

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vaera

3 Shevat, 5781/January 16, 2021

Vol. 12 Num. 19 (#480)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by David and Nina Bernstein  
in honour of Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

### Teaching Our Children to Dream

### Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Moshe's attempt to convince the Jews of their impending redemption launched powerfully: "And the nation trusted, and they heard that G-d had recalled the Children of Israel and that He had seen their suffering, and they bowed. (Shemot 4:31)" But then Moshe failed to convince Pharaoh, who reacted abusively toward the Jews. The nation then turned on Moshe. Hashem sent Moshe a new message of redemption for the Jews – but this time, they did not listen. "And they did not listen to Moshe, because of short spirits and hard labour." (ibid. 6:9)

We know what "hard labour" is, but what does the term "short spirits" mean? Many commentators suggest that the Jews **did not even hear Moshe**, due to these "short spirits":

- Rashi (ad loc.) blames their pain: "Anyone who is in pain, his spirit and breath are short, and he cannot extend his breathing."
- Ibn Ezra (ad loc. in extended commentary) writes that the issue was impatience: "Their spirit was short due to the length of the exile and the hard labour that had been newly increased for them."
- Ramban (ad loc.) contends that the people resisted Moshe's message due to their struggle, "They did not incline an ear to his words due to their short spirit, like one whose spirit is short due to his struggle."
- According to Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser (Malbim, ad loc.), the issue was that the Jews lacked resilience, the ability "to assert spiritual control over their emotions, and thereby to endure sorrow, pain and suffering."

Therefore, "Moshe's words did not enter their ears."

Rashi's students recorded a different approach, though, suggesting that the Jews heard, but **did not believe Moshe**. In explaining why we have three *haftarah* readings of punishment before Tishah b'Av, but then we have many more messages of consolation – seven – following Tishah b'Av, they explained:

This is like the way of comforters, who console little by little. One who would declare too much consolation to the ruined would be like someone who says to someone who begs at doors, "Tomorrow you will be king." He would not believe it. It is as it is said, "And they didn't listen to Moshe, because of short spirits and labour, etc." (Machzor Vitry 262; and see Tosafot Megilah 31b R" C)

Machzor Vitry goes on to explain how each *haftarah* after Tishah b'Av builds a message of consolation incrementally. But Moshe did not do this; Moshe declared, in G-d's Name, "I will take you out from under the strain of Egypt, and I will rescue you from their labour, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments. And I will take you to Me as a nation, and I will be your G-d, and you will know that I am Hashem your G-d, who has taken you out from under the strain of Egypt. And I will bring you to the land, for which I have raised My hand to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and I will give it to you as an inheritance; I am G-d." (Shemot 6:6-8) This was too much; regardless of the trust the Jews had expressed earlier, they were not

prepared for this powerful message of hope.

These rabbinic explanations transcend the particular context of Divine promises to a struggling nation. These messages (which we could support here from psychology texts if there were space) should resonate with any parent who wants to convey messages of encouragement to children.

- First: we must make sure our children are ready to hear us. If they are under stress due to academics, social pressure or personal anxiety, they won't absorb our well-meaning words of praise and empowerment. We aren't even getting in the door.
- Second: we must be realistic. Telling children, "You can become whoever you want to become," or that we believe they can achieve an A when they have never exceeded a B-, could be a case of offering what Machzor Vitry called, "too much consolation to the ruined." We need to be appropriate in our encouragement.
- And third: we must be consistent. Like the *haftarot* following Tishah b'Av, seven moderate, spaced-out messages will be more acceptable than a single pep talk, however energetic.

The commentators we have cited did not blame the Jews for failing to listen; the message was too strong, too sudden, and too out-of-sync with their experience. May we learn the lessons of this passage, and thoughtfully and appropriately inspire our children to dream and to achieve.

[torczyner@torontotorah.com](mailto:torczyner@torontotorah.com)

#### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

**ROSH BEIT MIDRASH**  
**SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH**  
**AVREICHIM**  
**SEDER BOKER DIRECTOR**  
**WOMEN'S BEIT MIDRASH**  
**CORRESPONDENTS**

RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER  
RABBI SAMMY BERGMAN  
RABBI ALEX HECHT, NETANEL KLEIN, RABBI CHAIM METZGER  
RABBI MOSHE YERES  
MRS. SHIRA METZGER  
EZER DIENA, RABBI ADAM FRIEDMANN, RABBI BARUCH  
WEINTRAUB, RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING

**CHAVERIM** NADAV GASNER, SHAUL HARRIS, ARI KARON, YEHUDA LEVI, SHIMMY NAUENBERG, NATAN SNOWBELL, AKIVA WEITZ, ELI WELTMAN  
**CHAVEROT** ORLY AZIZA, MINDY CHAPMAN, SHULA DIENA, SOFIA FREUDENSTEIN, TEHILLA HELFENBAUM, ARIELLA MARKUS, SYLVIE MOSCOVITZ, HADASSA NAUENBERG, YEJIDE OMOTOSO, KINNERET WITTY



An affiliate of  
**Torah MiTzion and YU**

Find Toronto Torah online at  
[tiny.cc/torontotorah](http://tiny.cc/torontotorah)

We are grateful to  
**Continental Press**

**Summary**

King David's reaction to Avshalom's death is to cry over his lost son. This sets the tone for the king's army, who return from battle quietly and somberly. Yoav chastises King David, arguing that this reaction alienates the soldiers who had just risked their lives for him. After all, Avshalom was the enemy. David, apparently accepting Yoav's argument, goes out to greet the people. (19:1-11)

Meanwhile, in the wake of Avshalom's death, the nation has decided to re-accept David as King. The king sends messengers to the elders of Yehudah, urging them to come and be the first to welcome him. King David and his entourage approach the Jordan river and prepare to cross back into Israel. (19:12-16)

At the Jordan, King David is greeted by a series of welcomers:

- Shimi ben Gera, who had cursed the king, arrives first. He falls at David's feet and begs for forgiveness. Avishai, Yoav's brother, argues that this show of fealty should not be enough to excuse Shimi from death for cursing the king. King David responds that on such an auspicious day, it is not appropriate to sentence people to

death, and spares Shimi's life. (19:17-24)

- Next Mefiboshet appears, unshaved and with clothing unlaundered since the time David had left Jerusalem. David asks why Mefiboshet did not come with him into exile. He responds that his servant Tziva had betrayed him and left him alone. Mefiboshet, who was disabled, was unable to travel by himself. David rules that Tziva and Mefiboshet should share the estate that David had given to the latter. (19:25-31)
- The final welcomer is Barzilai, who had supported David's troops. David invites Barzilai to live with him in Jerusalem. Barzilai declines, citing his advanced age. He sends his son Kimham instead. (19:32-40, and see Rashi to 19:38)

The chapter ends with the representatives of the other tribes expressing frustration that the tribe of Yehudah had stolen their opportunity to bring King David back into the country. (19:41-44)

**Analysis**

Twice in this chapter King David finds himself at odds with the sons of Tzeruyah - Yoav and Avishai. In both

cases, the brothers argue for prudent political moves which are clearly in the king's best interest. Why aren't these things obvious to King David himself?

With regards to King David's grief for Avshalom, Ralbag (18:5) argued that David's orders of mercy for his son were due to an understanding that the entire coup was actually a punishment for his sin with Batsheva. Avshalom was only G-d's instrument to this end, and was therefore, at some level, blameless.

Regarding forgiveness for Shimi ben Gera, Rashi (19:23) explains that King David assumed that if someone as great as Shimi had cursed him, it was a sign from G-d that he was not fit to be king. Now that Shimi had recanted, David understood that his rule was still accepted in heaven. The elation of this realization made executing Shimi inappropriate.

We see that as opposed to Yoav and Avishai's practical politics, King David interpreted events based on his perception of G-d's providential hand. What the text is trying to tell us by juxtaposing these approaches is left to the reader to decide.

*afriedmann@torontotorah.com*

**The Israeli Farmer: Tithing Israeli Exports**

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829-1908), in his *Aruch haShulchan* commentary on the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 331:1), tells the reader that he has decided not to write about the laws pertaining to *terumot* and *ma'asrot* (agricultural tithes given to kohanim and leviyim) since they had no practical relevance in his day. Over a century later, there is no shortage of scholarly articles and consumer guides in both Hebrew and English about the application of these laws in Israel and abroad. The resettlement and re-establishment of sovereignty in the Land of Israel has enabled a thriving agricultural sector and booming export industry, placing the laws of *terumot* and *ma'asrot* into the practical arena.

Halachah requires a Jew to tithe his crop as follows: Approximately two percent is given to a kohen (*terumah gedolah*) who must consume it in a state of ritual purity; 10 percent of the remaining produce is given to a levi (*ma'aser rishon*); the levi gives 10 percent of his portion to a *kohein* (*terumat ma'aser*). In the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle, an additional 10 percent is separated and may only be eaten in Jerusalem or redeemed for money spent there (*ma'aser sheni*), and in the third and sixth years, it is given to the poor (*ma'aser ani*).

Rabbi Yosef Caro (1488-1575) in Shulchan Aruch and Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1530-1572) ruled that today, the obligation to separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot* in the Land of Israel is rabbinic. [See Toronto Torah 10:3 for more detail regarding this point.] Also, since kohanim are presently unable to maintain the ritual purity required for eating *terumah*, the portion separated may not be eaten by anyone and is to be disposed of in a dignified manner (see "Instructions for

Separating Terumah and Ma'aser" [http://www.crcweb.org/kosher\\_articles/Terumah\\_Maaser\\_Separation\\_%28Dec%202016%29.pdf](http://www.crcweb.org/kosher_articles/Terumah_Maaser_Separation_%28Dec%202016%29.pdf)).

What about Israel's exports? This question, originally addressed in a mishnah (Challah 2:1), stems from the Torah's passage regarding *terumah*, "[W]hen you arrive in the **land** to which I am bringing you" (Bamidbar 15:18)." Although the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 331:12) exempted exports from separation, Rabbi Yehudah Rosanes (1657-1727) in his *Mishneh l'Melech* argued that produce grown in Israel requires separation regardless of where it is consumed. In a third view, Rabbi Shalom Mordechai Schwadron (1835-1911) said that if produce is grown in Israel specifically for export, *terumah* need not be taken.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel relies on those authorities who do not require *terumot* and *ma'asrot* to be separated from produce consumed outside of Israel, although some exports are tithed; see <https://oukosher.org/blog/consumer-kosher/separating-terumah-and-maaser/>. Other authorities, including Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986), follow the *Mishneh l'Melech*, and require tithing for exported produce (*Igrot Moshe*, YD 3:127).

Israel's renewed prosperity has not only allowed people around the world to enjoy its fruits - it has also made it necessary for areas of Jewish law to be re-opened.

*ahecht@torontotorah.com*

## Biography

### Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi

Rabbi Sammy Bergman

Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi was born in Turkey in 1512. As a young prodigy, he studied in the Yeshiva in Salonika with Rabbi Yosef Taitazak, one of the great Sephardic rabbis of his time, and he became one of Rabbi Taitazak's most prominent disciples. The Egyptian community appointed Rabbi Ashkenazi as a rabbi and a judge, when he was only 26 years old. After serving the community for 22 years and developing a reputation as a Torah scholar, Rabbi Ashkenazi left Egypt for political reasons and became a Rabbi in Cyprus. After serving in that role for two years, Rabbi Ashkenazi left to travel throughout Europe. Following stops in Venice, Prague, Bohemia, Crimea and Italy, Rabbi Ashkenazi returned to Eastern Europe where he served as Rabbi of Posen. He spent the last of year of his life in Krakow, Poland, where he died in 1585.

Rabbi Ashkenazi was a prolific author and an original thinker. His works include a commentary on the Torah entitled *Ma'asei Hashem*, a commentary on Megillat Esther entitled *Yosef Lekach*, and eight selichot which became part of the Bohemian liturgy. Although his teacher Rabbi Taitazak was a kabbalist, Rabbi Eliezer studied both philosophy and physics. He was a bold and confident thinker, who stood by his legal opinions even when they differed from the decisions of his peers. His disagreements with other prominent Torah scholars compelled Rabbi Ashkenazi to move on from many Jewish communities. For example, when the rabbis of Poland issued a decree (based on a ruling of Maimonides) which forbade their students from opening a rival Yeshiva in close proximity to their own, Rabbi Ashkenazi refused to give his consent – even after Rabbi Joseph Gershon, the head of the Yeshiva in Krakow, asked him to do so.

Rabbi Eliezer and his wife Rachel had two sons and a daughter. The couple were buried together in the famous Rama cemetery in Poland, where their tombs remain extant. Their epitaphs attest to their piety and generosity.

[sbergman@torontotorah.com](mailto:sbergman@torontotorah.com)

## Torah and Translation

### No Mercy for Pharaoh

R. E. Ashkenazi, Maasei Hashem, Maaseh Mitzrayim 11

Translated by Rabbi Sammy Bergman

אמנם כי כן אפשר לומר שאין ההקשאה האמורה כאן הסרת בחירה, ויתכן לומר שאין פירוש הכתוב חלילה שהוא יקשה את לבו, וימנע ממנו הבחירה לבלתי שלחם, אבל אמר הקב"ה שבהיות מידותיו יתברך עם בריותיו בחסד וברחמים, לא כמלך בשר ודם שעיר או ממלכה אשר ימרו את פיו לבלתי עשות מצותו תיכף דינם לפי חרב, כי הקב"ה אין מידתו כן, אבל יתרה בהם וייסר אותם בנחת כדי שישבו אליו, ולא דינם למיתה רק אחרי הסרבנות המופלג.

וזה אמר הכתוב "ואני אקשה את לבו, רצה לומר אם הייתי בא עליו כמלך בשר ודם תיכף בחרב ובחנית, כבר היה נכנע תיכף על כרחו, אבל מה שאני מתנהג על פי מידותי עם בריותי בנחת ובהתראות וביסורים בלתי קשים כדי שישבו, אלו מידותי ידעתי שיהיו לפרעה למכשול ולמוקש, כי לא יחשוב שאני כך מידותי להתנהג בנחת, אבל זדון לבו ישיאנו לחשוב שמבלתי יכולת לבוא עליו בפעם אחד ולא אשנה כמלך בשר ודם, לכן אני בא עליו באלו המכות דם צפרדע כינים.

וגם ענין זה רצה הקב"ה להודיעו ולהתרות לו שלא יטעה, כמו שנאמר (שמות ט: טו-טז) "כי עתה שלחתי את ידי ואך אותך ואת עמך בדבר ותכחד מן הארץ ואולם בעבור זאת העמדתיך וגו'".

וכן תמצא שנאמר (דברים ב: ל) בסיחון הקשה את רוחו, שגם שם היה מה שציוה ד' למשה שישלח לו דברי "תחנונים ידבר רש", "לשה"כ משלי יח, כג) חשב שמבלתי יכולת לבוא להילחם עמו שלח דברי תחנונים, באופן שאותו מעשה שליחות האנשים שהיתה ממידת טובו יתברך, היתה לפוקה לסיחון.

However, it is possible to say that the "hardening" discussed here is not the removal of choice. It's possible to say that the explanation of the verse isn't, Heaven forbid, that He will harden [Pharaoh's] heart and withhold [free] choice from him, so that he will not send them. Rather, the Holy One, Blessed be He said that since His virtues, may He be blessed, toward His creations are with kindness and mercy, unlike a king of flesh and blood (for if a city or king rebels against his word by not performing his commandments, he will judge them by the sword, [but] the Holy One Blessed be He, His virtues are different), He will rather warn them and punish them slowly so they return to Him, and He only judges them for death after egregious refusal.

This is what the verse says (Shemot 7:3), "And I will harden his heart", meaning, if I would treat him like a king of flesh and blood suddenly with a sword and a spear, he would immediately be humbled against his will. But since I behave according to My virtues with my creatures, with ease and warnings, and afflictions which aren't harsh, in order that he return, I know that these virtues of mine will serve as an obstacle and a stumbling block for Pharaoh. For he will not think that My way is to act slowly, rather, his malice would make him think that since I can't attack him once without repetition, like a king of flesh and blood, therefore I attack him with those [repeated, non-fatal] plagues of frogs, blood, and lice.

And regarding this matter, too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to inform him and warn him so that he would not make this mistake. As it says (Shemot 9:15-16) "For now I have sent My Hand and struck you and your nation with a plague, you would be annihilated from the land. However, for this reason I have upheld you..."

So too you will find that it says (Devarim 2:30) regarding Sichon that He hardened his spirit. For also there, if Hashem had commanded Moshe to send words of supplication like a poor person (Proverbs 18:23), [Sichon] would have thought that since He is incapable of coming to fight him, He sent words of supplication, such that the same sending of messengers which is a function of Hashem's benevolence would be an obstacle for Sichon.

**COME LEARN WITH US!**

Click Underlined Lines to Open Zooms.

Clickable links also at [www.torontotorah.com/letslearn](http://www.torontotorah.com/letslearn).

All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted

**SPECIAL PROGRAMMING**

**10:00 AM Sun. Jan. 17: Midreshet Yom Rishon for Women**

**Mrs. Michal Horovitz, Growth from Within**

**Rabbi Chaim Metzger, How Did the Jews React to the Plagues?**

**10:00 AM Wed. Jan. 20: Medieval Provence: Creativity and Chaos, a 3-part series  
Rabbi Sammy Bergman, Week 3: Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Medieval Modernist**

**Register at <https://torontotorah.com/provence>**

**8:15 PM Wed. Jan. 20: Supernatural Beings, a 5-part mini-series**

**With Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Week 1: Angels**

**DAILY**

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

**Monday/Wednesday: Gemara Succah, Orot haTeshuvah**

**Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Shemuel**

**WEEKLY**

**Shabbat Jan. 15-16**

**After minchah at Shaarei Shomayim, R' Sammy Bergman, Groundbreaking Responsa of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Sunday Jan. 17**

**9:20 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**

**Monday Jan. 18**

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

**Tuesday Jan. 19**

**1:30 PM Megilat Esther, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

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

**Wednesday, Jan. 20**

**6:15 AM Talmud Eruvin, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman**

**7:30 PM Genesis Journeys, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman**

**7:30 PM Greatest (Halachic) Hits of COVID: Avoiding Contagion, with Rabbi Alex Hecht**

**Thursday Jan. 21**

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

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

**8:00 PM Gemara Beitzah, with Ezer Diena (men, advanced)**

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

**Friday Jan. 22**

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

**10:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

**FOR MORE OPPORTUNITIES, GO TO [WWW.TORONTOTORAH.COM/LETSLEARN](http://WWW.TORONTOTORAH.COM/LETSLEARN)**