



BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV TORONTO TORAH

PARASHAT PEKUDEI

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DVAR TORAH PEKUDEI RABBI YEHUDA MANN, ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

Finding Value in Emptiness

You may have noticed at the end of every weekly parasha, many of the Chumashim record the number of verses in the portion. Almost always the Chumash adds a word whose *gematria* (numerical value) equals the number of verses, as a sign to aid in memory. For example, in Parshat Beshalach, there are 116 verses, and the sign is related to the portion: "*yad emunah*" (יד אמונה) referring to previous verses where the Torah says Moshe's hands were Emunah.

However, in our parasha, Parshat Pekudei, in many chumashim there is no sign! Why is that?

An amusing explanation I've heard is the explanation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe says that there was indeed a sign for Parshat Pekudei—"bli kol" (בלי כל) which also mean "without anything". However, the typesetter made a mistake; he thought it meant there was no sign because it was written in the Torah "without any sign," so he simply didn't write anything. Sadly, he failed to realize that the sign was indeed—"bli kol."

But now the bigger question arises: What kind of sign is "without anything"? After all, there are such beautiful signs reflecting the portions, like "*yad emunah*" in Beshalach, so why such a disappointing sign like "bli kol"?

Rabbi YY Jacobson suggests a wonderful idea—the most suitable sign for Parshat

Pekudei, the parasha that concludes the story of the construction of the Tabernacle, is indeed "*bli kol*"—without anything. According to many commentators, the building of the Tabernacle and having the possibility that G-d would establish His dwelling place among the Jewish people only came about because of the sin of the Golden Calf. Due to the spiritual decline of the Jewish people, they needed something to uplift them and ensure G-d's presence among them, hence the commandment to build the Tabernacle. Meaning, because of the terrible downfall of the Am Yisrael, because of their spiritual decline, they merited a renewed elevation in building the Tabernacle.

This is the message of the Tabernacle, and the sign of the portions related to the Tabernacle—"without anything." When it seems there's emptiness, from this low point, one can reach new spiritual heights. And this is a message for each and every one of us: sometimes we fall and enter into despair due to our spiritual low points, but precisely from our downfall, we can grow and build a place for G-d to dwell in.

One of the stories that illustrates this idea is the wonderful story of Rabbi Yehoshua Neuwirth, the author of the book *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata*. The book "*Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata*" has been printed in several editions and is a very popular book that makes

the complex laws of Shabbat accessible to modern reality. Only in the latest edition did Rabbi Neuwirth write in the preface what encouraged him to write the book. Rabbi Neuwirth describes his experience during World War II, when they lived in Holland and how his family loved Shabbat, and also experienced miracles because of Sabbath. One of the stories he tells is that his sister worked for a family during the war, but always managed to avoid working on Shabbat. On one of the Shabbats when she didn't work, the house she worked in was hit by a bomb and all the residents of the house died. However, despite his love for Shabbat, he once had to desecrate the Shabbat when the ship that took him to Israel sailed on Shabbat and he always regretted having to be on a ship on Shabbat. At that moment, he decided that one day, he would do something for the sake of the Shabbat. And that encouraged him to write one of the most significant books in the laws of Shabbat.

Rabbi Neuwirth could have fallen into depression because of what he felt was a spiritual downfall, but instead, from the darkness, from the feeling of "*bli kol*"—he created something wonderful: the book *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata*.

May we all merit to build marvelous things out of our individual points of darkness, things that G-d will dwell in.



Yirmiyahu 14

Chapters 14 and 15 describe a famine, and an attempt by Yirmiyahu to convince Hashem to send rain. Dr. Menachem Bula (*Daat Mikra Yirmiyahu*) suggests that this was the second of three famines in Yirmiyahu's day. The first was early in his career and was described in 3:1-3, and the third would come after the death of King Yoshiyahu, described in 5:20-29.

The chapter begins by describing a horrifically devastating drought and famine. The elders at the gates will fall to the ground in mourning, and their cries will ascend heavenward. Even the animals will suffer, for lack of grass to eat. According to Radak, none of this had happened yet; it was a prophetic prediction. In a mishnah (*Taanit* 2:1), Rabbi Yehudah said the opening sentence was included in the liturgy when Jews

fasted for rain in Talmudic times (14:1-6).

Yirmiyahu pleads with Hashem not to remain remote; he describes Hashem as "the *mikvah* of Israel"—a pun identifying Hashem as our hope (*tikvah*) and our source of water (*mikvah*). He asks Hashem not to act as a stranger, a passerby, a person in shock. (14:7-9)

But Hashem responds that the Jews were restless, abandoning Hashem to try their fortunes elsewhere, and now any repentance was unwanted. "Do not pray for this nation's benefit," Hashem warns Yirmiyahu; even should they fast and bring sacrifices, Hashem will not be interested (14:10-12).

Yirmiyahu defends the Jews, pointing out that the nation was led astray by prophets who promised peace and security. But

Hashem replies that He will punish the false prophets and their followers alike. Radak explains that the nation should have known that genuine prophets would direct them to pursue Hashem's Torah and a path of righteousness (14:13-18).

Undeterred, Yirmiyahu persists in his appeal: Have You abandoned Judea and Zion? A midrash suggests that Yirmiyahu cried out to Hashem to reject us and send us away, rather than continue to punish us (*Shemot Rabbah* 31:10). Yirmiyahu then reprises a description of the Jews found earlier, in 8:15—"We hope for peace, and there is no good. We hope for healing, but behold, there is only terror." He pleads with Hashem for rain, for the sake of Divine honour and His throne of glory (14:19-22). Hashem's answer will come in Chapter 15.



Week 8: Earlier Lists of *Ikkarim*

In the past weeks, we explored three of the most extensive treatments of *Ikkarei Emunah*. Before we move to the reception in later periods, it is worth noting that hints of such lists appear earlier in Jewish history. Rabbi Dr. Joshua Berman summarizes these in *Ani Maamin: Biblical Criticism, Historical Truth, and the Thirteen Principles of Faith* (Maggid, 2020)

Strikingly, nowhere in Chazal is a list of necessary beliefs found. Rabbi Saadia Gaon (Rasag) seems to be the first to provide one. In his comments to Shmuel 2:22:2-3, he notes ten things a believer should believe:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. God is eternal. | his providence, regardless |
| 2. All that exists depends on and is sustained by God. | of what happens. |
| 3. God created the world <i>ex nihilo</i> . | 6. We must accept the mitzvot. |
| 4. God is the lawgiver for the Jews. | 7. God is the source of salvation and will eventually redeem the Jews in the times of Mashiach. |
| 5. Trust God and not question | 8. God will save people from |

- the wars of Gog and Magog. 10. God punishes those who
9. God grants reward in the deny or rebel against Him. World to Come.

As Rabbi Dr. Berman notes, Rasag leaves out several that Rambam will include, and also never explains the consequences of not believing these. He claims that Rasag was motivated to write this as an educational mnemonic, perhaps influenced by the practice among Muslims to recite their central beliefs.

Rabbeinu Chananel has an even more condensed list in his comments to Shemot 14:31: belief in God, that one is obligated to obey prophets, the World to Come, and Mashiach. He does note that one is rewarded for believing them and punished if he does not.

It is worth noting that neither Rasag nor Rabbanenu Chananel wrote systematic works explaining or defending these, and instead included them in the commentaries to Tanach. As such, discussions of *Ikkarei Emunah* usually focus on thinkers such as Rambam, Rabbi Yosef Albo, and Rabbi Chasdai Crescas, as we have seen in previous weeks.



My Parents are Asking Me Not to Drink

Question: I'm very excited for Purim to fulfill the mitzvah of drinking on Purim, but my parents are asking me not to drink to intoxication—should I listen to them? (I am of legal drinking age in Canada.)

Answer: The Talmud in *Megillah* 7b tells us about the obligation of a person to get drunk "until he does not know the difference between *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai*." However, the Talmud continues with the story of Rabbah who killed Rabbi Zeira out of drunkenness (and later through his prayers, Rabbi Zeira came back to life). What is the ruling?

Three possibilities were stated among the early commentators in explaining the law and the subject:

1. Rabbi Ephraim and the Meiri believe that since the Talmud brings the story of Rabbah who killed Rabbi Zeira, we learn from here that there is no obligation at all to get drunk on Purim and the words of the

Talmud saying to get drunk are not the legal conclusion.

2. The Pri Chadash believes the opposite, that from the story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira, we learn that indeed it is legally concluded that one should get drunk, even in an extreme way! Since the Talmud continues to tell that Rabbah invited Rabbi Zeira to his Purim feast a year later, and Rabbi Zeira refused because he feared he might get hurt since he would come knowing that there would be excessive drinking, it is therefore evident that indeed they needed to get drunk! And indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules in siman 695 that one must get noticeably drunk. However, it is important to note that the Pri Chadash himself believes that in our times, where people might neglect commandments and commit sins as a result of their drunkenness, they should not get drunk in an extreme way.

3. Intermediate approaches believe that

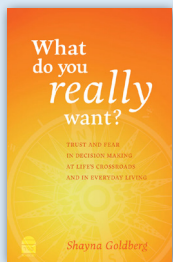
while there is an obligation to drink, it is not to get extremely drunk that could endanger oneself and others. Therefore, we find that the Rema believes that a person should drink "more than his usual" and then sleep, and by this, he fulfills "not knowing the difference between *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai*".

Regarding your question: it is known that there is no obligation to honor parents in a case where they ask you to cancel a commandment, but Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach [*Halichot Shlomo Purim* 25] rules that if a son is asked by either of his parents not to drink on Purim, he should listen to them! Since, according to the Rema and many poskim, it is enough to drink more than usual and then go to sleep, it is not considered that the parent is asking his son to violate a commandment of the Torah, so you should listen to your parents and drink a small amount and not get drunk.

Have a halachic question? Share it with Rabbi Mann at ymann@torontotorah.com.



Week 6: Making Our Own Decisions



What Do You Really Want?
By Shayna Goldberg
Maggid Press, 2021

"Students, just as one's children, need to be given the tools to become life-long, independent learners, thinkers, and decision makers. Rather than training students to doubt their own intuitions and to turn elsewhere for guidance, teachers should empower them to exercise and respect their own ever-maturing judgments, at age appropriate levels." (*What Do You Really Want*, page 119)

After exploring various challenges and decisions that one faces throughout life, Goldberg turns her attention to

the idea of inculcating trust in decision making to the next generation. She argues that children and students must learn to take ownership over their decisions, and not shift responsibility to others due to inability or fear in decision-making.

In the Jewish world, perhaps one of the greatest counter-examples of this idea is the concept of "*Da'as Torah*," where, when facing a difficult decision, one turns to a rabbi to decide. Rabbi Herschel Schachter in his article, "*מפנינו רבנו: קונטרס בעניני פסק הלכה*" [Pamphlet on Matters of Halachic Ruling] in Volume 38 of the *Beis Yitzchak* journal, argues that this is not correct. He writes that in non-halachic matters a rabbi's opinion is not absolute. It is a suggestion that one can use in making a decision, but it is far from a binding directive. In other words, when we reach out to our rabbis, teachers, and mentors, we ask not that they tell us what to do, but that they help us see what we really want.

Our advisors can help us, but we must recognize our ability, and responsibility, to choose our own path forward.

What Do You Really Want? can be purchased from Koren Publishers at tinyurl.com/KorenBMZD. Use the code *TorontoTorah* for a 10% discount on this or any other book on their website.



TABLE TALK RABBI NOAH SONENBERG, DEAN

Source: Shemot 40:35

And Moshe was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Kings I, 8:11

So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord.

Questions to Discuss

- What message was Hashem sending by denying access to both the Tent of Meeting and the Temple upon their completion?
- When experiencing a barrier in our ability to connect with Hashem, is there anything we can do to help “disperse the cloud”?

After Shabbat, please share your family's answers with us at nsonenberg@torontotorah.com to enter our raffle for a \$15 voucher for Tova's Bakery!

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Shabbat	Halacha from the Parasha	Clanton Park	After Hashkama Minyan	Rabbi Mann
	Gemara	BAYT	Between Mincha & Maariv	Rabbi Gutenberg
Sunday	Tzurba M'Rabanan – Halacha	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:30 AM	Rabbi Shor
	Men's Semichat Chaver: Hilchot Smachot	Clanton Park	9:00 AM	Rabbi Spitz & Rabbi Mann
	Shiur b'Ivrit	BAYT (Milevsky/Mizrachi)	9:00 AM	Rabbi Mann & Rabbi Lax
	Sefer Shemot	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	David Koschitzky
Monday	Between Haman and the BDS	Zoom: tiny.cc/idanrak	2:00 PM	R' Rakovsky
	Men's Halacha	Shomrai Shabbos	8:30 PM	Rabbi Mann
	Introduction to Gemara: Learn how to learn	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg
Tuesday	Then and Now: Returning to the Land of Israel – a Study in Tanach	Zoom	1:30 PM	Rabbi Horovitz
	Women's Gemara Shiur	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:30 PM	Rabbi Anstandig
	Women's Contemporary Halacha Shiur	Clanton Park	8:15 PM	Rabbi Mann
Wednesday	Exploring the Characters in Megillat Esther	Zoom	10:00 AM	Rabbi Sonenberg
	Men's Contemporary Halacha	Clanton Park	8:00 PM	Rabbi Mann
	Men's Gemara Bekiut	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg
	Study in Tanach	Shaarei Tefillah	8:00 PM	R' Rakovsky
Thursday	Tanach: Sefer Shmuel	Zoom: tiny.cc/BMZDtanach	1:30 PM	Rabbi Horovitz
	Men's Tzurba M'Rabanan	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Turtel
	Men's Gemara Iyun	BAYT (Milevsky/Mizrachi)	8:00 PM	R' Diena
Sun–Thu	Men's Community Night Seder	Yeshivat Or Chaim Clanton Park	Sun–Mon, Wed–Thurs: 8:00–9:00 PM Tues: 8:00–9:00 PM	
	Pre-Maariv Shiur	Yeshivat Or Chaim	New Time 8:45–9:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Midreshet Yom Rishon with Rabbi and Mrs. Sonenberg	BAYT	Sunday, March 17, 2024	10:00–11:30 AM
Updating the Determination of the Moment of Death with Rabbi Torczyner	Zoom: tiny.cc/mtorc	Monday, April 8, 2024	8:00–9:30 PM

YOUR BEIT MIDRASH

Rosh Beit Midrash

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