

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Toldot

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Robert and Karyn Goldberger ל"ה עילוי נשמת אריה בן צבי ז"ל in memory of Robert's father Arye Goldberger ז"ל, on his seventh yahrtzeit

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Lori and Larry Wolynetz and Family for the sixth yahrtzeit of Lori's father Dov Ber ben Yisrael Tzvi, ל"ה דב בער בן ישראל צבי ז"ל

Truly Blessed

Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Every time we say Birkat HaMazon after we finish a meal, we ask that G-d bless us like He blessed Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, "*baKol, miKol, Kol* – in everything, from everything, everything." But what does that mean?

The word *kol* is found in the same verse as the word *baruch* [blessing] for each of the patriarchs, and the Talmud associates four different benefits with this:

- Those who repent of their arrogance will merit to pass away at the proper time, peacefully, like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. (Sotah 5a)
- Each of the patriarchs 1) experienced a taste of the World to Come in this world, or 2) the evil inclination held no sway over them, or 3) the Angel of Death didn't hasten their end and they passed away peacefully. (Bava Batra 17a)

When we mention *baKol miKol Kol*, which of these blessings are we hoping to have fulfilled? Seemingly we are hoping to be blessed to experience a taste of the World to Come in this world. On the other hand, we may be hoping for all of these blessings. (h/t Archie Crandell)

But upon closer inspection of the verses which feature the word *kol*, a more complex picture emerges. Avraham's *baKol* is in Bereishit 24:1, "Avraham was old, advanced in years, and G-d blessed Avraham in everything." Avraham was still mourning his wife Sarah, and about to start seeking a wife for Yitzchak. This doesn't seem to be a

state of satisfaction; Avraham was a widower, with work to do.

Yaakov's *Kol* comes as he is meeting his brother Esav for the first time in years. Yaakov prepared for war, planned contingencies for fleeing, and sent gifts as bribes to save his family. Beyond all reason, Esav then hugged and kissed Yaakov when they met. Yaakov couldn't believe Esav's warmth, and tried to get Esav to accept his gifts and then to escape. Esav refused the presents, saying, "I have a lot." Yaakov replied, "Please take these blessings that I brought to you because G-d has graced me and I have *Kol* – everything." (ibid. 33:11) Rashi states that Yaakov meant he was satisfied with his portion, while Esav was insatiable. But how could Yaakov say he was content while fearing for his life?

In between those two stories, Yitzchak's *miKol* comes at the climax of this week's parashah, right at the moment when he realized that Yaakov had taken the place of Esav and stolen the blessing. "Yitzchak trembled violently, a great trembling, saying, 'Where is the hunter who brought this to me and I ate *miKol* - all of it - before you arrived and I blessed him, he will also remain blessed.'" (ibid. 27:33) Surely Yitzchak was shaken at this moment. He now knew that his previous conceptions about his sons were wrong, and that his children were fated to be at odds and to fight over their inheritance. So how could Yitzchak's *miKol* be considered a blessing? Indeed, how could he bless

Yaakov, "he will also remain blessed," right after Yaakov stole Esav's blessing?

In sum: why have none of our patriarchs experienced true and complete blessing when *Kol* is mentioned? How can we ask to be blessed like them?

In this world we cannot experience absolute blessing. Rather, we pray for the ability to see all of the good that G-d grants us, even when our circumstances are complex. Often it seems like our evil inclination tells us that G-d has abandoned us, or that the Angel of Death is waiting for us behind each corner like with Yaakov. We need to look toward the future knowing that we still have work to do and that G-d will be with us throughout. That is what it means to taste the next world in this world - to understand where we are despite all of the challenges while realizing G-d has been with us and will continue to be in the future. We hope that G-d will help us realize what we have, even though it is imperfect and still needs work.

cmetzger@torontotorah.com

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Summary

Yehoram the son of Achav was a wicked king, continuing the sins of Yerovam, but he removed some symbols of the idol worship of Baal. (3:1-3)

Under Achav, Meisha the king of Moav had paid tribute to Israel: the wool of 100,000 sheep and 100,000 rams. However, he rebelled upon Achav's death, prompting Yehoram to gather his army to fight. Yehoram asked for aid from Yehoshafat king of Yehudah (a rare occurrence), who agreed to fight alongside him, and the king of Edom. They decided to travel through the desert of Edom, and marched for seven days. They then ran out of water, leading Yehoram to cry out that this would lead to defeat at the hands of Moav. (3:4-10)

Yehoshafat, however, asked to speak to G-d through a prophet. A servant sent him to Elisha. When the three kings reached him, he told Yehoram to speak to the prophets of his parents - and their idols. However, out of respect for Yehoshafat, Elisha then agreed to speak to them. (3:11-14)

Elisha asked for a musician, and once he heard the music, he received prophecy. G-d said that the desert would fill with pools of water without rain or wind, and Moav would be given into their hands, and they would destroy their cities, trees, wells, and fields. (3:15-19)

In the morning, water came from the direction of Edom and covered the land. The Moabites, in the meantime, readied for battle. When they saw the water with the sun shining in it, they assumed that it was blood. This convinced them that the three kings had killed each other, and they ran to collect the spoils, running right into the armed camp. This enabled Israel to attack them easily and accomplish what G-d had predicted. (3:20-25)

As a last-minute attempt, the king of Moav led seven hundred soldiers to break through the Edomite camp, but failed. He then took a first born person and offered him as a sacrifice, burning him on the wall, causing the Jews to experience what the text describes as "a great anger" and return home. (3:26-7)

Insight

Whose son was sacrificed, and why were the Jews punished? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 39b) offers two possibilities:

- The king of Moav sacrificed his own son to idolatry. This caused G-d's anger against Israel by "reminding" G-d about the idolatry and human sacrifice of Israel.
- The king of Moav sacrificed his own son to G-d. [According to a midrash (Pesikta d'Rav Kahana cited in Radak), he did this to mimic Avraham's test at the Akeidah.] Amazingly, this interpretation sees value in having passion for G-d, even when the motivation is not pure, and the action itself is horrid! (See Taanit 4a, where this is described as the paradigm of that which G-d did not command.)

Radak claims that the Moabite king took the crown prince of **Edom** and killed him. Thus, though Moav could not beat Edom, they managed to dishearten them and create animosity in the Yisrael-Yehudah-Edom alliance.

ziring@torontotorah.com

It Happened in Israel: Land of the Generous Eulogy

Story

Reish Lakish eulogized a young Torah scholar who regularly visited the Land of Israel, for he learned gemara [or: halachah] in the twenty-four rows [of students in the beit midrash]. He said: Woe, the land of Israel has lost a great man!

There was someone [in Babylon] who learned gemara and Sifra and Sifri and Tosefta, and he died. They said to Rav Nachman: Shall the master eulogize him? He replied: How shall I eulogize him? Woe for the basket filled with books which is now gone!

Come and see the difference between the tough ones of the Land of Israel and the pious ones of Babylon. (Megillah 28b)

Explanation

Commentators to this passage stipulate that the scholar in Israel was not greater than the scholar in Babylon; some even suggest that the reference to "twenty-four rows" is not about his studies; rather, Reish Lakish eulogized him with twenty-four rows of students participating. (Tosafot haRosh ad loc.) Further, this was not actually an Israeli scholar; he only visited Israel. (Maharsha ad loc.) Despite this, Reish Lakish eulogized him in Israel most generously, compared with the eulogy offered by Rav Nachman in Babylon.

Reish Lakish is described as "tough" because in non-eulogy situations, he avoided behaviour which could cause people to overestimate the piety of others. People so valued his opinion of others that if he respected someone, then other people would provide that person with commercial merchandise without witnesses. Therefore, Reish Lakish would not speak with other Torah scholars in public, even leading scholars, lest that mislead people about their piety. (Yoma 9b)

Lesson

This story, like many found throughout the Talmud, distinguishes between the practices of Torah scholars in Israel and those in Babylon. (For other examples, see [here](#).) In some of those cases, the Babylonian sages appear to be more righteous than those of Israel; others, like our own, portray Israeli practices as greater than those of Babylon. Here, we learn lessons from the practices of each place.

In Babylon, even pious people chose to minimize their eulogies for others. Rather than promote good conduct and praise the deceased, Rav Nachman went in the opposite direction. We might understand Rav Nachman's approach by looking at another story: "A eulogizer spoke in front of Rav Nachman, saying, 'This person acted with *tzniut* [privacy].' Rav Nachman replied, 'Did you go with him to the washroom, such that you know whether he was *tzanua*?' The Talmud there explains that Rav Nachman believed that exaggerated eulogies bring punishment upon the deceased, the eulogizers and the participants. (Berachot 62a)

On the other hand, in Israel they were prolix in their eulogies, elevating and praising the reputations of the deceased. As we have noted, Reish Lakish was careful not to inflate people's reputations when they were alive, lest that cause financial harm for those who trusted those reputations. However, once that risk was gone he praised and honoured those who had passed away.

[For another example of differences between Israeli and Babylonian eulogies, see Megillah 6a.]

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Biography

The Vilna Gaon

Rabbi Jared Anstandig

Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer, known as the Vilna Gaon (or the “Great One of Vilna”) was born in 1720. He is commonly referred to as the GR”A, an acronym standing for the **Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu**. He is also simply called “The Gaon,” “The Great One,” an allusion to the staggering breadth and depth of his Torah knowledge. [The original Gaonim were the leaders of Jewry’s central yeshivot in the 7th to 11th centuries.]

His children and students reported that even as a young child, the Vilna Gaon excelled in all areas of Torah study, from Chumash to Kabbalah to astronomy. Regarding these almost incredible stories, Professor Immanuel Etkes writes, “[E]ven if we assume that in the portrait before us there is some degree of exaggeration and idealization, we cannot avoid the conclusion that it expresses an encounter with a personality endowed with extraordinary intellectual abilities and psychic powers...” (*The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image* pg. 35)

The Vilna Gaon spent his early years travelling through Europe, and eventually settled in Vilna, Lithuania. There, despite his clear command of all areas of Jewish knowledge, the Vilna Gaon avoided any significant positions of leadership, preferring to dedicate his time to personal Torah study and teaching. The Vilna Gaon’s own students and children attest to this dedication, describing how he would frequently skip meals and refuse sleep to maximize his Torah study.

On the communal level, the Vilna Gaon fiercely opposed the emerging Chassidic movement, accusing them of immorality as well as heresy. He spearheaded early excommunication efforts against the Chassidic leadership in Vilna, in an attempt to prevent the movement’s spread.

The prolific writings of the Vilna Gaon were largely published posthumously, and his students recorded still more of his teachings. His terse glosses can be found throughout the Talmud and the Shulchan Aruch, under the title “Biurei HaGR”A.” He also wrote the *Sh’not Eliyahu* commentary on the Mishnah and *Aderet Eliyahu* on Tanach.

The Vilna Gaon passed away in 1797, at the age of 77. The impact of his teachings and personality are still felt today, among the myriads who follow his halachic practices and method of Torah study.

janstandig@torontotorah.com

Torah and Translation

Educate a Child According to His Way

Commentary of the Vilna Gaon to Mishlei 22:6

Translated by Rabbi Jared Anstandig

”חנוך וגו’ כשהוא עוד נער ואז גם כשיזקין לא יסור.”

והענין כי האדם א”א לו לשבור דרכו כלומר מזלו שנוולד בו כמ”ש האי מאן דבצדק יהי גבר צדקן כו’ וכשנוולד במזל רע אז ע”ז ניתנה הבחירה ביד האדם שיוכל לאחוז במזלו לאיזה דבר שירצה להיות או צדיק או רשע או בינוני.

וכמ”ש במסכת שבת האי מאן דבמאדים יהי שופך דמים אר”א או מהולא או טבחא או ליסטים. וזכר אלו הג’ והוא לפי שמזלו מורה שיהי שופך דמים אך בבחירתו יוכל לבחור באלו הג’ או מהולא והוא צדיק שעושה מ”ע או טבחא הוא בינוני או ליסטים והוא רשע שופך דמים כמשמעו.

”ו... ש... דוד בשמים ו[לא] עלתה לו. והענין הוא כי בדוד נאמר והוא אדמוני והוא במאדים... והוא העביר מדותיו בכל ואף שאלו הב’ לא העביר מ”מ עלתה לו כמ”ש כל המעביר על מדותיו כו’ ודוד כבר הרבה צדק להעביר על מדותיו...”

”ו... ש חנוך לנער ע”פ דרכו דרך מזלו וטבעו כן תחנכהו לעשות מצות ואז גם כשיזקין לא יסור ממנה.”

אבל כאשר תעבירהו על מזלו עתה ישמע לך מיראתו אותך אבל אח”כ בעת יסור עולך מעל צוארו יסור מזה כי א”א לו לשבר מזלו.

“Educate a child, etc. while he is still a young man, and then even when he ages he will not drift.”

The idea is that a person, cannot break from his path, that is to say, from the fortune under which he was born, as it says in the Talmud (Shabbat 156a), “He who is born under the sign of Jupiter (literally *tzedek*, meaning justice) will be a just person etc.” And when a person is born under a bad sign, a person is given the opportunity to hold onto his sign for any purpose he chooses, as a righteous person, an evil person, or a neutral person.

And as it says in the Talmud (Shabbat 156a), “One who is born under Mars (literally *ma’adim* meaning reddening) will be a spiller of blood. Rav Ashi says this person will be a ritual circumciser, butcher, or bandit.” And the Talmud mentions these three because his sign indicates that he will spill blood, but it is up to his choice which of these three he will choose - as a circumciser, a righteous person performing a commandment, or as a butcher, which is neutral, or as a bandit, which means one who is evil, a shedder of blood.

And that is what the Talmud says (Yoma 22b), “...David sinned twice, and was not punished for them.” And the meaning is that regarding David he is described as a “red one,” having been born under the sign of Mars... And David overcame his natural traits in all matters, and even though in these two instances he didn’t, nonetheless, they are not counted against him, as it says (Rosh Hashanah 17a), “Anyone who overcomes his nature, [his sins are forgiven].” And David had already performed much justice in order to overcome his traits...

And this is what it means when it says to educate a child in accordance with his ways, in the ways of his sign and nature, so that you shall educate him to perform mitzvot, and so even when he is older, he will not drift from that.

But when you force him to act against his sign, now he will listen out of fear of you, but when you remove your yoke from his shoulders he will drift, for it is not possible for him to break away from his sign.

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10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)
Mon/Wed: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook; Tues/Thurs: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat November 5-6 Shabbaton at Shaarei Shomayim!

Shabbaton at Shaarei Shomayim: How Does Judaism Change?

Friday night Dvar Torah before maariv

Rabbi Steven Gotlib: Changing Judaism, Changing Ourselves

Shabbat morning post-Hashkamah Class

Rabbi Chaim Metzger: Revolutions in the Public Torah Reading

Shabbat morning Sharp Sanctuary Derashah

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: Yitzchak—Orthodox or Reform?

Shabbat morning Tent Minyan Derashah

Rabbi Jared Anstandig: The Curious Case of the Invented Blessing

Shabbat 5 PM in the Sharp Sanctuary

Idan Rakovsky: Truth Shattered and Restored: Jewish Thought Before and After the Shoah

Seudah Shlishit

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: Judaism's New Environmentalism

Sunday November 7

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, Postmodernist Jewish Thought, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613 (univ)

Monday November 8

7:30-9:00 PM Legal Ethics (CPD accredited): Wills & the Jewish Client, w/R' Mordechai Torczyner
ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtethics> Register at <https://torontotorah.com/cpd>

Tuesday November 9

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 2), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 8), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday November 10

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Eruvin, Shaarei Shomayim and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/erugin>

10:00 AM R' M Torczyner, The House that David Built, #1 of 3 ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

12:30 PM The Ethical Challenge (with CPD credit for accountants), Week 2

Rabbi Jared Anstandig, The Accountant's Fiduciary Responsibility

On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/bmlunch>, Register (free) at <http://torontotorah.com/business>

8:00 PM R' J Anstandig, Laws of Winter Shabbat #3, Shaarei Shomayim & ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/wintershabbat>

8:15 PM R' Chaim Metzger, Artscroll Through the Ages, BAYT and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/translated>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park

Thursday November 11

8:30 AM R' Chaim Metzger, Trei Asar, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/trei> (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 22), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, email ymanntorontotorah.com for location (advanced, men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Gemara Bava Batra, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

Friday November 12

8:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>