

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Beshalach

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This issue is dedicated by Esther and Craig Guttman and Family

for the yahrtzeit of Clara Berglas בריינדל בת ישעיהו ז"ל

This issue is dedicated by Jeffrey, Annette, Zachary and Benjamin Brown

From Gaza to Eilat: Lessons from Miluim Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

As Bnei Yisrael left Egypt and began their journey toward the promised land, G-d made a very strange navigational decision. Instead of taking the shortest route through northern Sinai, adjacent to the sea, which is also called "the way of the land of the Philistines", He sent them on a circuitous route, down to the southern part of the Sinai Desert. This path led the people to approach Eretz Yisrael not through Gaza, which was inhabited by Philistines, but south of it, through Kadesh Barnea or Paran, near contemporary Eilat. [It should be noted that G-d did not lead them from that southern point into Israel on a direct route north, but rather the Jews completed a circumnavigation of the land, ultimately entering from the east, near Jericho.]

Why did G-d not let His people take the "highway", rather than make an unnecessary, extended journey into the deadly desert? The Torah answers this question in an ambiguous way: "And G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines for it was near (*karov*), because G-d said: Lest the people regret when they see war and return to Egypt." (Shemot 13:17)

The commentators were puzzled by the words "for it was near." Does this justify leading the people through the land of the Philistines (per Ramban), or clarify why He chose not to lead them through there (per Rashi and Ibn Ezra)? And if it is the latter – as seems to be the more common opinion – what would have been bad in taking that short route?

Many answers have been suggested for this question:

- The short, easy route would encourage thoughts of retreating to Egypt when war would come. (Rashi)
- The short road would not allow space and time for great miracles, and therefore the Canaanites would be less affected and more willing to fight (Shemot Rabbah 20:16)
- The short road would not allow enough time for the peace agreement signed between Avraham and Avimelech to expire. (Bereishit Rabbah 54:2)

All of these answers are good, beautiful, and correct, befitting the holy sages who proposed them. Nonetheless, maybe there is room left for another attempt to explain in what sense the proximity of Philistine land to Egypt prevented taking this route. This week, as I was serving as a reserve soldier stationed on a mountain just above Eilat and looking upon the magnificent scenery of wilderness, I suddenly understood that the word *karov*, translated above as "near", could also be translated as "resembling" or "close in appearance." Read this way, the Torah's reasoning may be understood as follows: G-d did not want the people to walk through the land of the Philistines, for it resembled Egypt too much!

Indeed, there are some striking similarities between the Egyptian kingdom and the Philistine one: The Philistine economy was also based on agriculture, using rivers or

underground water rather than rain, as demonstrated by recent archaeological digs in Afek. They also boasted a strong army and tried to influence and subdue other nations, as seen in the time of Shaul. But perhaps most important - for both Egyptians and Philistines, enslavement was seen as a means of restraining a mighty enemy, as we see regarding Shimshon. Going through this route might lead the Jews to believe that there is no other way of life, and so, when challenged by war and other difficulties, they would revert back to Egyptian ways, or to Egypt itself!

Eilat's mountains, on the other hand, offer a very different experience: not a dense urban area with developed agriculture in which the many work for the one, but a simple, nomadic way of life, which encourages freedom and independence rather than subordination and slavery (compare Guide of the Perplexed 3:32). The beautiful and majestic scenery of the desert would hopefully accompany the nation in their entrance to the land, and give them a new approach to how the society they would build would differ from the one they were leaving behind.

bweintraub@torontotorah.com

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Summary

A famine broke out in the Land of Israel, lasting for three years. Using the *urim v'tummim*, King David inquired about the cause of the famine from G-d. G-d told David that three unrectified sins had caused the famine: King Shaul's abrupt, disgraceful burial; Shaul's massacre of Nov, the city of Kohanim; and Shaul's additional slaughtering of seven Gibeonites. King David reached out to the Gibeonites and attempted to appease them. However, despite the pain that famine had inflicted upon Israel, the Gibeonites refused King David's attempt at consolation. The Gibeonites told King David that they would only be consoled if he gave them the opportunity for retribution. They asked to hang seven of Shaul's progeny in Givat Shaul. (21:1-6, and Yevamot 78b-79a)

King David chose Armoni and Mefiboshet, the two sons that Ritzpah the daughter of Ayah had birthed to Shaul, and five sons of Meirav the daughter of Shaul who had been raised by their aunt Michal. The Gibeonites killed them and hung all seven of them on a mountain before G-d. Eager to protect her children's dignity, Ritzpah sat on a piece of sackcloth and guarded

the seven corpses from birds and animals. Eventually it began to rain, signaling the end of the famine, and the bodies of Shaul's descendants were taken down from their gallows. (21:7-10, Metzudat David ad loc.)

Inspired by Ritzpah's compassion, King David decided to ensure Shaul and Yehonatan had a proper burial. He retrieved the bones of Shaul and Yehonatan from Yavesh Gilead, and buried them together with the bones of Shaul's seven descendants in the tomb of Shaul's father Kish. G-d responded by providing the people of Israel with adequate rainfall. (21:11-14, Radak *ibid.*)

The chapter ends with a description of four wars that occurred near the end of King David's life. (Malbim to 21:15) In each of these battles, the people of Israel faced off against giants. (Radak to 21:22) In the first battle against the Philistines, King David became weary and was attacked by Yishbi Venov, a giant whose weapon weighed three hundred copper weights. However, Avishai son of Tzeruyah saved David and killed Yishbi. King David's men swore that from then on, King David wouldn't go out to war with them.

During the following three battles, Sibchai the Chushite, Elchanan of a weaver family from Bethlehem, and Yehonatan the son of Shimai each vanquished gigantic foes. (21:15-21, Rashi *ibid.*)

Insight

King David's behaviour toward Shaul's descendants raises a difficult question. How could he punish Shaul's progeny for their father's sin? The Talmud (Yevamot 79a) suggests that King David intended to send a message about how the nation of Israel punishes those who persecute converts, as the Gibeonites were non-Jews who had joined the Jewish people. Furthermore, Malbim (21:6) notes that a Jewish king has the authority to use extrajudicial punishment "to engender fear and break the hand of the wicked", as noted by the Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 3:10). Finally, it's noteworthy that G-d responded to David's actions by ending the famine. (21:14)

sbergman@torontotorah.com

The Israeli Farmer: The Blessing on Measuring Grain**Rabbi Jonathan Ziring**

"The Sages taught: One who enters to measure [produce] in his granary recites: May it be Your will, Lord our G-d, that You send a blessing upon the work of our hands. [After he has] begun to measure, he recites: Blessed is He who sends a blessing upon this pile. [If one first] measured and afterward recited the blessing, it is a prayer in vain, as a blessing is not found either in an object that is weighed or in an object that is measured or in an object that is counted [as these would constitute open miracles]. Rather, [a blessing is found only] in an object that is hidden from the eye." (Taanit 8b, Bava Metzia 42a, Koren translation)

Rabbi Uri Dasberg z"l (Techumin 32) devoted an article to the recitation of this lesser-known blessing, which is recited when a farmer begins measuring the amount of grain he has harvested, both before and after he begins. As this seems to be a prayer that G-d increase the harvest, potentially even by miraculously increasing what is found in the pile, one must say the blessing before beginning, as G-d will only perform hidden miracles, but will not magically increase the amount found once the owner knows how much is present. [Rabbi Dasberg notes that while Ritva follows this understanding, Rambam seems to believe the blessing is praise, not request.]

Blessing or Prayer?

The blessing is recorded both by Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Berachot 10:22) and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 230:2). There are variant editions of the blessing, but the general thrust remains the same. Most early authorities (Rashi, Taanit 8b; Ritva, cited in Kesef Mishneh to Rambam above; Avudraham, Berachot 8) assume this is a full blessing, using the opening "*Baruch*" and including G-d's

Name. Some later authorities, however, argue that it is said as a prayer without "*Baruch*" or G-d's Name. (Levush Orach Chaim 230, Machazik Berachah *ibid.* 4)

Only in Israel?

Ramban (cited in Kesef Mishneh above) and Avudraham rule that this is a blessing unique to Israel, where G-d promises blessing to those who harvest and then separate tithes, which are only given in Israel. Thus it is said when one begins counting the produce, to perform these mitzvot. Others rule that this is a more general prayer to be said even by a store owner counting his profits. (Chayei Adam 65:2, Piskei Teshuvot Orach Chaim 230) Many late authorities (Eshel Avraham of Buczacz Orach Chaim 230, Shiyurei Berachah *ibid.*) follow Ramban.

Rabbi Dasberg notes that the two understandings may depend on different editions, some of which refer to the generic "work of our hands," while others (see Tur) contain the phrase "in this pile," which makes it clear that it is a uniquely agricultural blessing, and therefore probably limited to a farmer in Israel. Even if this is the case, however, the message that G-d is responsible for our material wealth is true everywhere. [See Piskei Teshuvot.]

jziring@torontotorah.com

Biography

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, who was born in Tel Aviv in 1968, is a Rabbi and halachic authority in Israel. He attended Yeshivat Netiv Meir for high school, and then Yeshivat Har Etzion, following which he served in the Armored Corps of the IDF as part of his *Hesder* military service. He continued to learn in Yeshivat Har Etzion, becoming the head of the *Halachah* program in its Kollel. This eventually culminated in his first book on *Shemitah*, and he still teaches *Halachah* classes in the Yeshiva.

He is the founder and Chairman of Sulamot, an organization that is at the cutting edge of innovative Jewish educational programming such as “Ratzim LaMishnah” a video series for children bringing the Mishnah to life. Through Sulamot, Rabbi Rimon has published over 20 books on a variety of topics, including halachic works relating to Shabbat, Pesach, Chanukah, Purim, Tefillah, Tefillin, Shemitah and service in the IDF, many of which have versions designed both for adults and for children of varying ages. He has even created a board game to teach the laws of *Shemitah*. His publications are renowned not only for depth and clarity, but for their beautiful flowcharts and layout which bolster the learning experience. His curricula have been published in five languages and are used worldwide. He has also been at the forefront of rabbinic ruling on issues concerning COVID-19 and *Halachah* (see accompanying translation).

Rabbi Rimon was extremely involved in the resettlement of Jews displaced by the disengagement from Gaza, founding Job Katif to help those from Gush Katif find new homes and jobs. In 2014, the Jewish National Fund awarded him the Moskowitz Prize for Zionism on behalf of his efforts for the Jews of Gush Katif. Since then, Job Katif has become La’Ofek, which has expanded its reach to include other groups living on the sidelines of society such as Ethiopian Jews, soldiers from low socio-economic backgrounds, and “at risk” youth.

Rabbi Rimon currently serves as the Rosh Kollel at the Jerusalem College of Technology – Lev Academic Center (also known as JCT or Machon Lev) as well as the Rabbi of the Alon Shvut South community.

cmetzger@torontotorah.com

Torah and Translation

Outdoor Minyanim in Cold Weather

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, Sulamot.org

Translated by Rabbi Chaim Metzger

מעלת תפילה בציבור

ממקורות רבים בגמרא עולה בבירור שיש מעלה גדולה לתפילה בציבור, מפני שתפילת הציבור תמיד מתקבלת לפני הקב"ה (ראו למשל ברכות ז; ח. נ. ... אך האם יש גם חובה להתפלל בציבור? בשולחן ערוך (צ' ט) נפסק: ישתדל אדם להתפלל בבית הכנסת עם הציבור. מלשון זו אפשר להבין שתפילה בציבור איננה חובה מוחלטת, וצריך רק להשתדל לעשות זאת...

תפילה בציבור – חובה

אולם ממקורות אחרים עולה שיש צורך להתאמץ עבור תפילה בציבור, ונראה מהם שיש בכך מצווה ואולי אף חובה...

הלכה למעשה

למעשה, אם אדם יכול להתפלל בצורה סבירה בחוץ, הרי שגם אם לא יוכל לכוון בצורה מלאה, ותפילתו תהיה מהירה יותר ולא נחת – עדיף להתפלל במניין. אם אדם זה סובל במיוחד מהקור, יותר מאחרים, ולכן הוא סובל במהלך התפילה ובוודאי שאיננו יכול לכוון כלל, יכול להתפלל ביחידות בביתו (ועדיף שיתפלל באותה שעה שהציבור מתפללים), ובוודאי במציאות הקרוונה (ואם רוצה, יכול להתפלל בביתו וללכת למניין כדי לשמוע קדיש וקדושה). גם במקרה זה ראוי מידי פעם להתפלל בציבור (לפחות תפילות קצרות יותר, כמו מנחה וערבית).

כמוכן שכל דברינו אמורים כשאין חשש סיכון בתפילה בציבור, אבל אם יש חשש סיכון (ובוודאי אם הדבר נוגד את ההנחיות הרפואיות) או שמדובר על אדם שנמצא בקבוצת סיכון וכדומה, יש להתפלל בבית ביחידות, ויש בכך קיום מצוות “ונשמרתם מאוד לנפשותיכם”.

בע"ה שנוחה להתפלל במניין ומתוך כוונה גדולה, בשמחה ובטוב לבב.

The Virtue of Communal Prayer

From many sources in the Talmud, it emerges clearly that there is a great virtue to communal prayer, since the prayer of the community is always accepted before G-d (see, for example, Berachot 7b, 8a). ... But is there also an obligation to pray with the community? The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 90:9) rules, “A person should strive to pray in the synagogue with the community.” From this language, it is possible to understand that praying with the community isn’t an absolute obligation, and one needs only to try to do so...

Communal Prayer - an Obligation

However, it arises from other sources that there is a need to make an effort to pray with the community, and it seems from [those sources] that there is a mitzvah and perhaps an obligation [to do so]...

In Practice

In practice, if someone is able to pray reasonably well outside, even though he will not be able to concentrate to the fullest extent and his prayer will be at a faster pace and not relaxed, it is [still] preferable to pray with a minyan. If this individual suffers in particular due to the cold, more than others, and he is suffering throughout the prayer and is certainly unable to focus at all, he may pray by himself at home (and preferably should pray at the same time the community prays), and certainly in a reality of coronavirus (and if he wants, he may pray at home and then go to the minyan to hear *kaddish* and *kedushah*). Even under these circumstances, it is proper to pray with the community from time to time (at least for shorter prayers, such as *mincha* and *arvit*).

Obviously, all that we have discussed is [only applicable] when there is no risk of danger in praying with the community, but if there is a risk of danger (and certainly if it goes against medical guidelines) or if a person is in a [high]-risk category or similar, they should pray in their house by themselves, and through this, fulfill the mitzvah of, “And you shall guard yourselves carefully.”

With G-d’s help, may we merit to pray with a minyan with great concentration, happiness and a contented heart.

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

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

9:30-11:00 AM Sunday Jan. 31: Business Ethics

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Corporate Social Responsibility

Eligible for CE credit, Laypeople welcome, Register at <https://torontotorah.com/business>

10:00 AM Wed. Feb. 3: The Strongest Jew: Samson, a 3-part series

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Week 1: Restraint or Rule-Breaking?

Register at <https://torontotorah.com/samson>

8:15 PM Wed. Feb. 3: Supernatural Beings, a 5-part mini-series

With Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Week 2: Demons

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. 29-30

After minchah at Shaarei Shomayim, R' Sammy Bergman, Groundbreaking Responsa of the 20th Century

Sunday Jan. 31

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 Midrash on the Parshah with Rabbi Chaim Metzger

Monday Feb. 1

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

Tuesday Feb. 2

1:30 PM Megilat Esther, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

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

Wednesday, Feb. 3

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, with Rabbi Alex Hecht

Thursday Feb. 4

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

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

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

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

Friday Feb. 5

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

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

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