

Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Toldot

3 Kislev, 5777/December 3, 2016

Vol. 8 Num. 13

This issue of Toronto Torah is sponsored by Miriam Frankel and her children, Mark and Judy and family, Ralph and Gitty and family, and Esty and family, L'Zecher Nishmat Aron Frankel, Aron Mechel ben Chaim Meir A"H

Names and Destiny

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

“The first one emerged red (*admoni*), like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esav...” (Bereishit 25:25)

“Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open, famished. And Esav said to Yaakov, ‘Give me some of that red stuff (*ha-adom ha-adom*) to gulp down, for I am famished’—which is why he was named Edom.” (Ibid., 25:29-30)

Readers of Tanach know that the nations that descended from Esav are referred to as Edom. Thus, when they read the Torah’s description of Esav’s red complexion, they assume that the name Edom stemmed from there. However, the Torah provides a striking literary irony – in fact, that name was derived from his gluttonous consumption of reddish lentils. What is the message of this irony?

The Talmud (Berachot 7b) claims that *sh’ma garim*: a name can foretell a person’s destiny. Elsewhere (Sotah 34b), the Talmud explains how the names of each of the biblical spies hinted at each one’s ignominious crime. However, a straightforward understanding of this concept would severely curtail the belief in free will – that it is the decisions people make that determine who they become.

The Torah here seems to offer an alternative to this determinist theory. Each person has qualities, capabilities, and character traits that will inevitably define him or her. However, a person can choose which path to take with those abilities. The Talmud notes this

in a passage that seems to be playing with the above verses. “One who is born during the hour of Mars (*ma’adim* - red) will be a man who spills blood: a bloodletter, a *shochet*, a *mohel*, or a [murderous] thief.” (Shabbat 156a). The talmudic reference to people with “red quality” seems to purposely allude to the choice Esav could have made. He could have chosen to be known as Edom for no reason other than that he had a ruddy complexion. Alternatively, he could have channeled his “redness” into productive pursuits. Instead, he chose to be known for his gluttony, and, per the midrashic depictions of him, for his violence, idolatry, and promiscuity as well.

In a further ironic twist, the same sort of choice awaits Yaakov. As our parshah opens, the Torah indicates that he was named Yaakov because he was born clinging to his elder brother’s heel, *akev Esav*. Yet, after persuading Esav to sell his birthright, and subsequently deceptively stealing the blessings that Yitzchak reserved for Esav, Esav cries: “Was he named Yaakov that he might trick me (*va-ya-kveini*) these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!” (Ibid., 27:35)

Esav claims that Yaakov too has made a choice. Will he be known for his innocuous grasping of Esav’s foot, or for his life of deception? Esav claims that Yaakov has chosen the latter. And there are indications that Esav was correct. Many midrashim and commentaries, though far from all, see Lavan’s multiple deceptive crimes against Yaakov, as well

as the lies Yaakov’s sons told him to hide their kidnapping and selling of Yosef, as punishments for Yaakov’s deception against Esav. Other midrashim (Bereishit Rabbah 67) even claim that Haman’s near successful genocide of the Jewish people was punishment for the pain Yaakov had caused Esav!

Yet, Yaakov emerges morally victorious. Even if he was not guilt-free in his handling of the stealing of the blessings, he will be renamed. The negative connotations of *Yaakov* will fall away when Yaakov’s nameless combatant tells him, “Your name shall no longer be Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed.” (Ibid., 32:29) Yaakov is given the opportunity to shed one identity and adopt another.

Together, a compelling message emerges. At some level, all people have predilections that could be good, or bad. However, as Albus Dumbledore told Harry Potter, “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” And even when we have made the wrong choices in life, we are often granted opportunities to chart new courses. It is our responsibility to take them.

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Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik
Ed. David Shatz, Joel Wolowelsky
MeOtzar HoRav 2000

The author and his book

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903-1993) needs no introduction for the readers of *Toronto Torah*. His Torah teachings and practical guidance serve as the basis of many of our communities, and his long-lasting impact on North American rabbis, many of them his direct or indirect students, cannot be overemphasized.

However, as the book reviewed here contains a collection of articles dealing with one of the most fundamental realities of life – namely, family life – pointing out some connections between the life of ‘The Rav’ and the book’s messages may cast new light on this unique work.

The author and his parents

Rabbi Soloveitchik grew up in one of the most prominent families of the Lithuanian Torah world. An heir to a long chain of outstanding rabbis, he was well-suited to understand the role of Torah in the parent-child relationship. His feelings towards his parents, it seems, were completely

intertwined with his relationship with the Jewish tradition; only through the parents, he tells us, can one join the brotherhood of covenant. And so, Rabbi Soloveitchik concludes, “in loving father and mother a person is really in love with G-d.” (pg. 168)

Learning and loneliness

After achieving great mastery in Torah, Rabbi Soloveitchik pursued academic studies, first in Warsaw (1924) and later in Berlin (1926). There he became well acquainted with modern philosophy. This familiarity with western thought shows itself forcefully in our book, as Rabbi Soloveitchik derives nuanced philosophical concepts from the Torah’s story of creation. According to his explanation, the first chapter of Genesis displays man as *man-natura*, and the second chapter presents him as *man-persona*. These two men, Rabbi Soloveitchik stresses, see their singleness in different ways – the natural-man is alone; but the person-man is lonely (pg. 6-11). Again, Rabbi Soloveitchik seems to be speaking from personal experience, maybe from those years in a non-Jewish environment before his marriage; Rabbi Soloveitchik refers to the same loneliness in the first pages of his *Lonely Man of Faith* where he writes “whatever I am going to say here

has been derived not from philosophical dialectics, abstract speculation, or detached impersonal reflections, but from actual situations and experiences with which I have been confronted.”

Marriage and distinction between genders

The above-mentioned essay, *Lonely Man of Faith* was dedicated by Rabbi Soloveitchik to his wife, Tanya, about whom he wrote, “A woman of great courage, sublime dignity, total commitment, and uncompromising truthfulness.” Clearly, his definition of an ideal woman as “modest, humble, self-effacing... acts her part with love and devotion in a dim corner of the stage” (pg. 119) reflects a realized ideal he saw in front of his own eyes.

To summarize, *Family Redeemed* is not only a theoretical book about a social structure that should be; rather it is a descriptive book of a very concrete reality, which is offered for us to embrace.

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Israel’s Chief Rabbis: Rabbi Elimelech Bar Shaul

Yaron Perez

Rabbi (Aharon) Elimelech Bar Shaul
29 Sivan 5673 (1913) – 10 Cheshvan 5725 (1964)
Chief Rabbi of Rechovot, 1952-1957

Rabbi Elimelech Bar Shaul was born in Jerusalem, and he studied in Yeshivat Eitz Chaim and Yeshivat Chevron-Slobodka. At the same time, he was a regular participant in the Shabbat lectures of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook at Yeshivat Mercaz haRav.

In 1943, he moved to Rechovot at the invitation of Rabbi Isser Zalman Melzer, Rosh Yeshiva of Kletzk, to teach in his yeshiva. The staff included Rabbi Menachem Man Shach, who would become the leader of the Lithuanian Chareidi community, and Rabbi Yitzchak Kolitz, who would become Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. In 1952, Rabbi Bar Shaul replaced Rabbi Meltzer as Chief Rabbi of Rechovot, with unusually diverse support from most of the city’s factions.

Personally, Rabbi Bar Shaul sought to avoid identification with a particular faction or stream, and he was accepted as a halachic authority for the Kibbutz haDati while serving as an influential member of Agudat Yisrael. Rabbi Bar Shaul was known for modesty, hospitality, and a friendly approach to all people. At the same time, he did not hesitate to express his views on halachah or education; even when his views were criticized, he would not abandon his pursuit of truth.

Rabbi Bar Shaul took a very broad view of the role of Chief Rabbi. He arranged for young observant couples to move to Rechovot and strengthen that aspect of the city, while also involving himself with the city’s infrastructure needs, as well as its educational system. His ambition was to turn the institution of the Rabbinate into a Torah centre for the benefit of the area’s residents. As part of his activities, Rabbi Bar Shaul did much to increase public Shabbat observance; the subject is still controversial in Rechovot.

Education was a major arena for Rabbi Bar Shaul. Primarily, he taught in Yeshivat Kletzk and Yeshivat Kerem b’Yavneh, but he was also involved administratively on Boards of Education of the Chief Rabbinate, Agudat Yisrael and HaPoel HaMizrachi. Rabbi Bar Shaul authored several books, mostly in the realm of Jewish thought and mussar. In his writing one can see an uncommon synthesis of Chassidic simple faith and supernal joy, and Lithuanian introspection and self-development.

Rabbi Bar Shaul was among the halachic authorities who sought to establish a public Torah reading for the evening of Yom ha’Atzmaut, complete with the standard blessings; he equated this with the custom of reading from the Torah on the night of Simchat Torah. At the same time, he rejected the institution of a Haftorah for the day of Yom ha’Atzmaut, lest people confuse it with Yom Tov.

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Biography

Rabbi Reuven Margolies

Adam Friedmann

Rabbi Reuven Margolies was born in Lemberg, of current day Ukraine, in 1889. Possessing a photographic memory, he received some instruction in learning from his father, but he was largely an autodidact. He received rabbinic ordination at a young age, but would never hold a rabbinic position. In Lemberg, Rabbi Margolies opened a book shop which became a popular meeting spot for local Torah scholars. During this period, Rabbi Margolies began to publish his own works. Some of the earliest included a biographical work about Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (the *Maharsha*), and, interestingly, a *derashah* on the occasion of the ascension of Charles I, Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In 1934, Rabbi Margolies moved to Israel. During his time in Europe he had been involved with the Mizrahi movement in a variety of capacities, and his identification as a religious Zionist did not end after aliyah. In 1965 Rabbi Margolies was included on the party list of the Mafdal, the religious Zionist political party in Israel, for a potential seat in the sixth Knesset. Upon settling in Tel Aviv, Rabbi Margolies became the director of the Rambam Library there.

Rabbi Margolies was a prolific writer whose erudition was astounding. He wrote close to fifty books, which range very widely in their scope. One the one hand he mastered both Talmud and Halachah. His work on Masechet Sanhedrin, titled *Margoliot HaYam*, is an essential work which is studied at yeshivot of all stripes today. On the other hand, Rabbi Margolies's knowledge of Kabbalah is demonstrated by his several volumes on the Zohar. Most impressive of all, perhaps, are his analyses of themes and patterns throughout the Talmud and other texts. He wrote short volumes analyzing the use of nicknames in the Talmud, describing the various names of angels, and presenting a systematic identification of the authors of anonymous statements in the Talmud, among other topics. In addition, he wrote many biographical works. It has been suggested that the powerful introduction to his *Margoliot HaYam* - partially translated in the accompanying column - is an autobiographical sketch explaining his life choices.

Rabbi Margolies passed away in 1971.

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Torah and Translation

Ilfa's Choice

Rabbi Reuven Margolies, Margoliot HaYam, Introduction

Translated by Adam Friedmann

אילפא, כנראה לא היה לו מה למכור, לא ירש נחלת שדה וכרם, ומבלי אמצעים שיאפשרו לו ולביתו לחיות עד הימים שבהם יהיה ראוי להוראה הוכרח לפנות גם לעסקים ולומר טוב תורה עם דרך ארץ...

ר' יוחנן הדר, אבל אילפא הוכרח לעשות עיסקה והיה לסמל של "תלמיד חכם-סוחר". ידע אילפא כי אמנם לא תמצא הלכה פסוקה הוראה למעשה בסחרנים ותגרנים. אדם פרטי שאינו בעל משרה ולא יגיס לבו בהוראה לא ימצא צורך לשנן הכרעות אחרוני האחרונים, אינו עוסק בספרי קצורי-הלכות, אך קובע הוא עתוהו הפנויות לחקר גופי תורה שרשי ההלכות...

ואם לא הרשתו עתו לאילפא להרבץ תורה בקביעות עם חברים מקשיבים ותלמידים גוונים, הנה בחר באמצעי אחר שתהיה תורתו חיי עולם, בכתבו עלי ספר דברי תורתו שהעלה בעתותיו שקבע לתורה. אם היום היה למלאכה במסחר או במשרד הנה לילותיו הקדיש למשמר והקנה לו לחבר לרשום בפנקסיו מאשר העלה בלמודיו. ועלתה לו לאילפא שהגו חכמי ישראל 'בספריו, ראה מנחות ע. ... וחבירו הגדול ר' יוחנן למד מדבריו ואמר שמועות משמו...

אמנם לא מלך, אבל אילפא אינו חפץ כלל למלוך. גענועי אילפא הן ללמוד וללמד, לעשות אזנים לתורה לשאוב ממקורות ראשונים ולהשקות צמאים לדבר ד' בשיחות חברים ובפרסום דברי תורה שכתב בפנקסיה.

[The introduction is a commentary on an aggadic talmudic passage (Taanit 21a) in which two yeshiva friends, Ilfa and Yochanan, part ways. Yochanan stays on in yeshiva and becomes its leading light, the famous Rabbi Yochanan. Ilfa goes off into the business world.]

Ilfa, it appears, did not have anything to sell. He did not inherit a field or a vineyard, and without the means to sustain himself and his family until he would be fitting to rule [and be sustained in the position of Rosh Yeshiva], he was forced to involve himself in business as well and say, 'It is good to have Torah and business practice together.'...

Rabbi Yochanan returned (to study in the yeshiva), but Ilfa was forced to do business and became the symbol of the "talmid chacham-merchant". Ilfa knew that [ruling in] bottom-line practical halachah was not to be found amongst the salesmen and merchants. A private individual without a public position who does not raise his heart to rule [in matters of halachah] does not feel compelled to be versed in the conclusions of the latest decisors, he does not deal with summaries of halachah. But he sets aside his free time to analyze the essence of the Torah and roots of the laws.

And if his time constraints did not allow Ilfa to spread Torah amongst attentive friends and proper students, he chose a different means by which to give his Torah eternal life. He put in writing the Torah thoughts which came to him in the time he set aside to learn. If his days were for working in business or in the office, his nights were sanctified for the guard [of Torah], and the reed [quill] was his fellow [alternatively: he acquired the night as his fellow], to write in his notebooks whatever came to him in his learning. Ilfa succeeded, and the wise men of Israel commented on his notebooks. See Menachot 70a... His great friend Rabbi Yochanan learned from his words and repeated teachings in his name.

He never reigned [as head of the Yeshiva], but Ilfa never desired to rule at all. Ilfa longed to learn and teach, to "make handles" for the Torah, to draw from primary sources and to give drink to those thirsty for the word of G-d through friendly discussion and the proliferation of the words of Torah which he wrote in his notebooks.

The Torah presents a divorce option for couples who no longer wish to remain married. This process includes a duty for the husband to pay his wife a significant sum of money.

The Torah (Devarim 22:13-19) describes a case in which a newlywed husband wishes to divorce his wife, but seeks to avoid the payment by falsely accusing her of committing infidelity after their betrothal and before their marriage. The accuser is punished with lashes, and he is fined. In addition, if his wife wishes to remain married to him then he is prohibited from divorcing her. (Ketuvot 40a) As Rambam writes, this is a penalty for “choosing lust and seeking only

pleasure” at the expense of his wife. (Moreh Nevuchim 3:49) Sefer haChinuch counts these laws as Mitzvah #553 and #554.

This law is specifically regarding a bride who is a *na'arah*: she is physically mature, but still supported by her father. Therefore, the Torah gives the fine to her father.

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Weekly Highlights: Dec 3 – Dec 9 / 3 Kislev – 9 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבתה Dec. 3 Shabbaton at Shaarei Shomayim: The Legacy of S. Y. Agnon!				
After hashkama	Adam Friedmann	The Book that was Lost	Shaarei Shomayim	
Derashah	R' Jonathan Ziring	When the Torah Received the Nobel	Shaarei Shomayim	Downstairs Minyan
Derashah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	A Levi for our Times	Shaarei Shomayim	Main Shul
Seudah Shlishit	Yaron Perez	From Agnon's Diary	Shaarei Shomayim	
After minchah	R' Aaron Greenberg	Lying	BAYT	Simcha Suite
6:00 PM	Yaron Perez	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
Sun. Dec. 4				
8:45 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Hebrew
8:45 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Legal Ethics: Shabbat & the Jewish Lawyer	BAYT	CPD-Approved Laypeople Welcome
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Book of Shemuel	Associated North	Hebrew
Mon. Dec. 5				
7:30 PM	Adam Friedmann	Arvei Pesachim in Depth	Clanton Park	Men
8:30 PM	Adam Friedmann	Gemara Arvei Pesachim	Clanton Park	Men
8:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Avodah Zarah 5 of 6: Tattoos	Shomrai Shabbos	Third floor, Men
Tue. Dec. 6				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Ezra: The Decree of Cyrus	Shaarei Shomayim	
Wed. Dec. 7				
10:00 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Arguing with G-d 5 of 6: Hannah: Twisting G-d's Arm	Beth Emeth	There is a fee; see torontotorah.com/arguing
2:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Narratives of Vayikra	carolleser@rogers.com	Women
8:00 PM	Adam Friedmann	Why do we do...?	Shaarei Tefillah	
Thu. Dec. 8				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: The Drinking Test	49 Michael Ct.	Women
Fri. Dec. 9				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Laws of Onaah	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

Our Women's Beit Midrash for University Students at Ulpanat Orot offers:
 Monday 9:30 AM to Noon, Tefillah: Connecting to G-d, Mrs. Ellieza Perez
 Tuesday 9:30 AM to Noon, Gemara Chullin / Hilchot Kashrut, Mrs. Ora Ziring
 Wednesday 9:30 AM to Noon, Tanach, Mrs. Ora Ziring
 Thursday 9:30 AM to Noon, Netivot Shalom on the Parshah, Mrs. Ellieza Perez