

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bamidbar

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by the Lauterpacht Family
in honour of Rabbi Torczyner

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated in loving memory of Sam Ash, Yisroel Yecheskel ben Chaim a"h,
father of Rochelle Socken and father-in-law of Professor Paul Socken

A Story of Darkness and Light

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

"And there was light" - this corresponds to the Book of Shemot, in which Israel came from darkness to light. "And G-d saw that the light was good" corresponds to the Book of Vayikra which is full of many laws. "And G-d separated the light from the darkness" corresponds to the Book of Bamidbar which makes a distinction between those who left Egypt and those who came into the Land. "And G-d called the light, Day" corresponds to the Book of Devarim, which is full of many laws. (Bereishit Rabbah 3)

This midrash cryptically finds hints to all five books of the Torah in the verses about creation. Besides for Bereishit, the books are all alluded to in the creation of light and its separation from darkness. What is the message of this midrash? Several insights emerge. For example, the birth of the Jewish people is seen as a fulfillment of G-d's goals for the entire world. However, for the purpose of understanding Bamidbar, another detail offers perspective.

The book of Shemot describes the origin story of the Jewish nation. (In Bereishit, the Jews are only a family, the literal children of Israel.) The path from slavery to freedom, from idolatry (see Yechezkel 20) to worship of G-d, is aptly described as the journey from darkness to light. Indeed Mishlei (6:23) refers to Torah as light. In English, the Jews became "enlightened." Vayikra, in which the Jews are given many laws, gains the approbation of G-d,

"and the light was good." Bamidbar divides between those who left Egypt and died in the desert and those who merited entering into the land of Israel. The former are referred to as darkness while the latter are light.

However, upon further reflection, this is shocking. The Jewish people who in Bamidbar are described as darkness because they sinned and thus were not allowed to enter Israel **are presumably the same Jews who left Egypt and were thus described in Shemot as journeying to light.** Thus, the midrash is harshly reminding the reader that spiritual gains can be completely lost and reversed. The Jews who left Egypt did not just sin - despite having the Torah, it is as if they went back in time. Thus, the midrashic description of the second, surviving generation of light takes on a different meaning. They continued the legacy of their parents, despite their parents failing in that very task.

The Netziv (Introduction to Bamidbar) understands the "light" and "dark" of this midrash as two sides of a debate: whether G-d's providence is visibly supernatural or more subtle, functioning within nature. The beginning of Bamidbar still reflects the more miraculous journey begun during the Exodus, while the latter half, after the Jews sinned, reflects the more naturalistic. This implies that the second generation, despite meriting to enter Israel, was in darkness, while the first generation mostly experienced light. Presumably, hidden

providence must have benefits, such as enabling the Jews to become self-reliant. Otherwise, this would seem to be unjust, as the second generation suffers more than the first who brought the situation about. [See Yirmiyahu 31:28-29.]

In Havdalah, we bless G-d for separating light from darkness, and the Jews from the nations of the world. Considering the above, however, the unique status of the Jews, to be light and not dark, is a responsibility that must be earned and maintained, not an automatic privilege.

This midrash thus establishes several insights that should guide us through reading the book of Bamidbar:

- We can never rest on our laurels. Whatever is gained can be lost if we are not careful.
- We all have the potential for darkness, even after we have seen the light. Even then, however, there is hope to come back.
- G-d is in our lives, but in different ways, and the different ways we find G-d calling us towards different religious postures.

Bamidbar, is thus not just the journey of the first and second generation of Jews, those who left Egypt and those who entered Israel, but it is the story of every Jew's potential for greatness or its opposite.

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Summary

This chapter continues the discussion about Cyrus from the last several chapters, with other themes interspersed as well.

The chapter begins with a description of the Babylonian gods Bel and Nevo. Both of these gods were subdued and destroyed by Cyrus. Their idols were embarrassingly carried away by work animals. The gods were not able to save themselves from this captivity. (46:1-2)

The chapter continues with G-d addressing the Jewish people in exile. G-d contrasts Himself to the pagan gods. While the former are carried away by others, G-d carries and protects the Jewish people. He has done this from the beginning of Jewish national existence and will continue to do this even into the Jewish people's "old age". (3-4)

G-d asks: who can be compared to Him? (5) This is in contrast with the idols that are created by man. They need to be carried from place to place, and they do nothing to save their worshippers. (6-7)

G-d calls on the Jews to remember how different He is from the idols. G-d is the one who foretells the future (through prophets) and who follows through on

His promised actions. He summons the vulture (Cyrus) from a distant land to carry out His will. (8-11)

The chapter ends with a declaration to the hard-hearted Jews who don't want to listen to the prophets. G-d's salvation is coming. He will bring it to Zion and crown the Jewish people in splendor. (12-13)

Insight

The chapter's contrast of G-d carrying and protecting the Jewish people, unlike the impotent idols, recalls the Talmudic story of Onkelos (Avodah Zarah 11a). In the story, the Roman governor continuously sends soldiers to arrest Onkelos, who has converted to Judaism. Onkelos converts the first group of soldiers by teaching them Torah. The second and third groups are converted when he emphasizes the nature of G-d's relationship with the Jewish people. Onkelos explains to the soldiers that G-d is unlike human rulers who are served and protected by their subordinates. Instead, G-d, the ultimate ruler, helps and protects the Jewish people. The emphasis of G-d's care and concern for mere human beings moves the soldiers to convert.

A similar idea is presented in our chapter. The text sets up a contrast

between the Babylonian gods whose idols were carried away and were unable to save themselves, and G-d who actively carries and saves others, i.e., the Jewish people. The difference between the pagan gods and G-d is not only about efficacy. It's not just that the pagan gods are fake and powerless while G-d is real and powerful. There's also a qualitative difference in the respective relationships. Worshiping the pagan gods is aimed at placating both the god who needs food etc., and often the visceral desires of humans as well. G-d, on the other hand, reveals Himself as an ethical figure and role model. Following G-d means engaging in an ethical fellowship and a caring relationship. This is what Yeshayahu is urging his fellow Jews, and us, to remember in this chapter.

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Siddur Insights: Ma'ariv Aravim: Fate & Destiny

Idan Rakovsky

The *hama'ariv aravim* blessing that opens the evening prayer is a blessing about time. We express our gratitude to G-d for causing the sun to set and evening to come through His utterance. He "opens gates" and "changes times." In fact, He controls the dimension of time in our lives.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (commentary on the Siddur) asks specifically about the expression of G-d "opening the gates" and explains that this refers to the gates of dawn and dusk. Rabbi Hirsch explains that dawn and dusk serve as a sort of gateway with which G-d manages the roles of day and night. Through these gates G-d passes the world as it transitions harmoniously from one to the other.

In this blessing we also mention that G-d changes times **with great wisdom** – a fact that is mentioned in another blessing we recite every morning, "Who gives the rooster understanding to distinguish between day and night." (For more on this blessing, see Iyov 38:36 and Toronto Torah Bo 5783). The ability to differentiate between one thing and another, not only between light and darkness but also between good and evil, is one of the Divine traits that were given to man.

Relatedly, it is worth mentioning that the Sages enacted the Havdalah blessing on Saturday nights following Shabbat, when we separate the Shabbat from the weekday. In this blessing, we request that G-d grant us understanding "to fulfill Your will and distinguish between light and darkness." Again, we see from here G-d's dominance over time.

Based on this idea we can define the *hama'ariv aravim* blessing as one that deals with **the fate of humanity**. Humans have managed to reach space and walk on the moon, to find cures for dark diseases, and to progress technologically and culturally. Yet, we have not succeeded, nor will we ever succeed, in controlling time – to dictate the setting of the sun or the shining of the stars. *hama'ariv aravim* is a blessing of fate, in which we accept G-d's absolute control over the dimension of time. In doing so we understand that, at least in some arenas, nothing is under our control.

With this understanding, I want to suggest that there is a connection of "fate and destiny" between this blessing and the one that follows it. In this second blessing, *ahavat olam*, we elaborate on the Torah and laws and judgments that G-d granted us in His great love. The *ahavat olam* blessing serves as a turning point from fate to destiny. After understanding that we **cannot control time**, we understand that we actually **can control what we do with our time**. Days pass and time flies, but we are responsible for how we live them. Therefore, in contrast to our fate in *hama'ariv aravim*, we declare in the second blessing, "For they are our life and the length of our days, and we will meditate day and night upon the Torah." Day and night are given to G-d but using them to fulfill our destiny – learning Torah day and night – that is our choice.

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Biography

The Rogatchover Gaon

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Yosef Rosen was born in 5618 (1858), in Rogotchov, Belarus. His father, Rabbi Ephraim Rosen, was a Chassid of the Kopust brand of Chabad, but this fact did not prevent him from sending his son, upon Bar Mitzvah, to the Litvish Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichik (“Beit HaLevi”) to teach him. He learned under Rabbi Soloveichik, as well as with his son, Rabbi Chaim Soloveichik, who would become the founder of a new, “Brisker” approach to learning. Even in that company, young Yosef soon stood out as a unique genius. His nickname came to be ‘the Rogatchover’, after the place of birth; this nickname followed him from then on, and is better known than his real name to this day.

At the age of 31, Rabbi Yosef Rosen was appointed as Rabbi for the Chassidic Jews of Dvinsk, Latvia. [His counterpart, the famous Rabbi Meir Simchah HaKohen (“Or Sameach”), served the non-Chassidic Jews of the city.] He became famous worldwide for his powers of memory. Rabbi Rosen seemed to remember everything – Midrash, Mishnah, Gemara and Rishonim – and he was able to summon immediately every appearance of each word. Furthermore, he was able to find connections between what seemed to be completely unrelated issues. But these abilities were not received only by heavenly gift; the Rogatchover was known for his persistent, continuous learning. Rabbi Meir Simchah once contended that it was no wonder the Rogatchover remembered everything – after all, doesn’t everyone remember what they have just learned? For the Rogatchover, who never stopped learning and reviewing, every source is as if it was just learned.

Rabbi Yosef Rosen was outstanding not only in mind, but also in personality. He knew his own qualities, and he heeded neither his generation’s authorities, nor the authorities of previous generations. Some of his answers even disputed those of the Rishonim of the Middle Ages.

Unfortunately, Rabbi Rosen’s genius and breadth make his writings extremely cryptic. On many occasions he only refers to a certain page in the Talmud, and leaves it to the reader to decipher the meaning.

The Rogatchover passed away on 11 Adar 1, 5696 (1936).

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Weekly Halachah: Davening Jackets?

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 91:6) writes that “it is the way of Torah scholars and their students to only pray while they are wrapped [*atufim*].” The *Kaf HaChaim* there clarifies that this does not refer only to Torah scholars but, in fact, to everyone. He further adds that doing so includes specifically wearing an outer garment (*beged elyon*) in addition to being wrapped in a tallit, which implies that a tallit alone does not sufficiently count as a *beged elyon*.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (Orach Chaim 91:2, based on Shabbat 10a), however, writes that some people act differently in times of hardship, wear a *beged elyon* only on Shabbat or Yom Tov, but not during the week. Our garb reflects our suffering. That having been said, the *shliach tzibur* or those receiving *aliyot* would certainly still wear a *beged elyon* due to concerns for the honour of the community (*kavod hatzibur*) and the honour of the Torah (*kavod haTorah*). This is why some synagogues have spare jackets available for those to whom they give *aliyot*. Unlike the *Kaf HaChaim*, though, the *Aruch HaShulchan* writes that a tallit alone **does** sufficiently count as a *beged elyon*.

Despite the *Aruch HaShulchan*’s apparent inclusion of a tallit as a *beged elyon*, Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz writes (*Hakoneh Olamo* I 14) that since it is the practice of North Americans to meet important people wearing a jacket, it is ideal to wear one when praying as well. This idea comes from the *Mishneh Berurah* (91:5), who rules that one should dress during prayer the same way that they would when they meet an important individual (*adam chashuv*). Rabbi Lebowitz even writes that in a location where people are extremely careful to only meet with important individuals wearing a jacket, one should daven in a jacket even when davening privately. The *Netziv* (*Emek Berachah Hilchot Kriyat Shema* 1) even writes that it is better to daven alone dressed in an ideal way than to daven with a minyan but improperly dressed. Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim* 3:7), on the other hand, writes that it is better to daven with a minyan but without a jacket than to daven with a jacket, but without a minyan. This is because wearing the ideal clothing is a nice thing to do, but davening with a minyan is an obligation (*chiyuv gamur*).

As the discussion above demonstrates, it’s very important to think about how we present ourselves when davening. Jacket or not, are we dressed in a way that is fitting to present ourselves before the Ruler of the Universe?

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Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvah 26: Not to Believe in Foreign Gods

By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Shemot 20 commands, “You shall not hold the gods of others before Me.” Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah’s 26th mitzvah. This law prohibits not only worship, but also belief. However, since this is a thought-based mitzvah, no human court can punish its transgression; only G-d enforces this mitzvah. (Minchat Chinuch 26:1)

This commandment is also one of the “Noachide” mitzvot, which apply to all human beings; a non-Jew is not permitted to believe in other gods. However, based on a Talmudic discussion (Sanhedrin 63a), many authorities contend that a non-Jew may believe in other gods along with Hashem. On this basis, Tosafot (Bechorot 2b *shema*) contends that a Jew is allowed to enter an agreement with a non-Jew in which the participants swear by their belief systems, even if that means the non-Jew will invoke a deity which combines G-d with other beings.

As we noted regarding the mitzvah of belief in G-d, the 8th century Baal Halachot Gedolot contended that the Divine declarations of “I am the Lord your G-d” and “You shall not hold the gods of others” are not actually mitzvot. Rather, these were G-d’s way of introducing the Torah’s laws to the Jewish nation. (Cited in Ramban’s *hasagah* to Mitzvah Aseh #1)

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Shabbat May 19-20

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

Chabura after the 8:30 AM Minyan R' Mordechai Torczyner, The Keruvim of Yom Yerushalayim, BAYT

30 min pre-minchah R' Steven Gotlib, Big Topics, Village Shul

30 min pre-minchah R' Yehuda Mann, Yom Yerushalayim Shiur, Clanton Park

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

After minchah, R' Jared Anstandig, Halachah in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah *Guest Speaker!*

Sun. May 21

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver, Clanton Park (men): New Zman—Hilchot Seudah!

Mon. May 22

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Non-Jewish Help in Halachah, Shomrai Shabbos (men)

Tues. May 23

8:00 AM R' Steven Gotlib, Sefer Emunah uBitachon, Village Shul

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

7:00 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 20), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

8:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Adventures Through Shas, Shaarei Shomayim (university women) *Final Week!*

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

Wed. May 24

10 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Jewish Migrations: Origins of Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Week 4 of 4
On ZOOM @ <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> Register @ <https://torontorah.com/wednesdays>, there is a fee

8:00 PM R' Steven Gotlib, Ashkenazi and Sephardi Differences, The Village Shul

8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Megillat Ruth, Shaarei Tefillah

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park

Thurs. May 25 Erev Shavuot

8:00 AM R' Steven Gotlib, Jewish Mysticism, Village Shul

First night of Shavuot, Thursday-Friday May 25-26

11:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, TBD, Or Chaim Minyan

12:00-3:55 AM R' Steven Gotlib, Beis Medrash Track, The Village Shul

12:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Ivtzan: Prequel to Ruth, Aish Thornhill

1:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Naomi, Ruth and Anti-Gentilism, BAYT

1:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, May I Cause the Blind to Stumble?, Shaarei Tefillah

1:00 AM R' Yehuda Mann, TBD, Clanton Park

2:10 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Ruth: Book of Aspiration, Ayin l'Tzion/Zichron Yisroel

2:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, Adam, Eve & Freud, Shaarei Shomayim

3:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, May I Eat a Giraffe?, Shaarei Tefillah Youth

3:00 AM R' Yehuda Mann, TBD, Petah Tikva

3:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Q & A, Bnei Akiva

3:45 AM R' Jared Anstandig, The Jew Who Didn't Know He Was, Shaarei Shomayim

3:55 AM R' Steven Gotlib, Why Did We Just Stay Up?, The Village Shul

4:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, You Don't Need Your Coffee, Shaarei Tefillah