

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Noach

4 Cheshvan, 5783 / Oct. 29, 2022

Vol. 14 Num. 7 (#551)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Archie and Tobey Crandell  
in memory of Tobey's mother, Rochel bas Peretz Yehudah z"l, on her 15<sup>th</sup> yahrtzeit

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Ruth and Gerald Warner in memory of Ruth's dear parents,  
Margaret and Mike Smaye z"l מירל צביה בת דוד ז"ל ויחיאל מיכל בן יהושע ז"ל

### Plowing in the Fields of Torah

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

When Hashem decided to destroy humanity, He chose Noach to build up future generations. But what, exactly, made Noach so special? The first verse of our parshah notes that Noach was "a righteous man; he was blameless in his age." (Bereishit 6:9, all biblical translations JPS 2006) Rashi, commenting on that verse, notes that Noach must have truly been righteous in order to warrant being praised after being introduced. Furthermore, the fact that it is his righteousness that follows the words "These are the progeny of Noach," rather than the list of his children, teaches that the true progeny of righteous individuals are their good deeds.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 108a) records an important debate about the emphasis on "in his age": Rabbi Yochanan said that Noach was great compared to the horrible generation in which he was born, but that he would not have been considered righteous at other points in history. Reish Lakish, on the other hand, says that if Noach was able to still be righteous amongst the influences of his own generation, he'd be all the more righteous in other generations. But regardless of who is ultimately correct, it is clear that Noach was chosen because he was able to stand above those around him.

There may, however, be more to understanding why Noach was chosen, beyond his righteousness (relative or otherwise). At the end of last week's

parshah Hashem saw that humanity's increase had led to the spread of wickedness. (Bereishit 6:1-8) One of the earliest blessings that Hashem gave to humanity, to be fruitful and multiply, had been tremendously misused. Perhaps this is emphasized by the Torah describing that the rain "multiplied" as it overtook humanity and lifted the ark. (ibid. 7:17)

Just before all of this (ibid. 5:29), Noach was given his name precisely because, "This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which Hashem placed under a curse." Rashi comments that the relief that Noach will bring refers to his invention of agricultural instruments to help ease the burden that Hashem had cursed humanity with following the expulsion from Gan Eden. (Bereishit 3:17) Rabbi Ovadia Seforno notes that the word *noach* at various points in Tanach also refers to respite from one's enemies. Perhaps Noach's name refers to his eventual selection as a course corrector for the world away from wickedness. In that sense, Noach can be said to have literally acted as Hashem's agricultural tool in rendering the earth more fertile than it otherwise could have been.

Indeed, a midrash (Shemot Rabbah 30:13) claims that the generation of the flood was offered the Torah and, in fact, turned it down. Perhaps this is why it had to be water, which is so often associated with Torah, that had to be the

mechanism for purifying the earth. Only one who was righteous, whether fully or comparatively, would be in an ideal position to ensure that the fertile soil remaining would be able to support the seeds of Torah. Only one who is righteous can really ensure that Torah is able to grow and spread. As Rebbe Nachman notes (Likutei Moharan 8), the Torah is a garden, while the Jewish people are those who examine the different plants growing within it. But it is only the wisdom of Hashem that actually allows the Torah to grow, via the fountain that is human prayers, which are themselves inspired by the righteous of our own generation.

Of course, Noach's initial steps after emerging from the ark included planting a grapevine, which is seen as a failing. Nonetheless, in his overall arc, Noach can be seen as representing the beginning of a process that continues to this very day. Just as his righteousness allowed Torah to grow in a land that was previously unsuitable for it, so too can righteousness in our own generation inspire greater prayers and stronger connections to Torah.

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**Summary**

This chapter tells of a series of prophecies. One is about “Midbar Yam,” another is about “Dumah,” and a third is about “Arav.”

The opening prophecy, against “Midbar Yam” (from the prophecy, this appears to be Babylonia), begins with the prophet explaining the feeling of receiving this prophecy, likening it to being overtaken by a strong desert wind, weakening his body as though he were experiencing the pangs of childbirth. The prophet describes seeing people (presumably of Midbar Yam) sitting and feasting, when suddenly they are called to arms. At that moment, the prophet himself is called to set a guard or scout to observe and listen to what happens next. The prophet then explains what this scout will see and hear – horsemen and riders traveling and declaring that Babylonia has fallen. (21:1-10).

According to Rashi throughout this passage, the scout here is Chavakuk, who would arrive on the scene later in Tanach and ask Hashem when Bavel will fall. There are numerous textual links between this passage and Chavakuk’s brief book of prophecy. And Malbim (commentary to 21:7) explains that the feasting is the night of Belshazzar’s feast described in Daniel 5, before Persia conquered Babylonia.

The next prophecy is to “Dumah”. In this prophecy, a guard (there is no clear reason to assume that this is the same guard as in the earlier prophecy) is asked how far along into the night it is. The guard responds that morning has already come, and evening is on its way. He adds that if the questioner wishes to ask him again, he may return. (11-12)

The final prophecy of this chapter comes against Arav, explaining that the traveling Dedanites will set up camp in the fields. [See Bereishit 10:7 for more on the identity of the Dedanites.] The prophet urges those in the area to bring food and water to the Dedanites because they are refugees of war. The prophecy concludes with the assurance that in exactly one year’s time, Kedar will be destroyed. [See Bereishit 25:13 for more on the identity of Kedar.] (13-17)

**Insight**

Each of these three prophecies is difficult to understand. However, it seems evident from the text that both the first and last prophecy speak of some impending destruction – either of the Babylonian Empire or Kedar. The middle prophecy, however, spanning a mere two verses, seems to provide no meaningful information whatsoever; just a terse dialogue between a night

guard and a passerby.

Rashi’s commentary fills in the gaps of this middle prophecy. To begin with, Rashi explains that Dumah is Edom, the guard is none other than G-d Himself, and the questioner is a prophet who is currently living under Edomite subjugation. The question – what time in the night is it? – is really the prophet asking about the nature of his exile. The guard – that is, G-d – answers: The morning redemption, and the night of punishment to Edom, are on their way. Finally, Rashi explains the final line of the guard as follows: if you wish to hasten the redemption, then you must return through teshuvah.

According to Rashi, this middle prophecy is really to all those in exile – we can hasten the redemption, but if only we perform true teshuvah, and truly return to G-d.

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Every morning we open our day by reciting Birkot HaTorah (blessings upon Torah study), to enable us to perform what many sources call the most important mitzvah of all: Talmud Torah.

There is a basic question about the nature of Birkot HaTorah. Is it categorized as a *birkat hamitzvah*, the type of blessing one must say before performing a mitzvah, like the blessing we say before blowing the shofar or shaking the lulav? Or is it a *birkat hashevach*, a blessing we say in praise of Hashem, like the one we say when we witness amazing natural phenomena, like lightning?

According to Rabbi Mordechai Yafeh (Levush, Orach Chaim 47:6) this question is only relevant for the first two parts of Birkot HaTorah (“asher kidshanu bemitzvotav” and “asher bachar banu”). Rabbi Yafeh explains that the third part – beginning with “*veha’arev na*,” in which we ask Hashem to help us learn Torah out of joy and pleasure – is neither a blessing before a mitzvah nor a blessing of praise. Rather, it is a *birkat hanehenin* – a blessing on a pleasurable experience. Just like we must recite a blessing before eating delicious food, we also need to make a blessing before engaging in Torah study.

Furthermore, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov (Degel Machane Ephraim, Beshalach) brings in the name of the Ba’al Shem Tov that when the Talmud (Nedarim 81a) says that the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash occurred

because of not saying Birkot HaTorah, it is talking specifically about the blessing of “*veha’arev na*.” We did not realize how pleasurable the experience of learning Torah is, and this caused the destruction of the Temple.

We see from this that learning Torah out of joy and pleasure is extremely important and fundamental. However, Rabbi Avraham Bornsztain raises an obvious question: isn’t learning Torah out of fun and pleasure lacking in serving Hashem for the sake of Hashem? We are taught that one should strive to serve Hashem not for personal benefit but rather exclusively for the sake of Hashem, regardless of one’s own personal benefit and needs! Enjoying learning Torah lacks this spiritual level! Shouldn’t we strive to serve Hashem and learn Torah without so much personal enjoyment? (*Iglei Tal*, introduction)

Rabbi Bornsztain responds that this belief that it is better to learn Torah *not* out of joy is a common mistake. The truth is the opposite: Torah must be learned with a sense of pleasure and happiness. The word “*veha’arev*” has multiple meanings. It could be translated (as we translated above) as joy. But it could also mean “to mix” or “to blend.” The purpose of Torah study is to blend Hashem into our lives and into ourselves, and that is only achieved when we learn out of pleasure. Because of that, it is absolutely necessary to learn Torah out of pleasure and joy. May we all merit to achieve this.

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**Biography**  
**Rabbi Elimelech**  
**of Lizhensk**  
**Rabbi Dovid Zirkind**

One of the earliest figures in Chassidic history, and one of its most influential thinkers, was Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk. Born in 1717 in Galicia, Rabbi Elimelech was recognized as one of the great students of the Maggid of Mezerich.

Prior to the death of the Maggid, the early Chassidic movement was unified as a single group of the Baal Shem Tov's students. However, after the Maggid's death Chassidut was fragmented, and Rabbi Elimelech returned to Lizhensk to spread the thought of his teachers in southeastern Poland. His students include the Chozeh of Lublin, the Maggid of Koznitz and Menachem Mendel of Rimanov. He is commonly referred to as "the Noam Elimelech", the name of his mystical commentary to Torah.

Many legends speak of the unique relationship of Rabbi Elimelech and his brother Reb Zushya. Both were known to be extraordinarily pious individuals, but their contrasting personalities made their tales legendary. Here is one such story:

Rabbi Elimelech and Reb Zushya were once falsely accused of a crime and placed in prison with a group of other inmates. At one point in their stay, Rabbi Elimelech started to cry. Zushya asked, "Brother, why are you crying?" Rabbi Elimelech explained that he was saddened because he could not daven minchah in a room where prisoners had relieved themselves. Reb Zushya challenged his brother's reaction: "Is it not the same G-d who commanded you to pray, who is now forbidding you from doing so? Then you should not despair!" With that, Rabbi Elimelech took his brother by the hand and began to dance in great happiness.

The guards came running when they heard the commotion coming from the cell. They asked one of the inmates what was happening, and he explained that the two brothers had been arguing over the pail in the corner of the cell until they had suddenly began to dance. The guards replied, "If the pail makes these brothers so happy, we will remove it!" The pail was removed and Rabbi Elimelech davened minchah.

The Noam Elimelech died in 1787, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of Adar. His yahrtzeit is observed by many who visit his grave each year, and some communities do not recite tachanun on that day.

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**Torah and Translation**  
**Our Generations**  
**R' Elimelech of Lizhensk, Noam Elimelech, Parshat Noach**  
**Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו (ו, ט).

נראה לי דהנה האדם העוסק בעבודת הבורא יתברך ויתעלה בכל מעשיו: דהיינו אפילו בדברים הגשמיים כמו אכילה ושתיה שאוכל ושותה בקדושה על כל פנים בכוונה לדחות את הפסולת ולהעלות את הרוחניות שבו אזי בכל פעם שעולה ובא בבחינה אחרת יתירה זה נקרא בשם דור דהבחינה הראשונה שהיה מתנהג בה כל ימי נהוגו בה היא כמו דור ואחר שנופל מבחינה זאת ונופל לבחינה אחרת הרי הוא כמו שבא בדור אחר. וזה הוא "דור הולך ודור בא" (קהלת א, ד) פירוש כנ"ל שזה נופל מבחינה ראשונה שהיה מתנהג עד הנה הבחינה הזאת הולכות ממנו, זה דור הולך ודור בא גם כן כנזכר לעיל שבא לבחינה אחרת.

ואמר הכתוב אך צריך שיהיה באופן "והארץ לעולם עומדת", פירוש שהארציות, דהיינו הגשמיות צריך להעמיד, שיהא מתנהג בהם בקדושה כנ"ל והיינו לעולם עומדת, רצה לומר לעולם העליון והאדם המתנהג כנ"ל בא בכל פעם בבחי' אחרת.

אבל מי שאינו מתנהג בקדושה לא שייך בו כל זאת, שאין עולה כלל לבחינה אחרת. וזהו "דור לדור" (תהלים קמה, ד), פירוש אדם הרוצה לצאת ולבוא מדור לדור, דהיינו מבחינה לבחינה כנ"ל, "ישבח מעשיך", פירוש צריך לקדש עצמו אף בגשמיות כל כך עד שגם מעשיו הגשמיים ישבחו לד' יתברך ברוך הוא.

וזהו "נח איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו", פירוש בכל בחינותיו שהיה בו בכל פעם היה צדיק תמים בהם. וכל זה היה לו מחמת ש"את אלקים התהלך נח", רצה לומר שכל מעשיו לא היו רק לשמו הגדול יתברך, לכן הלך בכל פעם מבחינה לבחינה.

"These are the products of Noach. Noach was a righteous man; he was unblemished in his *dorot* [lit. generations]." (Bereishit 6:9)

It appears to me that someone who involves himself in serving the blessed and exalted Creator in all of his actions, meaning even in material matters like eating and drinking, eating and drinking in holiness, at least with intent to reject the dross and to elevate the spiritual in it, then every time he ascends and enters another, greater level, this is called a *dor*. The previous level, which he acted in all the days that he practiced it, is like a *dor*, and after he falls from the previous level that he practiced until now, that level leaves him. This is "A *dor* goes and a *dor* comes in." (Kohelet 1:4) Meaning, as said above, that this person falls from the previous level that he practiced until now, and that level leaves him, this is the *dor* that goes. And a *dor* comes as well, as stated above, for he enters another level.

And the text [in Kohelet] says only that it must be in a way that "the land stands for the *olam* [lit. eternally] (Kohelet *ibid.*)," meaning that the earthiness, meaning the materialism, must stand. He must act in it with holiness, as stated above. This is "and it stands for the *olam*," meaning, for the upper realms. One who acts thus enters into a new level each time.

But one who does not act with holiness, all of this is not relevant for him. He does not rise at all to another level. This is "From *dor* to *dor*" (Tehillim 145:4). Meaning, one who wishes to transit from *dor* to *dor*, meaning from level to level as stated above, "shall praise Your deeds." Meaning, he must sanctify himself, even with the material, to such an extent that his material deeds also praise Hashem.

This is "Noach was a righteous man, he was unblemished in his *dorot*," meaning in all of his levels, every time, he was an unblemished righteous person in them. And all of this was because "Noach walked with G-d." (Bereishit *ibid.*) Meaning, all of his deeds were only for His great Name. Therefore, he went from level to level every time.

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### Shabbat Oct 28-29

After hashkamah R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

Before minchah R' Steven Gotlib, Pirkei Avot, Village Shul

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

### Sunday Oct 30

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

### Monday Oct 31

9 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of Rav Soloveitchik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Eliyahu: Prophet of Fire & Water, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak> *Week 1!*

7:30-9:00 PM Legal Ethics Seminar, with CPD Professionalism Credit (laypeople welcome)  
R' Mordechai Torczyner, Jewish Families and Family Law Litigation, Part 2  
Register at <https://torontotorah.com/cpd> / On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtethics>

7:30 PM Prielle & Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklysong> *We're Back!*

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Even ha'Ezer in Bereishit, Shomrai Shabbos (men) *Week 1!*

### Tuesday Nov 1

9:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, Tzidkat haTzaddik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

7:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud Topics, Shaarei Shomayim (university women)

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 16), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

### Wednesday Nov 2

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Jews and Clothes Week 1 of 7  
There is a fee, Register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>; On ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM Idan Rakovsky, Issues in Jewish Democracy, Shaarei Tefillah, *Week 1!*

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

### Thursday Nov 3

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 28), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

### Friday Nov 4

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*  
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

### COMING UP!

12:30 PM WEDNESDAYS NOVEMBER 9, 16 AND 23, BUSINESS ETHICS

Debt Forgiveness: Good Religion, Good Business?

COVID, Hockey Canada and the Toxic Workplace

When Employers Change the Terms of Employment

Registration at <https://torontotorah.com/business> / On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/bmlunch>

10-11:20 AM Sunday November 13

MIDRESHET YOM RISHON FOR WOMEN AT BAYT ON PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

Ms. Miriam Bessin—The Life and Death of Sarah

Mrs. Shyndee Kestenbaum—When the Apple Falls Far From the Tree

Light refreshments served / No registration needed

7:30 PM Monday evening November 14, Medical Ethics

VACCINATION AND RISK-TAKING IN JUDAISM

A SPECIAL SESSION WITH RABBI DR. JASON WEINER & RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER!

In-Person at Yeshivat Or Chaim

Registration will be at <https://torontotorah.com/cme>