

Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bereishit

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in memory of Joyce's father, מתתיהו בן אברהם הכהן ז"ל

Is the Torah About G-d or Man?

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

The Talmud (Megillah 9a) tells us an interesting story about the events surrounding the Torah's translation into Greek: "King Ptolemy assembled seventy-two elders and put them into seventy-two houses without telling them his purpose. He approached each one and said to him: Write for me the Torah of Moshe your master [in Greek]. G-d counseled each of them, and they all agreed to one common understanding. And they wrote for him: G-d created in the beginning."

The sages decided to reverse the order of these words as they appear in the Torah – "In the beginning, G-d created," and to write instead, "G-d created in the beginning." What were they trying to gain by this change?

Rashi explains that the sages were concerned lest Ptolemy think that "Bereishit [In the beginning]" is the name of a deity, and thus conclude that "Bereishit" created G-d. The authors of the Tosafot further explain that King Ptolemy assumed that the first word in the Torah must be G-d's Name, and the sages changed the order of the words accordingly.

The importance the sages attributed to Ptolemy's notion suggests that a major question was at stake, one relating to the very core of the Torah's nature. Maybe the Hellenist Ptolemy expected the Torah to be a treatise of theology – philosophizing about G-d. Greek philosophy, developed on and against the background of Greek mythology, retained one of its deepest qualities: it

was Man's discourse on metaphysics. In mythology, Man told stories about gods, and in philosophy, he contemplated and speculated about 'The G-d'; however, in both the focus was on the divine.

The Torah, on the other hand, presents us with an entirely different angle; it opens with the 'beginning' – but not the beginning of G-d, as Ptolemy would have wanted, but the beginning of the human world. This unbridgeable gap required the sages to alter the Torah's original order.

Our holy book, then, is not a book written by man about G-d; it is, rather, a book by G-d, addressed to man. This is the opening – and the rest, as they say, is history.

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Law of the Land: Otzar Beit Din

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

While the Torah prohibits working a field to cultivate produce during shemita, the prohibition against harvesting crops is limited to doing so en masse. Picking small amounts of produce for personal use is permitted. In the modern Israeli food market this arrangement is highly impractical for several reasons. Chief among these is that most people don't live near farms, and different types of food are grown in different parts of the country, making it implausible to collect fruit for personal use directly. This is not to mention the economic impossibility of a farmer treating all of his produce as ownerless.

A potential resolution to these issues emerges from the Tosefta (Shevi'it 9:1), which describes how at some point in history, city courts would oversee the production of fruit in nearby fields. They would hire workers to harvest and process the crops, store them under auspices of the court, and then distribute the fruits to the public (ostensibly without charge) as need arose. Evidently, the fact that the courts organized this process in the interest of the public evaded the

prohibition against mass harvesting. [See Chazon Ish, Shevi'it 12:6.]

The modern application of this concept is to pass the costs for processing and storage to consumers. A farmer places his field and its ownerless produce under the authority of the court. The court then hires the field owner to harvest the crops. The crops are made available in stores, where consumers pay only the costs for working the field, not for the produce itself. This solution for contemporary shemita has come to be called "Otzar Beit Din" (the storehouse of the courts). Because this solution does not rely on selling the field to non-Jews, the produce retains full *kedushat shevi'it* (the sanctity of seventh year produce). However, this approach has several shortcomings: First, once consumers are buying produce in the store at normal prices it is clear that this is a legal fiction at best. Second, this approach does not help with the production of vegetables, which will not grow unless they are actually planted.

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The Torah (Shemot 13) instructs us to bring our first-born sheep, oxen and goats to a kohen; Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah's 18th mitzvah. When we have a Beit haMikdash, the kohen brings part of the animal as a korban, and eats the rest; the animal may not be redeemed, as per Bamidbar 18:17. Sefer haChinuch counts the prohibition against redeeming an unblemished first-born animal as the Torah's 393rd mitzvah.

By performing this mitzvah, in which we take the first fruit of our efforts and dedicate it to Hashem, we demonstrate that we recognize that everything we possess ultimately comes from Hashem. Further, we commemorate Hashem's destruction of the Egyptian first-born and redemption of the Jews from Egypt.

This mitzvah applies even when there is no Beit haMikdash, biblically within Israel and rabbinically outside of Israel. Jewish ranchers tend to form partnerships with non-Jews as joint owners of their animals; a first-born animal owned in partnership with a non-Jew is not subject to the laws of

the first-born animal.

The Torah also mandates that the owner of a donkey redeem its first-born progeny by dedicating a lamb in its place, or by donating the lamb's monetary equivalent. Failure to do so means that the donkey's owner must instead end his donkey's life. Our sages wrote that the penalty of losing one's donkey is meant to encourage owners to fulfill the mitzvah of redeeming their donkeys. Sefer haChinuch counts the redemption and loss as the Torah's 22nd and 23rd mitzvot.

The Torah explains that this mitzvah, like the mitzvah of giving first-born sheep, oxen and goats to the kohen, is meant to remind us of our own redemption from Egypt. Rambam (Moreh haNevuchim) suggested that the Torah singled out donkeys because they are common beasts, and because their ability to carry burdens makes them indispensable.

To be continued...

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Weekly Highlights: October 6—12 / 27 Tishrei — 3 Cheshvan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Oct. 6				
10:30 AM	R' Alex Hecht	Post-Hashkamah Parshah	Clanton Park	
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Mon. Oct. 8				
9:15 AM Breakfast 9:30 AM Learning 10:30 AM Shiur	R' Elihu Abbe	Thanksgiving Yarchei Kallah: Conversion for Marriage?	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Please RSVP at www.torontotorah.com/yk or info@torontotorah.com
8:00 PM	R' Elihu Abbe	When to compliment... and when not to	Bnei Akiva at Bnai Torah	Monday Night Learning
Tue. Oct. 9				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Noach and the Lion: A Painful Lesson in Justice	Adath Israel	Women; there is a fee info@adathisrael.com
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah, Week 1: Reckoning is Coming	Shaarei Shomayim	First week!
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Book of Yehoshua	129 Theodore Pl.	For men
Thu. Oct. 11				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel: Chanah's Song	49 Michael Ct.	For women
8:30 PM	R' Elihu Abbe	Gemara Beitzah	eabbe@torontotorah.com	For men
Fri. Oct. 12				
10:30 AM	R' Elihu Abbe	Kiddushin	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim
10:00 AM Sunday, Gemara—Not this week

11:00 AM Sunday, Contemporary Halachah—Not this week
8:30 AM Monday, R' Elihu Abbe, Midrash on the Parshah—Not this week
8:30 AM Friday, R' Mordechai Torczyner, The Book of Yeshayah

For University Women and Adult Women, at Ulpanat Orot
9:30 AM Tuesday, Mrs. Eliana Abbe, Succot is Over; Now What?
9:30 AM Thursday, Mrs. Eliana Abbe, Parshah

Seder Boker for Adult Men with Rabbi Moshe Yeres!
10:00 AM to Noon, Mondays/Wednesdays - Masechet Megilah and Eim haBanim Semeichah—Just Wed this week
10:00 AM to Noon, Tuesdays/Thursdays - Parshah and Pninei Halachah