



Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

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The Glorious Midbar

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

In books, stage and cinema, the setting of a story is, itself, a character, providing a sense of realism, giving the actors options and limits, and interacting with the other characters. The same is true in Torah; every backdrop is part of the story, whether Canaanite territory or Egyptian empire or Har Sinai or Mishkan. And with the start of a new chumash this week we are introduced to another player: Midbar (wilderness).

Of course, we've met Midbar before; the Jews already hungered for food and thirsted for water right after they crossed through the Sea. But back then, Midbar was quickly subdued by the manna and Miriam's well and Aharon's clouds, and then fully eclipsed by Mount Sinai and the Mishkan. Only as the Jews move away from Sinai does the wilderness, come to the fore.

Watching our ancestors interact with this setting teaches us valuable lessons:

- Midbar offers a lesson in humility; in a wilderness, all beauty is natural, all artifice is overtaken by nature, all property is communal. As the Talmud (Nedarim 55a) explains, Hashem gives the Jews the Torah in the wilderness to teach that we need to be humble in order to receive the Torah. The Jews already had Moshe as a model for this, but there is a difference between observing humility and being enveloped in an environment that declares, "All property is nothing."
- Midbar offers a lesson in isolation; receiving the Torah in a wilderness afford the Jews the opportunity to focus on this Divine gift without need to plant fields, maintain

homes or engage in commerce. Indeed, a cadre of women established homes at the Ohel Moed and devoted their days to study. (Ibn Ezra to Shemot 38:8)

- Midbar is *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which our story can be scripted as we choose. In a society with neither incumbent wealth nor predetermined hierarchy, Ohaliav from the tribe of Dan, son of Bilhah, can become master craftsman of the Mishkan and a nation of slaves can demonstrate spiritual greatness.

No other biblical environment would have suited all of these ends – the humility, the isolation, and the *tabula rasa*. Canaanite Israel and Egyptian slavery lacked isolation. The Mishkan certainly would not have served, as it was the opposite of humility, a grand construction outfitted with beautiful silver and gold and colourful embroidery. The Jews need the Midbar environment in which to work through their growing pains, enduring rebellions and hunger and suspicion while studying the Torah and achieving personal, tribal and national greatness.

Some might compare Midbar to childhood - at what other time in our lives have we accomplished so little, at what other time in our lives are we as unentangled, at what other time in our lives does the future lie so pliable before us? We are tempted to believe that childhood is the ideal, Midbar-like time for a Jew to embrace Torah. But that comparison to childhood might lead to a mistake of great consequence; people who believe they missed their chance in childhood abandon hope of change, instead of taking the opportunities that yet lie before them.

It is never too late. Always, we can return to Midbar, if not in practice then in state of mind, developing humility, paring down our distractions, and envisioning life as a canvas on which to paint afresh and build great things. Perhaps the best proof of this point is in that Jewish nation which received the Torah in Midbar. For all the benefits of Midbar, their national slate was actually no cleaner than ours; they had a great and complex history behind them. They had been patriarchs and matriarchs, and wars and treaties both without and within. They had been slaves, and had seen their captors punished. They had heroically persevered, and had been rescued as damsels in distress. They had been idolaters, and they had stood at Sinai witnessing Divine revelation. This was not a child-nation, emerging blinking into the sunlight for the first time – but it was capable of nonetheless viewing its future as a blank slate, and creating a brilliant and enduring legacy for its descendants.

On the first morning of Shavuot, we precede the Torah reading with the public recitation of *Akdamut*, an Aramaic poem describing Divine might and introducing the Torah reading itself. Toward the beginning of the poem, we describe G-d creating the universe with the letter ך, which is just a breath, the simplest exhalation, demonstrating that for G-d, creation is simple and the possibilities are infinite. For us as human beings, creation is anything but simple and easy – but when we, like the Jews in Midbar, look at the world as a blank slate and an opportunity for accomplishment, then for us, too, there will be few limits.

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OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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BEIT MIDRASH**

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HaMoadim BaHalachah
Rabbi Yosef Shalom Zevin
Avraham Tzioni Pub, Tel Aviv 1963
Kol Hamevaser Pub, Jerusalem 2010
The Festivals in Halacha (English),
Artscroll 1982

The Name of the Book

In the introduction to this book, Rabbi Zevin explains that he deliberately titled the book *HaMoadim BaHalachah* and not *Hilchot Moadim*. The latter name would imply an attempt to offer practical rulings and guidelines for the reader, which is not the author's objective. The former name implies an attempt to discuss issues related to each holiday, as they appear in *halachic* literature. Rabbi Zevin's stated goal for the book is "to organize the *halachic* foundations of each holiday in the form of a speech; the nature, roots and sources of the essential laws and customs for each holiday."

About the Book

The book begins with a chapter on the general issues related to the biblical holidays. It addresses the permissibility of cooking on the festival, the obligation to rejoice on the festival and what happens when the festival immediately precedes or follows Shabbat. The subsequent chapters describe the laws

unique to each holiday. Beginning with *Tishrei*, the book discusses subjects relating to each holiday in the order in which they appear in the Jewish calendar. In addition to chapters on the five biblical and two rabbinic holidays celebrated during the year, the book also includes chapters on *Tu biShevat*, *Sefirat haOmer*, *Lag ba'Omer* and the fast days.

Issues that are only relevant when the *Beit haMikdash* stands are also mentioned in the book. For example, the Pesach chapter has a lengthy presentation on the Pesach offering, and the Shavuot chapter includes material on the various aspects of the wheat offering.

Even for Shavuot, which doesn't have any special contemporary commandments relating to the holiday, Rabbi Zevin is able to find numerous topics which connect to the holiday. He offers brief summaries for all of the Ten Commandments, and then talks about the laws relating to reading the Ten Commandments in shul. He also uses the book of Ruth as a springboard to discuss matters of conversion, marrying Moabites and transactions via *chalipin*.

Who Should Read this Book?

This book is recommended for students with a basic understanding of the festivals and their laws. The average student will benefit from the clear and concise presentation of the major *halachic* issues corresponding to each holiday. Even the experienced student will benefit from Rabbi Zevin's ability to collect sources from the Torah, Talmud, commentaries and responsa literature to offer a complete picture of the topic at hand.

Other Books from this Author

Rabbi Zevin's greatest undertaking was his work as the founding editor of the Talmudic Encyclopedia. It was a project that started in 1946 and continues until this day. He also authored several other books, two of which have been reviewed in this column. *Le'or HaHalacha* (reviewed in Toronto Torah 6:13) is a collection of articles relating to various matters of Jewish Law. There, too, the purpose is to present and summarize the different topics without offering any practical rulings. *Ishim veShitot* (reviewed in Toronto Torah 6:2) is a book of intellectual biographies of many great rabbis from the 19th and 20th centuries.

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613 Mitzvot: #437: Do not damage the Beit haMikdash and do not erase G-d's Name

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

After the Torah describes what Jews should do to idols in their possession (see Toronto Torah 6:32), it then states, "You shall not do this to Hashem, your G-d. (Devarim 12:4)" Based on this, the Talmud (Makkot 22a) declares a prohibition against erasing the Name of G-d or damaging the Beit haMikdash.

As *Sefer haChinuch* (Mitzvah 437) explains, this mitzvah adds to our reverence for G-d. This is consistent with the message of other mitzvot involving the Name of G-d, such as the prohibitions against swearing with G-d's Name in vain (Mitzvah 30) and invoking G-d's Name in a curse. (Mitzvah 231)

The Talmud (Shevuot 35a) defines seven Names of G-d:

- The four-letter Name which is termed the *Shem haMeforash*
- The Name that titles G-d "Master", pronounced *Ado-nai*;
- The Name *E-l*, when it refers to G-d and not to any powerful entity;
- The Names *Elo-ah* and *Elo-heinu*;
- The Name *Sha-ddai*;
- The name *Tzeva-ot*, when it refers to G-d as Master of Multitudes, but not when it refers to armies or multitudes themselves.

All other terms which are used to praise G-d, such as *rachum* and *chanun*, may be erased for any purpose. There are those

who are careful regarding the word *Shalom* when it is written in the context of a greeting, because the meaning in that setting is to invoke G-d's Name when greeting someone. (Pitchei Teshuvah Yoreh Deah 276:28)

Technically, there is no prohibition against writing any of these Names, so long as one will not erase them. However, the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 276:13) mentions a practice of avoiding writing G-d's Name in anything other than a book, out of concern lest the text be treated with disrespect.

Words which refer to G-d in other languages should be treated with respect and not used lightly. (Rabbi Akiva Eiger, Yoreh Deah 276:9; and see Aruch haShulchan Choshen Mishpat 27:3)

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Biography
Ramban
Russell Levy

Born in 1194 in Gerona, Spain, Rabbi Nachman ben Moshe (Nachmanides) attained recognition as a Torah scholar in his teens. While still of the young age of 16, he authored his first work, *Milchamot Hashem*, defending the halachic compendium of Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi (Rif) from the criticism of Rabbi Zerachiah haLevi (Baal haMaor), who had also authored this book of criticism while in his teens.

Although Ramban was an ardent opponent of the views of Rambam (Maimonides), he held him in the highest regard; in both his correspondence regarding the Rambam with the Jewish community of Provence, as well as in his other extant published writings, his respect for the Rambam is striking.

After being promoted from serving as rabbi of his home town of Gerona to serve as the Chief Rabbi of Catalonia, he became the representative of the Jewish community in the disputation against Pablo Christiani, a Jewish apostate, in 1263. Though his victory in this disputation was acknowledged by King James of Aragon, he was nevertheless banished from his home country for two years due to pressure from the Dominican order. This exile, upon further pressure on the Pope, was turned into a perpetual banishment.

After three years of wandering, Ramban made aliyah, and re-established the Jewish community in Jerusalem following the Crusades. As well, he set up a synagogue, the Ramban Synagogue, that still stands today.

In addition to Chief Rabbi, Ramban was also a practicing doctor and philosopher. Ramban was a great kabbalist. He also wrote extensively; his works include: commentaries on the Torah and the Talmud; a commentary on Rambam's *Sefer haMitzvot*; various halachic works; a summary of his disputation; *Iggeret haMussar*; and *Derashot haRamban*.

Ramban passed away in Israel in 1270. His primary students were Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba) and Rabbi Aharon haLevi (Ra"ah).

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Torah and Translation
The Mitzvah of Remembering Sinai
Ramban

Hasagot I'Sefer haMitzvot, Shichichat haLavin #2
Translated by Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

המצוה השני' שנמנענו שלא נשכח מעמד הר סיני ולא נסיר אותו מדעתנו אבל היו עינינו ולבנו שם כל הימים והוא אמרו יתעלה (ואתחנן ד ט - י) השמר לך ושמור נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חיך והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך יום אשר עמדת לפני ד' אלקיך בחורב וגו'.

והכונה בזה גדולה מאד. שאם היו דברי תורה באים אצלנו מפי הנביא עליו השלום בלבד אע"פ שנתאמת אצלנו ענין נבואתו באותות ומופתים אם יקום בקרבנו נביא או חולם חלום בזמן מן הזמנים ויצונו בשום הפך מן התורה ונתן אלינו אות או מופת תהיה התורה נסוחה על יד השני או יכנס בלבנו ספק על זה.

אבל כשהגיענו ביאור התורה מפי הגבורה לאזנינו ועינינו רואות אין שם אמצעי נכחי כל חולק וכל מספק ונשקר אותו ולא יועילה אות ולא יצילהו מידינו מופת. שאנחנו היודעים ועדים בשקרותו ובפחזותו. זה הוא שנאמר במעמד ההוא (יתרו יט) וגם בך יאמינו לעולם. והוא הענין הבא בפרשת כי יקום בקרבך נביא או חולם חלום וגו' (ראה יג). וכבר באר הרב זה בספר המדע (יסוה"ת פ"ח). והוא יסוד גדול בתורה והיא המניעה הבאה לנו בפסוק פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך. והזהיר פן יסורו מן הלב מהודיעם לבנים ולבני בנים לדורות עולם.

The second mitzvah [that the Rambam "forgot" to include in his Book of Mitzvot] is that we have been warned to never forget standing at Har Sinai, and to never remove this event from our consciousness. Rather, our eyes and our hearts should be directed there all of the days. It is as the Exalted One said, "Be careful, and guard your soul greatly, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw and lest they leave your heart all the days of your life. And you shall make them known to your children and their children - the day that you stood before Hashem your G-d at Chorev, etc." (Devarim 4:9-10)

The intent in this [commandment] is of tremendous importance. For if the words of Torah were to come upon us only from the mouth of the prophet, peace be upon him, then even if his prophecy was demonstrated to us to be truthful with signs and with wonders, if at some later point in time a prophet or dreamer would arise and command us to do something which was against the Torah, providing signs and wonders [to support his words], the Torah would be removed by the second [prophet], or [at the very least] an uncertainty could enter our hearts over this issue.

However, once the explanation of the Torah arrived to our ears from the Mouth of G-d and our eyes saw that there was no intermediary, we will refute any who argue or present doubt and we will demonstrate his falseness. Signs won't benefit him, nor will any wonder save him from our hands. For we will recognize and testify to his falsehoods and recklessness. This is the meaning of the statement regarding the gathering at Sinai, "And in you [Moshe] they shall always believe." (Shemot 19:9). This is [also] the meaning of the passage, "If a prophet or dreamer shall rise up amongst you etc." (Devarim 13:2). The master [Rambam] has already explained this in the Book of Knowledge (The Foundations of the Torah, Chapter 8). And this is a critical foundation of the Torah and is the prohibition that comes to us from the verse, "lest you forget the things that your eyes saw." It is a warning lest they leave your heart, such that you will not don't convey them to your children and their children through all of the generations.

Operation Opera

5 Sivan is Shabbat

Operation Opera was a successful, yet controversial, attack by Israel against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The operation, under the guidance of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, destroyed the *Osirak* nuclear reactor, which Israel maintained would be used for the production of nuclear weapons.

The reactor was an *Osiris* class reactor, and was purchased in 1976 by Iraq from France. *Osirak* is an amalgamation of "Osiris" and "Iraq". While, at the time, both France and Iraq claimed that the reactor was intended for peaceful scientific purposes, there was substantial evidence toward Israel's suspicions to the contrary.

The destruction of *Osirak* was carried out by a number of Israeli-flown F-16 fighter jets on 5 Sivan (June 7), 1981. However, the Israeli opposition to Iraq's acquisition was not unknown beforehand. As early as 1974, Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin was already deliberating strategy for dealing

with Iraq nuclear ambitions. In 1977, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan negotiated with France, Italy and the United States to halt the program, but received no assurances.

On April 6, 1979, the *Osirak* reactor was sabotaged prior to shipment from France, allegedly by Israeli operatives; three reactor cores, ready for shipment to Iraq, were blown up. Then, on June 14, 1980, the Egyptian scientist who headed the Iraqi nuclear program, Yahya Meshad, was killed in a French hotel room. He was in France checking on highly enriched uranium to be shipped for use in the *Osirak* reactor.

The attack was harshly condemned by all members of the United Nations Security Council, but no sanctions were placed on Israel, seemingly due to American support. Enemies of Israel continue to use the *Osirak* attack as a sign of Israel's "aggression". However, contemporary scholarship on international law looks to Israel's actions then as a textbook example of a preventive strike.

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Weekly Highlights: May 23 – May 29 / 5 Sivan – 11 Sivan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת May 22-23				
Fri. 6:40 PM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Parshah and Kugel	BAYT	
5:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
Before Pirkei Avot	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Daf Yomi	BAYT	<i>Rabbi's Classroom</i>
After minchah	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	The Experience of Sinai	Yeshivat Or Chaim	
After minchah	R' Josh Gutenberg	The Shavuot Get	BAYT	
<i>For Shavuot Night Shiurim, See Flyer Insert</i>				
Sun. May 24	Shavuot Day 1			
After minchah	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Ruth and Rembrandt	Mizrachi Bayit	
Mon. May 25	Shavuot Day 2			
6:00 PM	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Ruth and Rembrandt	Clanton Park	<i>For women only</i>
7:45 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Rav Aharon Lichtenstein on The Case of Brother Daniel	Bnai Torah	
Before minchah	R' Josh Gutenberg	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
Tues. May 26				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Job	Shaarei Shomayim	<i>Not this week</i>
Wed. May 27				
8:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Legal Ethics The Dishonest Client with CLE credit	Goodmans LLP 333 Bay St.	Breakfast served RSVP required cle@goodmans.ca
12:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Lunch and Learn: Police Brutality	SLF 2300 Yonge St.	Lunch served; RSVP jonathan.hames@slf.ca
Thu. May 28				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Yehoshua: Yehudah's Land	49 Michael Ct. Thornhill	<i>For women only</i>
Fri. May 29				
10:30 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Advanced Shemitah	Yeshivat Or Chaim	