

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Lech Lecha

13 Cheshvan, 5781/October 31, 2020

Vol. 12 Num. 8 (#469)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Ruth and Gerald Warner

in memory of Ruth's dear parents,

Margaret and Mike Smaye ז"ל ויחיאל מיכל בן יהושע ז"ל מירל צביה בת דוד ז"ל

Why Avraham?

Avraham is chosen by G-d at the age of seventy-five to go on a journey and become the father of G-d's people. But why did G-d choose Avraham? What made Avraham special?

In the text of the Torah, we see Avraham marrying Sarah, taking in his orphaned niece. But that doesn't make Avraham any better than his brother Nachor, who also married his orphaned niece, Milkah. And Avraham did go along with his father Terach to Charan, but is that really enough of a reason for G-d to choose Avraham?

A midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 38:13) fills in gaps about Avraham's life before Parshat Lech Lecha. After discovering G-d on his own, Avraham destroys his father's idols with an axe, and then places the axe in the hands of the largest idol, telling his father that the idol did it. Terach then takes Avraham before Nimrod, who was the king of Ur Kasdim where they lived. Nimrod throws Avraham in fire as punishment for refusing to bow down to fire, but Avraham survives due to Divine protection. These two incidents demonstrate Avraham's belief in G-d, against the *zeitgeist* of the times and against the dominant powers that could have killed him.

But this is odd; similar stories occurred to Avraham's descendants. In Shoftim (Chapter 6), Gideon is visited by an angel and told to smash his father's altar of the Baal deity and to cut down the idolatrous *asheirah*, and to build instead an altar to G-d and offer a sacrifice upon it. When this is

discovered and accused by the townspeople the next morning, Gideon's father says that Baal and Asherah should come fight for themselves.

Along the same lines, that midrash describes Avraham surviving being thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow – and a similar event takes place with Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah. (Daniel 3)

Why are two of the formative stories of young Avraham similar to those of Gideon and Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah?

Ramban writes that the actions of our forefathers affect the future of their children; for example, Avraham and Sarah walked about the land, and so would their descendants. (Commentary to Bereishit 12:6) Some explain this mystically, as Ramban does; others understand this to mean that our ancestors taught us proper conduct. Here, our sages appear to be utilizing this mechanism in reverse, suggesting that whatever the descendants did must have been influenced by the deeds of their forefathers.

Our midrashim anchor these stories that occurred to subsequent generations on hints in the text about Avraham. For example, G-d says He "took Avraham from Ur Kasdim" (Bereishit 15:7), and "Ur Kasdim" can be translated to "fire in Chaldea" or "a fire that occurred in Chaldea". This midrash is strengthened by the fact that "taking Avraham from Ur Kasdim" cannot refer to the Divine

Rabbi Chaim Metzger

call of "Lech lecha," as that seems to have happened when Avraham was already out of Ur Kasdim, in Charan.

Avraham is seen as living the stories of Gideon and Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah because if they did this, it was inspired by Avraham's actions.

This may also grant insight into the dispute of at what age, and how, Avraham discovered G-d. Reish Lakish says that Avraham was three years old, while Rabbi Yochanan posits that he was 48. (Nedarim 32a, Bereishit Rabbah 30:8) Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu places Avraham at 52. (Avodah Zarah 9a) The Rambam says he was forty. (Hilchot Avodah Zarah 1:3)

It seems that according to Reish Lakish, Avraham discovered G-d in the simple, pure manner a child would. While according to the others, Avraham reached this conclusion from a more mature worldview, from a more reasoned philosophical standpoint.

Perhaps these different views provide a valuable lesson. Avraham served as an inspiration not just for biblical figures, but for everyone on their respective journeys in discovering and coming closer to G-d. Wherever and however our challenges manifest themselves, we can find ourselves in Avraham, the forefather whose deeds foretell our own. As Rabbi Yochanan concludes regarding Avraham's discovery of G-d at age 48, "Avraham was ready to guide the whole world to return to Hashem." (Bereishit Rabbah 30:8)

cmetzger@torontotorah.com

OUR BEIT MIDRASH

ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER

SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

RABBI SAMMY BERGMAN

AVREICHIM

RABBI ALEX HECHT, NETANEL KLEIN, RABBI CHAIM METZGER

SEDER BOKER DIRECTOR

RABBI MOSHE YERES

WOMEN'S BEIT MIDRASH

MRS. SHIRA METZGER

CORRESPONDENTS

EZER DIENA, RABBI ADAM FRIEDMANN, RABBI BARUCH

WEINTRAUB, RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING

CHAVERIM NADAV GASNER, SHAUL HARRIS, YEHUDA LEVI, SHIMMY NAUENBERG, NATAN

SNOWBELL, AKIVA WEITZ, ELI WELTMAN

CHAVEROT ORLY AZIZA, MINDY CHAPMAN, SHULA DIENA, SOFIA FREUDENSTEIN, TEHILLA

HELFFENBAUM, SYLVIE MOSCOVITZ, HADASSA NAUENBERG, CHAYA WITTY



An affiliate of
Torah MiTzion and YU

Find our upcoming classes at
www.torontotorah.com

We are grateful to
Continental Press

Summary

Chapter 8 records King David's successes.

It begins with his defeat of the Philistines, from whom he took Meteg Ha'amah. He then overpowered the people of Moav, and after some were killed, many others become his slaves. He then struck Hadadezer, king of Tzovah, and captured thousands of his men. (8:3-4) This caused the people of Aram to attack King David in an attempt to help Hadadezer's army; however, King David killed 22,000 troops and enslaved others. (8:1-6)

On his return to Jerusalem, King David killed another 18,000 Edomites, and enslaved many others. (8:13-14) According to some opinions, King David buried those who he had killed in that battle. (Rashi to 8:13). That story is recorded after the text notes that King David brought back various spoils of battle to Jerusalem, primarily precious metals from the people of Tzovah. (8:7-8)

To'i, king of Chamat, was overjoyed that King David had defeated Tzovah, his enemy. He sent his son, Yoram, with gifts for David. But King David took nothing for himself; rather, he

dedicated all of these gifts and the spoils of battle to Hashem (8:9-12).

In 8:15-18, we are further told that King David ruled over the entire Jewish People righteously. Then, to close the chapter, we are given a list of King David's highest-ranking officials and their roles:

- Yoav ben Tzeruyah – Military Leader
- Yehoshafat ben Achilud – Recorder
- Tzadok ben Achituv and Achimelech ben Evyatar – Priests
- Serayah – Scribe
- Benayahu ben Yehoyada – Leader of the Archers and Sling-shooters (Targum Yonatan)
- David's sons – Ministers (Targum Yonatan)

Insight

We have translated the Hebrew term "kohanim", used to refer to David's sons in 8:18, as "ministers", but a more literal translation would be "priests". Why is this term chosen, as opposed to other Hebrew words which mean ministers, such as "sarim"? The Talmud (Nedarim 62a, cited by Radak and others) explains that this serves to illustrate that they had the same privileges as kohanim, in that they would receive some form of deference

due to their immense Torah knowledge. This midrash emphasizes the positive nature of the role which David gave his sons; he enabled them to study Torah and lead the generation.

However, other commentaries are less charitable when it comes to the "family business" here. In what is likely a subtle criticism, Rabbi Yosef ibn Caspi notes that unlike the rest of the people at that time who were busy working, David's sons were allowed to sit idle, with no worries. Ralbag writes extremely negatively of this decision, and blames David for all of the future harm that arose for him and his family, since he allowed his children to rule. Additionally, Ralbag (Commentary to 8:18) explains that had David treated his children like the rest of the people of Israel, none of the tragedies of Adoniyah, Amnon and Avshalom (to be detailed in future weeks) would have happened. While one may want to offer the utmost tranquility and power to their children, they must also be careful that they do not sacrifice their children's education to do so.

ediena@torontotorah.com

The Israeli Farmer: Who Owns IDF Produce?

Rabbi Alex Hecht

Can the IDF declare produce grown on an army base ownerless, thereby exempting it from *terumot* and *maasrot* (tithes)?

In [an article published by Machon HaTorah v'HaAretz](#), Rabbi Yaakov Epstein addresses two issues relevant to this question:

- Is produce grown on army bases legally accessible to the public?
- Who is the legal owner of the produce, with the authority to relinquish ownership?

Question 1

Regarding the first question, Rabbi Epstein cites the authoritative ruling of Beit Hillel (Mishnah Peah 6:1), that relinquishing ownership entails making it available to everyone. This is based on the Torah's requirement to "abandon" our land during the Shemitah year (Shemot 23:11), which indicates unconditional revocation of ownership. Consequently, one who declares his produce ownerless, but stipulates that it remains off-limits to certain people, is still obligated to tithe it. (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 273:5)

Produce grown on an Israeli army base could, theoretically, be made legally available to all. On a practical level, however, the majority of the public is prevented from entering and picking fruit, because access to them is difficult. Does this impediment to access render relinquishment of ownership ineffective?

Rabbi Epstein answers that the fact that it is difficult for the public to access the army base is not, in and of itself, a problem. After all, in any situation in which an object is rendered ownerless, it will naturally be easier for some to acquire it than for others. For example, those who are closer to the object can more easily access it than those who are distant. However, our case is more extreme, in that those outside of the base have no way to access the produce. Therefore, declaring the produce ownerless is ineffective.

Question 2

Regarding the more general question of who owns the produce on an army base, Rabbi Epstein posits that IDF soldiers are legally considered employees of the State of Israel. As is the case with other hired workers, the soldiers have a responsibility to work in and guard their designated area, but do not have the ability to transfer ownership of any property therein. For example, a soldier may neither sell, nor relinquish ownership of, a vehicle received from the IDF. According to Rabbi Epstein, soldiers are considered paid guardians over government property, and as such, are financially responsible for any damages resulting from negligence, as well as for items lost or stolen. This is also true for commanders, despite their position of authority within their base. Therefore, even if a commander were to allow for unimpeded access to the produce on their base, they would not have the authority to do so, and *terumot* and *maasrot* would remain obligatory.

ahecht@torontotorah.com

Biography

Rabbeinu Hai Gaon

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

From the 7th century through the late 10th century, the Gaonim of Babylon were the religious leaders of global Jewry. They headed the major yeshivot of Sura and Pumbedita; “Gaon” was the title of the head of the yeshiva.

Rabbeinu Hai Gaon, son of Rabbeinu Sherira Gaon, was born in 939. His ancestors had been among the political aristocracy of Jewish Babylon, but they had abandoned political power in favour of the yeshiva, where they became teachers and leaders. In his youth, Rabbeinu Hai began to help his father direct the yeshiva in Pumbedita, and he became head of the beit din there in 986. He married the daughter of Rabbeinu Shemuel bar Chofni, the Gaon of the yeshiva in Sura. In 997, enemies of Rabbeinu Sherira used the presence of foreign students in the yeshiva to charge Rabbeinu Sherira and Rabbeinu Hai with treasonous communication with enemies of the Caliph. Both were imprisoned, contributing to the decline of Rabbeinu Sherira's health. In 1006, at the age of 100, Rabbeinu Sherira passed away; Rabbeinu Hai became the new Gaon. [Shem haGedolim records some dispute regarding the date when Rabbeinu Hai became Gaon.]

The Jewish centre in Babylon was now in decline, but Rabbeinu Sherira, and then Rabbeinu Hai, extended its influence. Their students came from across Europe, Asia and North Africa. Thousands of people, including Shemuel haNagid and Rabbi Meshulam ben Klonymus, sent questions to Rabbeinu Hai, for his analysis of halachah was sharp and lucid. *Shem haGedolim* cites a view that when Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi quotes “the Gaon”, it always means Rabbeinu Hai. Rambam described Rabbeinu Hai as, “The last of the Gaonim by era, and the first of the Gaonim by significance.” [See Kovetz Hea'rot 16:5.] To this day, Rabbeinu Hai Gaon's positions are critical in halachic discussions.

Rabbeinu Hai was a rationalist, anticipating the philosophy which Rambam would later promote; he wrote against using talmudic medicines, denied the effectiveness of magic, and argued against anthropomorphism of G-d.

Rabbeinu Hai served in Pumbedita until his death on the seventh day of Pesach in 1038. Shemuel haNagid and Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol wrote elegies upon his passing. His students included Rabbeinu Chananel, Rabbeinu Gershon and Rabbeinu Nisim.

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Torah and Translation

The Authority of the Community

Rabbeinu Hai Gaon, cited in *Tmim Deim* 119

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Preface: The Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 34a) seems to say that in talmudic times, there was uncertainty regarding the definition of the shofar blast called teruah, and Rabbi Avahu declared that we should blow teruah in multiple ways, which we call shevarim, teruah, and shevarim-teruah. In the early 11th century, a Jewish community sent a letter about this to Rabbi Hai Gaon.

[שאלה:] מקודם ר' אבהו מה היו עושים, והיא החובה של כל שנה ושנה ולא כן יתכן מימות נביאים הראשונים ועד ימות ר' אבהו שהניחו שנה א' בלא תקיעה! ואם החובה ידועה אצלם, מה תקן להם רבי אבהו, והתיקון לא יהא אלא על דבר שנסתפק ונתערבב. ואנו אומרים שלא יתכן להיות האמת בשני דרכים, אלא אם התרועה היא האמת הג' שברים אינם חשובים, ואם הג' שברים הם העקר התרועה לאו כלום היא.

[תשובה:] מנין אנו יודעים כי יש עלינו מצוה לתקוע ביום זה? ועקר התורה הכתובה מנין אנו יודעים כי היא תורת משה שכתבה מפי הגבורה, אלא מפי עם ישראל, הנה אלו המעידים עליה גם הם מעידים כי במעשה יצאנו ידי חובותינו וכי כן העתיקו בקבלה מפי הנביאים הלכה למשה מסיני. ודברי הרבים הוא המוכיח על כל משנה ועל כל גמרא, ויותר מכל ראייה מזה פוק חזי מה עמא דבר, זה העיקר והסמך ואחר כך אנו מביטים בכל הדברים שנאמרו במשנה או בגמרא בענין הזה, ומה שיעלה מהם ויתרץ כאשר את נפשותינו מוטב, ואם יש בה כלום שלא יתכוין כאשר בלבבנו ולא יתברר בראיה אינו עוקר את העיקר.

שברים ותרועה אחת הם, זה וזה תרועה נקראים ושמה בעלמא הם שנקראים שנים...

ואל תחשבו בלבבכם כי בימי ר' אבהו נפל ספק בדבר הזה... וכך היה הדבר מימים קדמונים מנהג בכל ישראל, מהם עושים תרועה יבבות קלות, ומהם עושים תרועה יבבות שהם שברים, ואלו ואלו יוצאין ידי חובתן, כי שברים כבדים תרועה הם ויבבות קלות תרועה הם... ולא פלוגתא היא ולא היו אלה מטעים את אלו, אלא מר כי אתריה ומר כי אתריה. וכשבא ר' אבהו ראה לתקן תקנה שיהיו עושים בה כל ישראל מעשה אחד, ולא יהיה ביניהם דבר שההדיטות רואין אותו כחלוקה וכו'.

[Question:] Before Rabbi Avahu, what did they do? This is an annual obligation, and it is not possible that from the time of the early Prophets to the time of Rabbi Avahu they went for a single year without blowing! And if the obligation was known to them, what did Rabbi Avahu enact for them? An enactment is only for that which has been uncertain and confused! And we say it is not possible for two paths to both be true; if Teruah is true, then Shevarim is nothing. And if Shevarim is right, then Teruah is nothing.

[Answer:] How do we know that we are obligated to blow shofar on this day? And regarding the essential text of the Torah, how do we know that this is the Torah of Moshe, written from G-d's word? It is from the mouth of the Jewish nation. Their mouths testify to it, and they also testify that our deeds fulfill our ritual obligations, and that this has been transmitted by tradition from the prophets, the law of Moshe at Sinai. The words of the masses testify to every mishnah and gemara, and beyond any proof is the [Talmudic] principle, “Go see what the nation says.” This [national practice] is the essence and basis, and after that we look at the declarations of the mishnah and gemara in such matters, and whatever emerges from them and we resolve is good. Anything that does not match that which is in our hearts and which cannot be proved does not uproot the essence.

Shevarim and Teruah are the same, each of them is called “Teruah”, and it is just in name that we identify them as two different sounds...

Don't think that doubt in this began in the time of Rabbi Avahu... Such was always the custom throughout Israel; some did Teruah as light sounds, and some did Teruah as the Shevarim, and each fulfilled their obligation, for heavy Shevarim are Teruah and light sounds are Teruah... There was no conflict, and each did not mislead the other, but each did according to his place. And when Rabbi Avahu came, he saw fit to enact for all Israel to do the same thing, lest they have something which uneducated people would perceive as a split.

Come Learn with Us!

Click Underlined Lines to Open Zoom Sessions. All times are EDT.
Clickable Zoom links are also available at www.torontotorah.com/letslearn
All classes are free and open to all, unless otherwise noted

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

10:00 AM Wed. Nov. 4: Vaccination Ethics

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, a 4-part series on Zoom

Week 3: The Ethics of Human Challenge Trials

Register at <https://torontotorah.com/vaccine>; there is a fee

7:30 PM Wed. Nov. 4: Emotional Judaism

Rabbi Alex Hecht, a 5-part series on Zoom, with Clanton Park and Shaarei Tefillah

Week 4: Nervousness

DAILY

7:10 AM Sun, 7:30 AM Mon-Fri, Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Daf Yomi with BAYT (men), via ZOOM

ADULT SEDER BOKER

Mon-Thu 10 AM to Noon, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, via ZOOM (men)

Mondays and Wednesdays: Gemara Taanit, Orot haTeshuvah

Tuesdays and Thursdays: Parshah, Tanach: Shoftim

WEEKLY

Shabbat Oct 31

After minchah, Rabbi Sammy Bergman, "Cruelty to Hagar", in person at Shaarei Shomayim

Sunday Nov. 1

9:15 AM Contemporary Halachah with Netanel Klein (not this week)

10:00 AM Gemara Shabbat with Rabbi Aaron Greenberg (University)

7:30 PM Gemara Ketuvot with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)

8:15 PM Uncovering Midrash with Rabbi Chaim Metzger *New Series!*

Monday Nov. 2

8:30 PM Gemara Shabbat, Chap. 15, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Tuesday Nov. 3

1:30 PM Megilat Esther, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

7:30 PM Shoftim, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)

Wednesday, Nov 4

7:30 PM Genesis Journeys: Mystery of the First 7 Days, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman

Thursday Nov. 5

8:30 AM Daniel, Rabbi Chaim Metzger (University)

1:30 PM Shemuel, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women)

8:15 PM Gemara Bava Metzia, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University women)

8:30 PM Gemara Beitzah, with Ezer Diena (men, advanced)

Friday Nov. 6

8:30 AM Parshah, Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University)

11:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (advanced)