer is traditionally attributed to Rabbi Yisrael HaKohen of Radin, a.k.a. the Chafetz Chaim. The novel idea the peddler presents to Rabbi Yannai is that until this day, Rabbi Yannai thought that the value and virtue of *shemirat halashon* - staying away from slander - is only to acquire the next world. Suffer in this world, and busy yourself with Torah and mitzvot, and you will gain joy, pleasure and happiness in the "World to Come". However,

that is not true; Torah and mitzvot in general, and avoiding slander in particular, are the elixir of life and provide joy, pleasure and happiness in our mundane world.

Many times, we face the challenge of deciding to observe Torah and mitzvot when we fear missing out on the pleasures of life. However, Torah and mitzvot can provide us the true happiness and fulfillment of life. There are so many examples of mitzvot that show how Torah can improve our mundane life - the relaxation and family time of Shabbat, the creation of a righteous and respectful society by observing the laws of harmful speech, the educational value of a child craving a piece of dairy chocolate but asking in advance whether enough time has passed since eating meat.

That is the profound message of the peddler who provides merchandise and necessities to his customer to have an easier and better life. This time he brought the best piece of merchandise possible - the Torah, its commandments and its values.

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At the start of our chapter, Yoshiyahu gathered all of the people to the Beit haMikdash and renewed the covenant between Hashem and the nation. (23:1-3)

Yoshiyahu then cleansed the Beit haMikdash of idolatry. He purified the adjacent valley of Gei ben Hinom and broke the idols and their altars – replacing them with human bones. [Radak says these were the exhumed bones of disgraced idolaters.] (4-14)

Yoshiyahu continued his campaign, burning the altar that Yeravam ben Nevat had built in Beit El. He saved the bones of an anonymous prophet who had predicted this very event back in Melachim I 13. (15-20)

He also renewed the celebration of the Passover sacrifice in the Beit haMikdash in Jerusalem, with public participation increased to a level not seen since the period of the Judges. (21-23) The text concludes by summing up Yoshiyahu's reign and describing him as a one-of-a-kind king. No king before or after him returned to G-d as powerfully as he did. (24-25)

Yet, the text still notes that despite the wonderful actions Yoshiyahu took, Hashem was still angry outraged at the conduct of the people of Judea. Hashem decided to exile the kingdom of Yehudah just as He exiled the kingdom of Yisrael. Yoshiyahu died when the Egyptian army invaded Israel on its way to attack Assyria; he attempted to block their passage. Yoshiyahu's wicked son Yehoachaz was appointed as king after him (26-30)

The Egyptian pharaoh kidnapped Yehoachaz, and he died in Egypt. Pharaoh appointed Yehoyakim (previously known as Elyakim); he was a wicked king who sent gold and silver to Pharaoh (31-37)

[These events are also described in Divrei haYamim II 34-36.]

Insight

The text tells us that Yoshiyahu completed a widespread reform, and yet he died on the battlefield. Why did this happen?

Divrei haYamim 35:21-22 records that the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho attempted to convince Yoshiyahu to stay out of his way, but Yoshiyahu did not listen.

Midrashim (Taanit 22b, Eichah Rabbah 1:18) explain that Yoshiyahu thought his reforms had been entirely successful, and therefore Israel would merit the fulfillment of a Divine promise, "The sword shall not pass through your land. (Vayikra 26:6)" He failed to consult the prophet Yirmiyahu, who would have advised him differently, and he lost his life in his attempt to block the Egyptian army. As Yirmiyahu mourned, "The breath of our life, the Lord's anointed, was captured in their traps - he in whose shade we had thought to live among the nations." (Eichah 4:20, JPS tr.) The "traps" were the sins of the nation.

Rabbi Yuval Sherlow, Rosh Yeshiva of Orot Shaul, argues that the prophet Tzefaniah's harsh prophecy, "I will sweep everything away from the face of the earth, declares the Lord (Tzefaniah 1:2, JPS tr.)" was about the generation of Yoshiyahu. Rabbi Sherlow reads this as further evidence that the nation did not support Yoshiyahu's reforms. [Classic commentators read Tzefaniah as preceding those reforms.]

irakovsky@torontotorah.com

It Happened in Israel: Listening for G-d's Voice in History

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

Summary

Tur Malka was one of the strongholds of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel during the Second Temple period. The Talmud (Gittin 57a) attributes its destruction to "a rooster and a hen":

The people of Tur Malka used to lead a rooster and hen in front of newly married couples as an omen for having many children. One day, a passing group of Roman soldiers took the chickens, and the people of the town attacked them. The soldiers informed their emperor, who sent an army to attack Tur Malka. But the city had a champion named Bar Daroma. He was able to jump a distance of a *mil* and defeat many of the Roman soldiers himself.

Embarrassed by the loss, the emperor removed his crown and placed it on the floor. He said to G-d, "Master of the world, if it is good in Your eyes, please do not allow me and my kingdom to be defeated by a single man."

The emperor's prayer was ineffective. In the end it was Bar Daroma's own words that did him in. At some point during the fighting, he exclaimed, borrowing a line from King David, "You have rejected us, G-d, and You, G-d, don't come out with us in our armies. (Tehillim 60:12, 108:12)" King David had only meant these words rhetorically, wondering whether G-d had abandoned the Jewish people. Bar Daroma, however, believed G-d had abandoned them and meant the words literally. His punishment for this was that a snake came and eviscerated him.

When the emperor saw that Bar Daroma had died through a

miracle, he decided to leave the rest of the city alone. The people of Tur Malka reacted to the Roman retreat with a massive party. The emperor interpreted this as the Jews making light of him, so he returned and captured the city.

Insight

This story has more details than we can unpack here. A striking one is the reversal between the emperor's and the Jews' sensitivity to G-d's role in the events. We would expect the Jews, G-d's people, to be aware that He was orchestrating the details of their encounter with Rome. But the story presents the opposite. It is the Roman emperor who prays to G-d for victory and recognizes and respects the miraculous defeat of his enemies. The Jews, on the other hand, seem oblivious to G-d's involvement. Bar Daroma thinks that G-d has abandoned him when the opposite is the case. The residents of Tur Malka celebrate the Roman retreat when they should have considered that G-d had saved them from a dangerous and close call.

According to the prophet Hosheia (see for example Hosheia 4:6), a major part of the breakdown in Israelite society that led to the first Temple's destruction was a lack of "knowledge of G-d," of His actions and expectations from us. This story is arguing that something similar was at play ahead of the second Temple's destruction as well.

afriedmann@torontotorah.com

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam) was born in Cordoba in 1135 or 1138. As a child and teenager, he studied Torah under his father, who was a student of Rabbi Yosef Ibn Migash (Ri Migash), who studied under Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi (Rif). He also taught himself many sciences, as well as philosophy. After the Almohad Caliphate (a Berber Muslim movement) captured Cordoba in 1148, Jews were forced to convert to Islam or be exiled, so Rambam and his family moved around in Spain and Morocco for approximately the next ten years. He then settled in Fez, Morocco, where he lived for about ten years, and where he composed his first major work, an Arabic commentary to the Mishnah [see accompanying translation]. At some point during this period of his life, Rambam also married Jamila, and they had two sons.

In 1168, Rambam and family moved to Fustat, Egypt, via Israel, and became an integral part of the community there. He was formally appointed as *Nagid* of the Jewish Community in 1171, and he also served as the physician for various Egyptian leaders, including Sultan Saladin, the first sultan of Egypt. In addition to his various communal positions, in the 1170s he produced *Mishneh Torah*, a 14-part codification of Jewish Law. In 1191 he published his *Moreh Nevuchim*, a three-volume philosophical work; some suggest that completing *Moreh Nevuchim* took him fifteen years!

Rambam produced a great number of “minor” works, including various influential letters, a number of books on medicine, as well as shorter essays and books on topics such as the terminology of metaphysics and the calendar. He also wrote a *Book of Mitzvot*, which lists and explains all 613 biblical commandments.

Rambam died on December 12 or 13, 1204. Although he was a controversial figure in his lifetime and opposition to his works lasted a few hundred years, he is now considered one of the greatest halachic decisors and philosophers of all time.

ediena@torontotorah.com

שאלה על אדם שרקם בטליתו פ' ויאמר והוכיחו גדולי העיר ולא קבל ממנו וכתב השם שלשה יוד"ן וזה נוסח תשובתו:

תשובה מעשה זה חטא ואין נכון כלל ואסור משני טעמים האחד שאין לכתב מן התורה פסוקים פסוקים אבל יכתב שלש תיבות ולא יותר... וכאשר ראינו במצרים שהיו לוקחים טסי כסף וזהב וחורתין בהן שיר של פגעים ותולין אותה בצווארי התינוקות מחינו בידם.

והטעם השני והוא נכון וחזק מן הראשון לפי שהעושה כן מביא פסוקי תורה לידי זלזול כי הציצית תשמישי מצוה ואין בו קדושת גוף ולכך יכול לבא בטלית מצויצת בבית השתא ולבית הטבילה ולהשתמש בו ולכסות בו את הערוה [אבל] איך יביא כתובי התורה שנאמרו בקדושה ונכתבו מפי הגבורה במקום טנופת וזלזול וזה בזוי התורה בלי ספק.

ועוד כי המעשה הזה הוא חדש לא שמענו כמוהו מעולם ומן הראוי לך שתדע כי הכתיבה הזאת הנקראת כתיבה אשורית כיון שניתנה בה התורה ובה נכתבו לוחות הברית הרי הגונה מאד להשתמש בה רק בכתבי הקדש ומימי קדם היו ישראל נזהרין בזאת והיו כתביהם וחיבורי חכמותיהם וכתבי חול שלהם בכתב עברי... ועל כן שנו הספרדים כתיבתם ושמו אותותם אותות אחרות עד שנעשה ככתב אחר להתיר להשתמש בו בדברי חול...

לכן בעל המעשה הזה יתן כבוד לד' וכאשר יטול שכר על כונתו להתנאות במצוות ד' כן יגדל שכרו כאשר יכבד דברי ד', וראוי לחתוך הבגד אשר בו רקום דברי אלוקים חיים ולגנום, וכן הדין...

Question: Someone embroidered his *tallit* with [Bamidbar 15:37-41, the Torah portion describing *tzitzit*] and was rebuked by the elders of the city, but he refused to listen. He used three 'Yuds' for G-d's Name. This is the text of his answer:

Answer: This is a sin and completely improper for two reasons: 1) One, you may not write select verses from the Torah, but one may only write three words at most... And when we saw people in Egypt making plates of silver and gold with verses and inscribed them with [Psalm 91, about protection from harm] and hanging it on the necks of babies, we protested.

2) The second reason, which is stronger than the first, is that one who does this debases the verses of the Torah. Because *tzitzit* are used in the performance of a *mitzvah* and don't have inherent sanctity, and therefore one can go with a garment with *tzitzit* all over the house, or go to the bathroom or use it to cover one's nakedness, [but] how could one bring writings of the Torah that were uttered in holiness and written from the 'Mouth' of G-d to a filthy and disgusting place? This is a degradation of Torah without a doubt.

Furthermore, this action is new and we have never heard its like before. You should know that this script, which is called *Ashurit*, since the Torah was given in it, and the Tablets of the Covenant were written with it, it is very proper to use it only for sacred writings. Since the early years Israel was careful about this and their writing and works of wisdom and secular writings were written in Hebrew script [which is different from *Ashurit*]... Therefore the Spanish [Jews] changed their script and replaced the letters with other letters until it became another script, to be able to use it for secular matters...

Therefore the person, in this case, should give honour to G-d and just as he will receive merit for his intention to beautify the *mitzvot* of G-d, so too shall his merit increase when he honours the word of G-d, and it would be fitting to cut the garment that has embroidered on it G-d's living words and place it in *genizah*, as is the law...

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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 of Rav Kook ∞ Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat April 1-2

Shabbaton at Shaarei Shomayim: Personalizing Pesach

Friday night Dvar Torah before maariv: Rabbi Jared Anstandig: Alone, Not Lonely

Shabbat morning post-Hashkamah Class: Rabbi Chaim Metzger: May I Ask a Personal Question?

Shabbat morning Sharp Sanctuary Derashah: Rabbi Yehuda Mann: The Dangers of Recycling

Shabbat morning Downstairs Minyan Derashah: Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: After the Seder

Shabbat 5:45 PM in the Sharp Sanctuary: PANEL DISCUSSION: CREATING A TEEN-FRIENDLY SEDER
Rabbi Dovid Appelrouth, Miriam Bessin, Rabbi Elliott Diamond, Dr. Daniel Held, Feiga Werner
Moderator: Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Seudah Shlishit

Rabbi Steven Gotlib: When Personalizing is Petrifying ∞ Idan Rakovsky: Morocco Meets Toronto

After minchah R' AZ Thau, The Four Cups of Pesach, BAYT: Gruda Beis Medrash (men)

Sunday April 3

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

DEDICATION OF OUR FIRST SEFER TORAH, SPONSORED BY THE ZWIEBEL FAMILY!

11:30 AM PARADE LEAVES CLANTON PARK SYNAGOGUE (11 LOWESMOOR AVE)

12:30 PM HACHNASAT SEFER TORAH AT YESHIVAT OR CHAIM (159 ALMORE AVE)

1:30 PM DESSERT RECEPTION

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

Monday April 4

A New Parshah Podcast: Parshat Metzora/Pesach

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)

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Exodus: Birth of a Nation #2 of 2, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

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

8:15 PM-9:00 PM HAGGADAH NIGHT AT SHAAREI SHOMAYIM, or ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/haggadahnight>
Four ten-minute thoughts for your Seder!

Rabbi Jared Anstandig, Idan Rakovsky, Prielle Rakovsky, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Tuesday April 5

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

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 14), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday April 6

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 #3 of 3

Free of charge, Register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>; On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/customs>

8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Pre-Pesach Program, Shaarei Tefillah

Thursday April 7

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

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Biur Chametz #2 of 2, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

Friday April 8

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>