

Toronto Torah

YU Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bechukotai (*Diaspora*)

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Our Evening of Tribute is Tuesday evening June 25, celebrating Ten Years of our Beit Midrash!

For more information and to make a contribution, please go to www.torontotorah.com/dinner19

Israel: Motherland and Mother

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Focus of the biblical universe, cradle of our nation, throne of King David's theocentric empire, haven from our foes, coordinate at which our mitzvot are most practical and practicable, host of our most palpable connection to the world of the spirit, terraced hills across which the plangent Divine declaration, "Here I will dwell, for I have desired her (Tehillim 132:14)" still echoes – Israel has been all of these for the genetic and spiritual heirs of Avraham and Sarah.

In the vision of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook and Rabbi Yissachar Teichtel, though, Israel plays a more active role. Earth, stone, river and sea are anthropomorphized as limbs controlled by a humanesque consciousness, and the space formerly known as Canaan is identified as a living being, an independent spiritual entity to whom we are bonded.

Rabbi Kook stated this explicitly, writing, "The Land of Israel is not an external thing, an external prize acquired by the nation, a means toward the end of national unification and reinforcement of the nation's physical or even spiritual survival. The Land of Israel is an independent entity, bound to the nation in the bond of life..." (Orot Eretz Yisrael 1)

Description of land as a thinking, feeling entity did not originate with the Land of Israel; a midrash places this concept at the start of the Torah, when G-d charged the land to create both fruit tree and fruit-producing tree, but

it only produced the latter. (Bereishit Rabbah 5:9) The concept of territorial consciousness continued as the sages envisioned stones desiring to serve righteous Yaakov. (Talmud, Chullin 91b) Many more classic sources ascribe consciousness to a range of inanimates. Certainly, at least some of these texts are meant to provide moral instruction rather than to describe ex-cerebrum thought processes. Nonetheless, the identity of Israel as **thinking and feeling mother to the Jewish people**, adds depth of meaning to our exile, and intensifies the imperative for our return.

Of course, numerous nations describe their homelands in maternal terms, depicting these spaces as environments which passively provide nourishment, security and familiar comfort. As Professor Rosemary Marangoly George wrote, "Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few." (*The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*) Our concept of Israel as Mother **transcends** this role, though; we envision the Land of Israel as an **active** matriarch, like Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Batsheva, protecting her children. As noted by Rabbi Teichtel, Eretz Yisrael evicts unworthy tenants and invokes her own merit on behalf of her longed-for children.

This vision of the Land begins in our parshah, when G-d promises to

remember Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and "The Land". Rabbi Teichtel commented, "It is written (Vayikra 26:42), 'And I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham I will remember, and the land I will remember.'... Rashi there wrote, 'Why are they listed in reverse? As if to say: Yaakov the youngest is worthy of this, and if he is not worthy then Yitzchak is with him, and if he is not worthy then Avraham is with him.' Based on this, one may add that even if all of them are unworthy, meaning that the merit of our ancestors has ended, still, 'The land I will remember,' for the merit of the Land of Israel itself will save them from trouble... She will protect us, to free us whenever we are placed in trouble, Heaven forbid." (Eim haBanim Semeichah, First Prologue)

Like Queen Esther approaching Achashverosh and offering herself on behalf of her people, the Land of Israel approaches Hashem and offers her own merit on our behalf.

This personification of Israel as mother and protector should add a dimension to our longing for *aliyah*. Our impulse to return is not only a selfish desire to live in the land of our ancestors, or to use the land and products for our rituals. We are not only walking the Bible and laying claim to the once and future home of the Beit haMikdash. We are returning to our mother, who longs to have her children restored.

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Summary

Following Avimelech's death, Tolah, the son of Puah, of Yissachar, judges the Jewish people for 23 years. Following him, Yair the Giladite judges the nation for 22 years, and both of their reigns pass without incident. However, immediately after the death of Yair, the nation returns to idol worship of a very severe degree. They worship no fewer than seven deities, from a variety of cultures, and completely forsake Hashem. In response, Hashem gives those living in Transjordan over to the Ammonite and Philistine armies, who oppress them for 18 years. Following that, the Ammonites cross the Jordan and invade the land of Yehudah, Binyamin, and Ephraim, and persecute them as well.

The narrative then records a long discussion between the Jewish people and Hashem, in which they admit their wrongs and cry out for help, followed by G-d telling them that they should cry out to all of the gods they have been worshipping, and that He is not interested in helping them. However, once the people remove all the foreign gods from their midst, and return to worshipping Hashem, He becomes sympathetic to their cause.

The chapter ends with the Jewish army encamping at Mitzpah, ready to battle the Ammonites in Gilad, but lacking a leader, who will be revealed in Chapter 11.

Insight

As mentioned in the summary, the nation once again returned to serving other gods, but this time, reached an even lower level than on other occasions: "And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baalim, and the Ashtaroth, and the gods of Aram, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Lord, and served Him not." (10:6, alhatorah.org translation)

We could question the final clause of this verse; isn't it clear that if they were serving seven other gods, that they forsook Hashem and weren't serving Him? Rashi, Radak and others therefore understand this verse to be teaching us that despite their service of basically every god in the entire area, there was one whom no Jews worshipped – Hashem. It would have been bad enough to worship other

gods without discriminating against Hashem, but ignoring their own Deity and worshipping every other one to be found was a true chutzpah.

Food for thought: Perhaps the reason why the Jews did this was because they were embarrassed to worship G-d alongside so many other deities, since they knew how much Hashem abhors idol worship. Would that (somewhat) justify their stance here? Additionally, are there times when we, on a lesser scale follow the same reasoning, and once we have done one misdeed, follow with more sins?

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Law of the Land: Minority Rights in Israel**Rabbi Jonathan Ziring**

Many of the Torah's laws seem to be in tension with the modern value of religious tolerance. These include the obligation to destroy idolatrous places of worship, and prohibitions on allowing non-Jews to buy/rent land in Israel, to name a few. However, the modern state of Israel, founded under the auspices of the United Nations and subject to international law, was of necessity founded with an acceptance of religious tolerance and freedom. Many rabbinic authorities struggled, and struggle, with ways to open space for such freedom.

Admittedly, there were those who demurred from reconciling these competing values. Writing to Rabbi Menachem Kasher after the Six-Day-War, his interlocutors criticized religious Jews for not destroying churches when they conquered Jerusalem (*HeTekufah HaGedolah* Chapter 13)

Rabbi Kasher, following the lead of Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, responded on pragmatic grounds. He noted that within the political context that Israel existed, it needed to respect religious freedom. Rabbi Herzog summarized this as follows:

What should we do? Tell the nations 'we can't accept this condition because our holy Torah forbids a Jewish government from permitting Christians to dwell in our lands, and even more so idol worshippers'? More than that, [the Torah] forbids us from permitting their worship in our lands and forbids us from permitting them to acquire land. It seems to me that a rabbi cannot be found in Israel with a brain and common sense, that thinks we must respond this way, meaning that this is our obligation by the law of the

holy Torah.... Even if we assume that when we accepted the state with this condition the Jewish government would violate a prohibition when fulfilling this condition, even so I would say "the prohibition is overridden to save the lives of the Jewish nation," when we pay attention to the situation of the nation in the world. And even though [the right/obligation] of protecting lives does not stand up to idolatry, or even its ancillary parts, that is only with regards to Jews themselves, but the prohibition of tolerating Gentile worship, and certainly the prohibition against them dwelling in the Land and the like, is not included, and it does not override saving the lives of the collective Israel. Even more so, there are cases where we can violate Torah law [to prevent] enmity. (Rights of Minorities According to *Halakha*" [Hebrew] *Techumin* 2, pages 169-179, republished in *Tehuka Le-Yisrael al Pi Torah* Chapter 2)

This has been the dominant defense, combined with positions that define Christianity as non-idolatrous, and arguing that Muslims may reach the status of *gerei Toshav*. Rabbi Yehuda Henkin (Bnei Banim 3:36) has suggested that perhaps this political reality is indeed planned by G-d to enable us to wait for the Messianic era when all will be peacefully convinced to worship G-d properly.

Exactly how we deal with these issues continues to be a heated topic in modern Israel. For a fuller analysis, see my article here: <https://www.thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/is-religious-tolerance-a-jewish-idea/>

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Biography
Rabbi Yehoshua Neuwirth
Rabbi Elihu Abbe

Rabbi Yehoshua Neuwirth was born in Berlin, Germany on February 15, 1927. His father, Rabbi Aharon Neuwirth, was a well-known communal rabbi in Germany. As a young boy, Yehoshua was sent alone to Belgium on the Kindertransport. (Following Kristallnacht in 1939, many children were sent out of Germany alone, without their parents. Britain organized a formal program to take in many of them, and other countries participated as well.) His parents, thankfully, also managed to leave Germany. They were reunited, and they moved to Amsterdam.

In 1943, the Germans liquidated the Jewish community in Amsterdam. The Neuwirth family waited in terror for the Germans to enter their home. Instead, the Nazis (y"sh) stood outside and called out for the Jews to exit. A non-Jewish neighbour approached the Nazis and told them that there were no Jews living in the vicinity. Their lives were thus saved. Rabbi Neuwirth observed a personal Purim every year of his life to commemorate this miracle. For more than two years, they remained in hiding, receiving food from the underground resistance until they were liberated.

While they were in hiding, they only had two books: one volume of the Talmud, and the third volume of Mishnah Berurah, which discusses the laws of Shabbat. Most of their study while in hiding was in the Mishnah Berurah, and ultimately, Rabbi Neuwirth would become world-renowned for his expertise in the laws of Shabbat.

In 1946, he travelled to Israel and became a close student of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, one of the leading rabbis of the generation. In 1965, he published *Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchatah*, a comprehensive book on the laws of Shabbat. It has been translated into 12 languages, and has become one of the classic works on the subject. In preparing to write the book, he reviewed the laws of Shabbat together with his study partner, Dr. Goldschmidt, from 2 AM to 7 AM every morning. He also served as Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Chochmat Shlomo, and was considered an expert on medical halachah. He passed away on June 11, 2013.

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Torah and Translation
The Gift of Shabbat
R' Y. Neuwirth, Shemirat Shabbat k'Hilchatah, Foreword
Translated by Rabbi Elihu Abbe

תניא, "לדעת כי אני ד' מקדשכם" (שמות לא, יג), אמר לו הקב"ה למשה: מתנה טובה יש לי בבית גנזי ושבתי שמה, ואני מבקש ליתנה לישראל, לך והודיעם. (שבת 10b)

אין מצוה בתורת ישראל, אשר תבדיל בין עם ישראל לשאר אומות כשבת זו, השבת המקודשת בידי הקב"ה.

עם ישראל שנותק מאדמתו במשך אלפיים שנה וחי מפוזר בין הגויים כשה אובד, לא שכח בכל זאת מכתב עוז חביון. דבק הוא נשאר בתורת משה אמת שקבל בהר סיני, ובה מתנה טובה אשר שבת שמה. זו היא ששמרה על אחדות עם ישראל, כמאמר חז"ל: "כי קודש היא לכם" (שמות לא, יד), מגיד שהשבת מוספת קדושה על ישראל. מה לפלוני חנותו נעולה - שהוא משמר את השבת, מה לפלוני בטל ממלאכתו - שהוא משמר את השבת. (מכילתא לפסוק) היא התורה שקבעה את צביונו של עם ישראל, ובה מכיר היהודי שהוא אבר בגוף שלם, גוף אשר על שמירת שלמותו הוא מצווה, לחיים ולמוות ח"ו.

ראה משה רבינו ע"ה עוד בימי שעבוד מצריים, שישאל לא יוכלו להחזיק מעמד כאומה, אלא אם כן כח עליון יצרפם יחד. ייחד אותם משכניהם המצריים, והנה הוא מבקש מפרעה, שיתן להם יום מנוחה כדי שלא יתבוללו בין המצריים... שידעו כי אומה מיוחדת הם, אומה שחיה בה תקות "פקוד יפקוד אלקים אתכם"...

It is taught, "In order to know that I am Hashem who makes you holy." (Shemot 31:13) Hashem said to Moshe, 'I have a wonderful gift in My treasure house and its name is Shabbat. I wish to give it to the Jewish people. Go and tell them.'" (Shabbat 10b)

There is no other commandment in the Torah of the Jewish people that highlights the uniqueness of the Jewish people like this commandment of Shabbat, the Shabbat that is infused with holiness by Hashem directly.

The Jewish people, who have been exiled from their land for two thousand years, and have lived scattered amongst the nations like a lost sheep, have nevertheless, not forgotten the concealed writing of power (i.e. the Torah). They have remained attached to the true Torah of Moshe that he received at Mount Sinai. In it is contained a wonderful gift, named Shabbat. This is what protected the unity of the Jewish people, as the Sages say, "For it is holy for you," (Shemot 31:14) this teaches that Shabbat adds holiness to the Jewish people. 'Why is so-and-so's store closed? For he is one who observes the Shabbat. Why is so-and-so refraining from work? For he is one who observes the Shabbat.'" [i.e. the communal observance of the Shabbat protects the unity of the Jewish people.] (Mechilta) This is the Torah which established the character of the Jewish people. Through it, the [individual] Jew recognizes that he is one limb from a full body [i.e. the community], which is responsible to take care of its entirety to ensure its life, and not, G-d forbid, its demise.

Moshe Rabbeinu saw, already during the enslavement in Egypt, that the Jews would not have the strength to stand as a nation unless an elevated power would connect them and unify them from amongst their neighbours, the Egyptians. He asked of Pharaoh that he grant them a day of rest so that they would not become assimilated amongst the Egyptians... They should know that they are a unique nation. A nation in which the hope for "Hashem will surely redeem you" remains alive...

Mitzvah 34 prohibits killing an innocent person. The Sefer haChinuch ties this law back to G-d's initial instruction to His creations, "Produce fruit and multiply." G-d told the world that He is interested in seeing it filled with life, and we are instructed not to act against His desire.

One might be surprised that the same Torah could prohibit taking a life and yet provide for capital punishment, but the Sefer haChinuch's linkage of this mitzvah with "Produce fruit and multiply" provides a justification: Certain criminal actions work against G-d's stated desire to see the world filled with life, and so G-d declares that for those cases, execution actually supports G-d's overall mission.

Hiring a murderer, causing a death indirectly, and committing suicide are all included within this prohibition, although the penalties vary. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Rotzeiach 2:2) The Talmud explains that wounding one's self is prohibited; this certainly applies to killing one's self,

and so suicide is prohibited. (Bava Kama 90b, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Chovel uMazik 5:1 and Hilchot Rotzeiach 2:2-3; Sefer haChinuch 34; Code of Jewish Law Choshen Mishpat 420:31) This includes ending one's own life to avoid pain and suffering, although halachah recognizes that there can be no blame, after the fact, for acts performed under great duress. (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 345:3)

Enabling suicide is also prohibited, as one may neither lead others to sin nor assist them in doing so. Ontario's College of Physicians and Surgeons currently requires physicians to refer patients to those who will assist in their death, if they will not execute the death themselves. While this is extremely problematic within Halachah, Rabbi Asher Weiss has ruled that a physician could refer rather than lose the license to practice medicine. (<http://bit.ly/2McMBGj> at 1 hour, 17 minutes)

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Weekly Highlights: June 1 – June 7 / 27 Iyar – 4 Sivan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבועה May 31-Jun 1				
After hashkamah	R' Alex Hecht	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
Before Avot	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Not this week
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Tue. June 4				
8:00 AM to 12:30 PM	Many speakers, incl. R' Mordechai Torczyner	Bnai Brith Seminar: Trust Troubles	Shaarei Shomayim	Register: ar@bnaibrith.ca
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah: Chapters 19-20	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Chapters 1-2	129 Theodore Pl.	Men
Wed. June 5				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Leading Philo-Semites 1: Cyrus the Great	Beth Tikvah	
7:30 PM	Ezer Diena	Leisure in Halachah 4: Sports: Foreign or Jewish?	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
7:30 PM	R' Alex Hecht	Non-Jews in Jewish Law	Shaarei Tefillah	
Thu. June 6				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel: Chapters 10-11	49 Michael Ct.	Women
8:30 PM	Ezer Diena	Gemara Beitzah	ediena@torontotorah.com	Men, Advanced
Fri. June 7				
10:30 AM	R' Elihu Abbe	Kiddushin	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Not this week

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM Sunday, R' Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat

11:00 AM Sunday, Beit Midrash Rotation: Contemporary Halachah: R' Elihu Abbe: Tzaar Baalei Chayim

8:30 AM Wednesday, Ezer Diena, Stories and She'eilot

8:30 AM Friday, R' Mordechai Torczyner, Parshah

WOMEN'S BEIT MIDRASH for University and Adult Women, at Ulpanat Orot, with Mrs. Eliana Abbe

9:30 AM Tuesdays: Sefer Devarim

9:30 AM Thursdays: Tefillah

Seder Boker for Adult Men

10:00 AM to Noon, Monday/Wednesday - R' Moshe Yeres: Masechet Megilah and Olat Ra"ayah

10:00 AM to Noon, Tuesday/Thursday - R' Moshe Yeres: Parshanut on Parshah and Pninei Halachah