

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bo

10 Shevat, 5781/January 23, 2021

Vol. 12 Num. 20 (#481)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by David and Nina Bernstein  
in honour of Rabbi Chaim Metzger

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Jeffrey C. Silver  
in memory of Tzvi Zushia Aryeh ben Binyamin Kammer z"l, a tzaddik and a talmid chochom

### Strong-arm Tactics and Tefillin

### Rabbi Adam Friedmann

The very end of our parshah includes two quick paragraphs, each detailing an important mitzvah. The first is the command to eat matzah on Pesach and the prohibition against owning chametz. The second is redemption of firstborn animals and children. G-d tells Moshe that all the firstborn are to be consecrated to Him, and subsequently, a process of redemption is required. The descriptions of these mitzvot share a peculiar detail: they are both incorporated into the mitzvah of tefillin. We are told to make them "a sign" on our arms and a "memorial" between our eyes. (Shemot 13:9, 16) In both cases the reasoning for this is that G-d took us out of Egypt with a "strong arm".

Putting these mitzvot into the larger context of our parshah, we can begin to raise some questions:

- These are not the only "memorialization" mitzvot we encounter. Both the Pesach sacrifice and eating of marmor are designed to have us recall elements of the Pesach story. However, those mitzvot are not included in our tefillin. What makes matzah and redeeming the firstborn different?
- The description of the Jews being taken out with a "strong arm" is also unique to the end of the parshah. What is its significance?

Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 421) explains that tefillin are part of a series of mitzvot designed as a check against the coarser elements of human nature.

The presence of these items reminds us constantly of basic elements of our faith, enabling us to incorporate them into our general consciousness. This way, the nobler aspirations of the soul can overcome base desires. Given this explanation, it seems that the story of the Exodus left us with different types of mitzvot. Some of these, like the Pesach sacrifice and marmor, recall historical events which need to be commemorated. Others, like matzah and redeeming the firstborn, evoke eternal truths which require the constant reminder of the tefillin.

There is a debate amongst commentators about the identity of the "strong arm" involved in the Exodus, and its purpose, but the overarching message is the same according to all: the extreme and abrupt nature of the Jewish people's departure from Egypt was an event that could only be interpreted as G-d's direct action.

The simplicity of this fact threatens to mask its profundity. Of course G-d caused the Exodus! Everyone knows that! But consider in our own lives, and in recent history, how much we waffle and equivocate about whether different events were *really* examples of G-d's involvement. Our propensity to second-guess Divine providence underscores the power of a moment where everyone, even our Egyptian antagonists, unconditionally recognized G-d's manifest Will.

Two fundamental lessons regarding that Will emerged from this event. The first

is symbolized by matzah, a bread which most directly portrays its ingredients without the human intervention that would (literally) inflate them and alter their appearance. According to Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (*Ha'ameik Davar* to Shemot 13:3) this is a message about Jewish survival. No matter the great, usually very necessary, lengths to which we go to survive and thrive, these efforts only ever amount to chametz. The basic ingredient of Jewish survival is G-d's consistent providential Hand.

The second lesson is G-d's love for us. When explaining the mitzvah of redeeming the firstborn to inquisitive children, the Torah tells us to say that "when Pharaoh was obstinate in sending us out, G-d killed every firstborn in Egypt". (13:15) This description hearkens back to the very first message G-d sent to Pharaoh. "So says G-d, Israel is My firstborn son. I say to you, send out My son and he will serve Me, and if you refuse to send him, I will kill your firstborn son". (4:22-23) Notwithstanding everything the Exodus accomplished, it was, at its core, the story of a Father coming to rescue His son. This faithfulness and love are not always apparent. They weren't during the years of Egyptian slavery, nor during many years of painful exile since then. It is therefore our duty to take the shining example of the Exodus and bind it to our hearts and minds. Becoming conscious of G-d's special care for us, we can learn to see it in the tumultuous world around us and respond in kind.

[afriedmann@torontotorah.com](mailto:afriedmann@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**

The chapter begins with a coup organized by a Binyaminite named Sheva Ben Bichri. The man, described by our book as a wicked person, incites most of Israel to abandon King David – leaving him with the tribe of Yehudah alone. Before attending to the new trouble, David returns to his home in Jerusalem and separates himself from the concubines that were used by Avshalom in his attempt to conquer his father's throne. (20:1-3)

Then David begins to give orders aimed at crushing the revolt. First he sends Amasa, the former chief general of Avshalom, to replace Yoav as his own chief general. However, Amasa fails to recruit the people in the three days given to him by David. The king, not wanting to linger and allow the rebels time to organize, asks Avishai, Yoav's brother, to take his brother's men and lead the charge against Sheva. (20:4-6)

Avishai follows the king's orders, but takes Yoav with him; this was not David's order, and it was probably against David's wishes. On their way, they meet Amasa, finally back from his mission. Pretending to greet Amasa,

Yoav brutally kills him, letting his rival's body lie in blood in the midst of the highway until it is finally removed by one of the soldiers. (20:7-13)

From there on, Yoav practically re-takes command, continuing the search after Sheva. Eventually, Sheva is located in Maachah, and Yoav begins to besiege the city. A local woman cuts a deal with Yoav: Sheva's head will be handed over, and the city will be spared – and so it happened. In the aftermath of the revolt, David was again an uncontested king, and Yoav his chief general. (20:14-26)

**Analysis**

Avshalom's death brought the nation back to King David's rule, but without great enthusiasm. David's loss of control in his own home, combined with his ambiguous response to the revolt, gave an impression of weakness, and invited further attempts to undermine his kingship. While the more apparent attempt was by Sheva, and this ended in a clear victory for David, the hidden but more important act was by Yoav, who violently took charge as David's military commander.

It is hard not to see this development as another consequence of the Bat Sheva story. David's ability to punish Yoav was limited, as Yoav was presumably the only one to know that Uriah's death in combat was orchestrated by the king himself. As David himself would admit on his deathbed to his son Shlomo, Yoav's brutality escaped David's justice. (Melachim I 2:5-6) From recent chapters it also seems that he was more popular with the people. Thus, Yoav was able to impose his will on David, and maintain his high office.

Was Yoav David's most faithful soldier or a cunning warlord looking after his own interests? A cold-blooded murderer, or someone who saved many lives by ensuring that the most able warrior would lead the army? These questions remain open.

*bweintraub@torontotorah.com*

**The Israeli Farmer: Mowing Lawns During Shemita****Rabbi Sammy Bergman**

Rabbi Yosef Lieberman (*Shu"t Mishnat Yosef* 1:8) quotes a ruling of Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tucazinsky (3:2:4) that forbids cutting one's grass in the normal way during the shemita year. Rabbi Tucazinsky argues that despite the primary intention of the field owner to improve the appearance of their lawn, cutting the grass also contributes to its growth. One who cultivates plant growth violates the prohibition against working the land during shemita, even if the plant bears no fruit and serves a purely aesthetic purpose. Furthermore, Rabbi Tucazinsky postulates that when one mows their lawn, they intend for their newly trimmed grass to grow.

Rabbi Lieberman notes that Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch (*Sheviit k'Hilchatah*, pg. 60) disagrees with Rabbi Tucazinsky for three reasons:

- 1) According to experts, cutting grass does not contribute to its growth.
- 2) One who mows their lawn specifically intends to halt the growth of the grass.
- 3) The context of the act demonstrates that the landowner intends to beautify their property, not to cultivate their land.

Therefore, Rabbi Sternbuch permits cutting one's grass provided that the owner chooses an unusual tool, and only trims enough grass to prevent degeneration.

Rabbi Lieberman rejects all three prongs of Rabbi Sternbuch's argument, for two reasons. First, he argues that mowing one's lawn contributes to its growth. Second, he argues that cutting grass constitutes a forbidden act of pruning, even when one merely intends to improve the appearance of their lawn. Rabbi Lieberman proves this from a mishnah in Sheviit (4:6), which discusses trimming a

grapevine during the shemita year. The commentators on that mishnah (Rambam, Tosafot Yom Tov ad loc.) explain that one may only trim their grapevine if they deviate from their normal method of pruning, and they primarily intend to use the wood from the branches. However, one who mows their lawn typically lacks both these conditions.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Lieberman suggests that a landowner may cut their grass during the year of shemita based on a dispensation discussed in the Talmud. (Avodah Zarah 50b) The Talmud permits working on trees during the shemita year for the purpose of "*okmei ilana*" (tree preservation). One may work to maintain the health of a tree without improving it. (Rashi *ibid.* s.v. *okmei*) Rabbi Lieberman argues that letting the grass grow wild would expose the lower parts of the grass to excessive sunlight, causing the grass to yellow and lose its value. Even though the Talmud only explicitly allows tree preservation, Rabbi Lieberman argues that the dispensation applies to all plants which survive from season to season, including grass.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Lieberman notes the challenge of determining precisely when one needs to trim their grass to ensure its survival. Therefore, he recommends that landowners deviate from the normal method of lawn mowing. His suggestions include: For large areas, in which cutting the grass by hand requires excessive strain, deploy small animals. If that is unfeasible, one may mow the grass in sections, allowing weeks between the time one cuts each section, so that others will realize the cutting is not meant to improve the grass. In small areas, he recommends using shears instead of a lawnmower.

*sbergman@torontotorah.com*

**Biography**  
**Rabbi Yehuda Henkin**  
Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

**Torah and Translation**  
**On Civil Disobedience**

**Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, Akdamot, Volume 18**  
Translated by Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Until his passing last month, Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin was a prominent contemporary Orthodox halachic authority, and a prolific author. He wrote four Hebrew volumes of responsa (*Shu"t Bnei Banim*); a collection of English responsa (*Responsa on Contemporary Jewish Women's Issues*); and many halachic articles. He also wrote a book on the laws of modesty, *Understanding Tzniut: Modern Controversies in the Jewish Community*, as a response to the extremism he perceived in Rabbi Yehoshua Falk's *Oz VeHadar Levushah*. Rabbi Henkin also published several works of commentary on the Torah, in both English and Hebrew.

Rabbi Henkin was born in the United States, and he graduated from Yeshiva of Flatbush, New York. His primary teacher, however, was his grandfather, the renowned halachic authority Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin. His relationship with his grandfather is the basis for the title of his responsa, *Shu"t B'nei Banim*: "the responsa of grandsons". Once in Israel, Rabbi Henkin became the Rabbi of the Beit She'an Valley region for many years, following which he served as dean of some of the programs of Nishmat, the institution started by his wife, Rabbanit Chana Henkin. In particular, he was the official dean of the Keren Ariel Program training *yoatzot halacha*, women who help answer questions for other women about the laws of niddah and related issues.

Rabbi and Rabbanit Henkin's son, Rabbi Eitam Henkin, was one of his primary students, but was tragically killed on Succot in 2015. Recently, Koren released *Mehalchim BaMikra*, a book of Rabbi Yehuda Henkin's commentary on the Torah that had been edited by Rabbi Eitam Henkin.

As is seen in this translated piece on civil disobedience, Rabbi Henkin was very sensitive to the complexity of applying Halachah to the modern world, and greatly valued people's right to understand the world differently, if they were willing to live with the consequences.

Rabbi Henkin passed away on December 24, 2020.

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

אקדים לדיון הערה מתודית על אודות תפיסת התהליך ההלכתי שתנחה את דברי. שלושה אלמנטים בפסיקה: הלכה, מציאות והוראה. ההלכה היא התורה ה"טהורה", הנדלית מתוך הספרים. המציאות היא המצב בשטח, שאיתו צריכה ההלכה להתמודד. כדי לגשר בין שני אלה באה ההוראה, אשר לה כללים משלה המאפשרים לפוסק גמישות ומרחב תמרון באמצעות מושגים כגון בדיעבד, שעת הדחק, מוטב שיהיו שוגגין ועוד. בדרך כלל מתעוררת מחלוקת בתחום ההלכה, ורק לעתים רחוקות בתחום המציאות. לא כן הדבר בנושאים בעלי היבט אידאולוגי. לדידו של מי שסבור שהגאולה בפתח, הרי הגאולה נהפכת לחלק מן המציאות, ועל כן יש לצפות שההוראה תשתנה בהתאם. תפקיד הפוסק הוא להמעיט ככל האפשר בשיקולים שאין להם בסיס עובדתי, מתוך הכרה שגם הערכת העובדות נושאת לעתים אופי סובייקטיבי...

**נורח המצפון**

קשה לקבוע את גבולות המחאה המותרת, ובמידה מסוימת הדבר תלוי בנורמות של החברה... מכל מקום, מי שסובר שיש במדיניות ההתנתקות/ההתכנסות משום סכנה קיומית, לא יצא זכאי מבית דין של מעלה אם לא פעל כנגדה. ויש לאדם לפעול כפי מצפונו, ויזהר מכל דבר עברה. אין להתפלא אם אין הגדרות ברורות לכך, שהרי בעיות מסובכות אינן ניתנות לפתרונות קלים, כמו שאין הגדרות כאלה לחיוב המקביל של "עת לעשות לד'..." (ברכות נד.). שם הצורך הוא לפעול למען ד', וכאן למען העם והארץ...

אך כדי לעצור את מדיניות הממשלה יהיה צורך לשלם מחיר אישי. התנאי הוא אפוא שהמתנגדים למדיניות זו - והנפגעים ממנה - יהיו מוכנים לשלם את המחיר שהממשלה רשאית, גם באיוולתה, לגבות....

I will preface the discussion with a methodological comment with regards to the understanding of the halachic process that will guide my words. There are three elements of a Halachic ruling: Halachah, reality, and the ruling. Halachah is the "pure" Torah, which is drawn from books. The reality is the situation on the ground, which Halachah has to deal with. To bridge these two comes the ruling, which has its own rules that allow the authority flexibility and leeway through concepts such as *b'diavad* ["after the fact" leniency], extenuating circumstances [and the principle that] "it is better they be inadvertent sinners", and more. Usually, controversy arises in the halachic realm, and only rarely in the realm of reality. This is not the case in issues with an ideological aspect. For those who believe that redemption is imminent, redemption becomes part of reality, and therefore one should expect halachic rulings to change accordingly. The role of the halachic authority is to minimize considerations that have no factual basis as much as possible, with the recognition that the assessment of the facts also sometimes carries a subjective nature...

**The Necessity of Conscience**

It is difficult to determine the limits of permissible protest, and to some extent this depends on the norms of society... Nevertheless, anyone who believes that the policy of disengagement/withdrawal will cause existential danger, will not emerge innocent from the heavenly court if he did not act against it. And man has to act according to his conscience, and be wary of all sin. One should not be surprised if there are no clear definitions of this [appropriate action], since complicated problems cannot possibly have easy solutions, just as there are no such definitions for the parallel obligation of "it is time to act for G-d [the principle that sometimes one must break the Torah's law in order to protect the Torah]" (Berachot 54a). There the need is to act for the sake of G-d, and here, for the people and the land...

However, to stop government policy one must pay a personal price. The condition is therefore that those who oppose this policy - and those affected by it - will be willing to pay the price that the government may, even in its folly, demand.

**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 Wed. Jan. 27: Medieval Provence: Creativity and Chaos, a 4-part series  
Rabbi Sammy Bergman, Week 4: Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Medieval Modernist  
Register at <https://torontotorah.com/provence>**

**7:30 PM Wed. Jan. 27**

**Tu b'Shevat Kumsitz! Music and Torah!**

**Led by Rabbi Sammy Bergman, with Shaarei Shomayim and Beth Lida**

**Thu. Jan 28 Master Chef, Tu b'Shevat Edition!**

**Rabbi Chaim Metzger with BAYT Youth; Time TBD, email [cmetzger@torontotorah.com](mailto:cmetzger@torontotorah.com)  
Ingredients: <http://tiny.cc/15shvatrecipe> Program Zoom: <http://tiny.cc/15shvatchef>**

**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. 22-23**

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

**Sunday Jan. 24**

**9:20 AM Contemporary Halachah with Netanel Klein: Hospitality to Guests**

**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. 25**

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

**Tuesday Jan. 26**

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

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

**Wednesday, Jan. 27**

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

**7:30 PM Genesis Journeys, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman (not this week)**

**7:30 PM Greatest (Halachic) Hits of COVID, with Rabbi Alex Hecht (not this week)**

**Thursday Jan. 28 - Tu b'Shevat!**

**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. 29**

**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)**