

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayeshev

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Robbie and Brian Schwartz in memory of Brian's parents, Frank and Lyla Schwartz, Ephraim ben Noach z"l and Masha Leah bat Ze'ev z"l

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Tanach in a Day: Jews & Non-Jews in Tanach is Sun. December 25<sup>th</sup>! Register at [torontotorah.com/humanity](http://torontotorah.com/humanity)

### We Interrupt This Message...

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

Parshat Vayeshev is one of the most well-known portions in the entire Torah, having received at least two popular dramatic adaptations of the narrative that it sets into motion (DreamWorks' *Joseph: King of Dreams* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*). As such, the basic structure of this week's reading should already be known to most:

- Yaakov settles down to raise his family, and seems to favour Yosef, whom he presents with a multicoloured tunic.
- Yosef tells his brothers of dreams that seem to place him in an exalted position over them, earning their ire.
- Yosef's brothers sell him to travelling merchants and present his bloodied tunic to Yaakov, as if he had been devoured by a wild beast.
- Yosef ends up a slave in Egypt, serving in the house of Potiphar.
- Potiphar's wife has Yosef imprisoned when he refuses her advances.
- In the prison, Yosef interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's imprisoned baker and butler, accurately predicting which will be executed and which will go free.
- Yosef implores the butler to remember him so that he too will be freed, but the butler forgets and Yosef is left in prison as "TO BE CONTINUED" appears on the mental screen of all readers.

Attentive readers will notice that part of the parshah was left out of this description, as well as each adaptation of

Yosef's story: an interlude involving Yosef's brother, Yehudah, which seemingly has nothing to do with the broader story. The Torah inserts this immediately after the sale of Yosef, before the advances of Potiphar's wife.

The story essentially goes as follows: Er, Yehudah's oldest son, dies childless. Er's wife, Tamar, then marries his brother, Onan. Onan, however, also dies without having children. Tamar is supposed to marry Yehudah's third son, but Yehudah does not make this happen. Desperate, Tamar disguises herself and sleeps with Yehudah. When Yehudah hears that Tamar has become pregnant without having married his youngest son, he sentences her to death. Tamar, though, produces items that Yehudah had given to her as collateral. Yehudah then recognizes that he is the father and Tamar gives birth to twins - Peretz and Zerach, the former of whom is an ancestor of David HaMelech.

As Rashi and other commentators note, this portion interrupts the narrative oddly. Further, the events don't seem to fit entirely in the timeline where they are inserted. One could easily assume that this story was only placed in the middle to build tension while readers worry about what will befall Yosef. A close look, however, will show that Yehudah and Tamar's interlude reveals a powerful message in its own right.

Many commentators note that the phrase of "going down" appears twice in this parshah: once regarding Yosef go-

ing down to slavery in Egypt and once involving Yehudah going down to Canaan. A rabbinic tradition (Bereishit Rabbah 85:2) notes that this shows that just as Yosef had been sent down to Egypt, so too was Yehudah brought down from his exalted position by his brothers after seeing the grief that his suggestion of selling Yosef brought to their father.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes ([Covenant and Conversation, Vayeshev 5775](#)) that Yehudah picks himself up from this state by being the first person in the Torah to explicitly admit that he was wrong. This also could be the moment that gave Yehudah the depth of character necessary to be willing to place himself in slavery (to which he had condemned Yosef) in order to save Binjamin from the same fate.

But Rabbi Sacks clarifies that the true hero(ine) of this story is Tamar, pointing out that despite her anger and desperation, she avoided publicly shaming Yehudah for his actions and never directly identified him as her children's father. It is that dedication to avoiding bringing another to shame that makes her worthy of being an ancestor of David HaMelech and also allows Yehudah to decide for himself to admit his wrongdoing. This message, of avoiding embarrassing others, is an important one and does much to set the stage for the remainder of this story. After all, if Yehudah can raise himself up from his situation, surely Yosef can do the same.

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#### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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**Summary**

In contrast to the end of the preceding section, Chapter 28 begins with a condemnation of the political leaders of Ephraim, a reference to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Yeshayahu chastises them and foretells their destruction, ultimately to be replaced by G-d Himself (28:1-6).

The prophet continues with his chastisement of the religious leaders of Ephraim, the kohanim and the scribes (according to Targum Yonatan) for being drunken, corrupt in their judgment, and ineffective in teaching the people. (7-13)

Yeshayahu quotes the sinners who say that they made a covenant with death so that they would survive whatever punishment befalls them. However, the prophet explains that G-d will overrule this pact and punish them. (14-22)

The chapter concludes with a description of a farmer: First, he plows. When he's finished plowing, he plants seeds of various types in specific locations. Following this, the farmer harvests and threshes. All this knowledge, Yeshayahu concludes, comes from Hashem. (23-29)

**Insight**

What is the meaning of the description of the farmer at the end of this chapter?

Rashi explains (28:26, 29) that a farmer doesn't spend his whole life plowing the field. Once he is done plowing, he moves on to planting. Likewise, G-d will not forever rebuke the people; eventually punishment will come. Through this parable, Rashi writes, Yeshayahu hopes to convince the people to perform teshuvah, and not wait for the most severe punishments to come.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra has a slightly different approach, seeing this parable as a form of rebuke. He writes (28:29) that Yeshayahu was challenging the people – the ground and seeds are more obedient than the people. The ground does what it is told, and still the people hear prophecy and do nothing.

In his commentary, Radak (28:29), unpacks this parable more. He explains that the farmer is G-d, and the ground is Israel. At first, we were in Egypt, like an unworked field filled with thorns and thistles. So, G-d sent Moshe to "plow the field" with wonders

and miracles that brought the people to a belief in G-d. The end goal, of course, was to prepare the people to receive the seeds, which are the mitzvot and laws of G-d.

Radak points out that just as the farmer plants different seeds for different tracts of land, when it comes to receiving the Torah, different people experience different things, each one according to his or her spiritual capabilities. And, just as the farmer desires that every seed sprout and grow, so too G-d wants us to grow in our understanding of Torah.

Throughout Jewish history, G-d continued to send "rain on the field," the prophets who continually awaken and enlighten the people until they reach the point of "harvest," when they can fully enjoy the fruits of wisdom and Torah. However, if Israel does not correct itself and does not accept the chastisement from the prophets, the field will spoil. Instead of becoming a nation that the non-Jews respect, we will become a mockery.

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**Siddur Insights: Asking for Miracles?****Rabbi Yehuda Mann**

"What is Hanukkah? ... there was sufficient oil there to light the candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit the candelabrum from it eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *hallel* and special **thanksgiving in prayer** and blessings." (Shabbat 21b, Steinsaltz translation)

Rashi explains that this "thanksgiving in prayer" is expressed by reciting "Al HaNisim" in davening, and indeed, the Shulchan Aruch rules (Orach Chaim 682:1) that we say "Al HaNisim" both in davening and in birkat hamazon. The Shulchan Aruch continues to say that if one forgot to say "Al HaNisim" one doesn't have to repeat davening or birkat hamazon. However, the Rama rules that if one realizes the mistake in the middle of birkat hamazon then one may recite the "Al HaNisim" paragraph during the "HaRachaman" section, saying, "May the Merciful One do for us miracles and wonders as He did for our forefathers, in the days of Matityahu..."

This makeup formulation, "May Hashem perform miracles for us," raises a question. How could we pray for miracles? The Talmud says (Berachot 60a) that one should not pray for miracles. In addition, the Talmud says (Shabbat 32a) that if one experiences a miracle, some of one's merits will be deducted. So, why do we pray for miracles?

Rabbi Yitzchak Weiss (Minchat Yitzchak, Moadim pg. 104) explains that there is a difference between asking for miracles in general and asking for miracles like what happened on Chanukah. A person is not allowed to ask, in general, for new miracles. However, on Chanukah one may ask for miracles like the Chanukah miracle, because the days of Chanu-

kah contain the light and influence of those miraculous days from thousands of years ago. This explains why the berachah on lighting Chanukah candles emphasizes, "That You did miracles for our ancestors, **in those days, at this time.**" These special days of Chanukah contain miracle-potential. Therefore, one can ask for miracles on Chanukah "as He did for our ancestors."

Another question that is raised is: why does the person who forgot to recite "Al HaNisim" have the privilege of requesting miracles, whereas the person who made no mistakes does not? We might suggest that there is a special value to a person who had made a mistake in life, recognizes it, and wants to fix it. As the Talmud says (Berachot 34b), "In the place where penitents stand, even the fully righteous do not stand." Therefore, our rabbis wanted to express the idea that a perfect person who is without any mistakes is great, but doesn't necessarily deserve miracles. However, a person who made a mistake and works to correct himself or herself, that person has the right to request miracles from Hashem.

Certainly, all of us have made mistakes and have shortcomings. May we recognize them, fix them, and come before Hashem asking for miracles. And, indeed, may we merit and witness miracles.

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## Biography

### Rashba

Rabbi Adam Frieberg

*Based on an article by Russell Levy*

Born in 1235 in Barcelona, Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba) was one of the primary students of both Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) and Rabbeinu Yonah. In his younger years, Rashba was a merchant, but he ultimately left business for the rabbinate. As Rabbi of the main synagogue in Barcelona, Rashba led Spanish Jewry for more than 50 years. Rashba was well versed in Roman law, Spanish common law, and economics; this enabled him to lead the Jewish communities of the Spanish provinces and to serve as their representative to the greater Spanish community. As a prominent leader of the Jewish people, Rashba successfully defended the community in theological debates with Christians (Shut HaRashba 4:187).

Rashba wrote prolifically; more than 3000 of his teshuvot are still extant. He received requests for halachic guidance from all over the Jewish world. This is likely due in part to the geographic centrality of Barcelona, relative to major Jewish centres of the time - Portugal, France, Germany, Turkey, North Africa, Italy, and Israel. Also, Barcelona was itself a prominent Jewish community.

Rashba also wrote halachic tracts; two of his most famous are *Torat haBayit* and *Avodat HaKodesh*. *Torat haBayit* has been preserved in two versions, one long and the other short, both of which are usually printed together.

The turn of the Jewish millennium in 5000 (1240) created much messianic fervor in the Jewish community. Rashba ensured the unity of the Jewish community by combating false messiahs, most prominently Nissim ben Avraham and Avraham Abulafia when they appeared in the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (ibid. 1:548).

Rashba vigorously defended Rambam against his detractors, but he disagreed with Rambam's approach to general philosophy and the philosophy of Judaism. Indeed, Rashba, as part of the Beit Din in Barcelona, forbade those under thirty from learning secular philosophy and the sciences.

Rashba passed away at the age of 75, in 1310. Among Rashba's works are his novellae on the Talmud, *Torat HaBayit*, *Avodat HaKodesh* and *Sha'ar HaMayim*. His most renowned students were Rabbi Aharon haLevi (Ra'ah), Rabbi Yom Tov al-Asvilli (Ritva) and Rabbeinu Bechayye.

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## Weekly Halachah: The Electric Chanukiah

By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

### May one use an electric chanukiah?

The consensus of many authorities is that electric lights do not fulfill the mitzvah. The reasons include:

1. The original enactment of lighting was established when electric lights were unknown, and so the Sages did not include this as a way to fulfill the mitzvah.
2. At the time we light, there must be enough fuel present for the flame to last for the entire period; electricity is continuously generated. [This concern will not apply for a battery-powered chanukiah, though.]
3. Fulfilling the mitzvah requires direct kindling; flipping a switch or pressing a button only ignites the light indirectly (*grama*).
4. The point of lighting is to commemorate the menorah of the Beit haMikdash, which employed fuel and wick.
5. Each flame is supposed to be a single flame, not a *medurah* (lit. bonfire), since the original menorah had a single flame for each wick. If the filament arcs horizontally, it is a *medurah*.

Nonetheless, some have ruled that one who cannot light a standard chanukiah should use an electric chanukiah, with incandescent bulbs, without a berachah. This may be relevant in a hospital or airplane, for example. Uniquely, Rabbi Avigdor Nebentzahl even permits reciting a berachah in such a situation.

(Har Tzvi Orach Chaim 143; Mitzvot Ra'ayah Orach Chaim 673; Mishpitei Uziel I Orach Chaim 7; Dvar Halachah (R' Kletzkin) 36; Meorei Eish 5:2; Tzitz Eliezer 1:20:12; Yabia Omer 3:Orach Chaim 35; Halichot Shlomo 15:3; <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/3043>, Yerushalayim b'Moadeha: Chanukah pp. 243-244)

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## Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvot 7: Eat Roast!

By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The Torah commands that we eat the Korban Pesach in a particular way: "Do not eat it raw, or boiled in water, but fire-roasted." The *Sefer haChinuch* counts this as the Torah's seventh mitzvah, and presents two reasons for making sure the korban is fully roasted:

- 1) Classically, royalty ate roasted meat. Peasants ate boiled meat, which would preserve the fat and be more filling.
- 2) Roasting over a flame is quicker than boiling in a pot. The Jews ate this korban in haste, and we mark their haste by cooking with the quick, roasting method. [See also Rama, *Torat ha'Olah* 3:53.]

The Korban Pesach is not the only meat requiring roasting. All Jews are instructed to give certain parts of their animals to the kohanim – the foreleg, jaw and abomasum – and according to the talmudic view of Rav Chisda (Chullin 132b), they must be roasted. However, a kohen who does not like roast is free to transfer these gifts to another kohen; for the Korban Pesach, there is no alternative option for its consumption. (Divrei Yatziv Orach Chaim 204)

The Rambam and Raavad disagreed (Hilchot Korban Pesach 10:11) as to how the roasting was performed. The Rambam wrote that they roasted the entire animal, including the prohibited *gid hanasheh*. The Raavad dissented sharply, "Should I merit to eat the Korban Pesach, and he would bring this before me, I would smash it down on the ground before him!" This unresolved disagreement is one of the arguments against bringing the korban pesach in our own day.

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### Shabbat Dec. 16-17

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

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

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Mitzvot in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

### Sunday Dec. 18 First night of Chanukah

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

### Monday Dec. 19 Chanukah Day 1

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of Rav Soloveitchik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

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

### Tuesday Dec. 20 Chanukah Day 2

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)

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 17), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

### Wednesday Dec. 21 Chanukah Day 3

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Miriam, Week 3, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Miriam, Week 3, Shaarei Tefillah

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park *not this week*

### Thursday Dec. 22 Chanukah Day 4

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 29), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Gemara Beitzah (advanced) (men) *not this week*

### Friday Dec. 23 Chanukah Day 5

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!

10:00 AM to 4:00 PM Sunday December 25  
TANACH IN A DAY: JEWS AND NON-JEWS IN TANACH  
*Entirely Free of Charge!*

Full flyer and Registration at <https://torontotorah.com/humanity>

10:00 AM The Arc of Bereishit: Universalism to Particularism, Idan Rakovsky

10:30 AM The Conversion of Yitro and Ruth, Rabbi Yehuda Mann

11:00 AM Moshe: Between Egypt and Israel, Rebbetzin Emma Taylor

11:30 AM The Ban on Inter-marriage: Is it Racist?, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

12:00 PM Pizza Lunch and Learn!  
Battlefield Ethics, Rabbi Yehuda Mann

1:00 PM Jews and Non-Jews in the Book of Yehoshua, Rabbi Steven Gotlib

1:30 PM The Wolf and the Lamb, Russia and Ukraine, Idan Rakovsky

2:00 PM Tyre: Friend or Foe?, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

2:30 PM Yonah, Nachum and Nineveh, Ms. Miriam Bessin

3:00 PM Yechezkel, Jews, Non-Jews and Olam HaBa, Rabbi Steven Gotlib

3:30 PM Iyov: Jew or Non-Jew?, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner