

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Yitro

24 Shevat, 5781/February 6, 2021

Vol. 12 Num. 22 (#483)

This issue is dedicated by Helen & David Wm. Brown & Family, and Golda Brown & Harry Krakowsky & Family, for the yahrtzeit of David and Golda's father, Al G. Brown אליהו גדליהו בן ירוחם פישל ז"ל

This issue is dedicated by Ralph and Paulette Frisch in memory of Ralph's father Zeev ben Raphael Frischwasser z"l, and his grandfather Avraham ben Tzvi HaLevi Levitan z"l

Divine Retribution

When Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, joined Bnei Yisrael in the desert, Moshe informed him of numerous miracles Hashem had performed for the Jewish nation. (Shemot 18:8, Rashi ad loc.) Understandably, Yitro rejoiced upon hearing about the ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, and the victory against Amalek. However, as expressed in Shemot 18:11, Yitro proclaimed his appreciation of Hashem's greatness in a peculiar and cryptic way. Yitro declared that he knew: "Hashem is greater than all the gods" because "*badavar asher zadu aleihem*", loosely translated: "with the matter they had schemed upon them". Yitro's statement raises two exegetical difficulties. First, simply translating the second half of the verse requires creativity. Second, what specifically impressed Yitro, which caused him to realize Hashem's greatness?

One approach to Yitro's exclamation focuses on **Hashem's insight into the Egyptians' evil machinations**. Ramban (ad loc.) interprets the verse as follows: "through the matter in which the Egyptians willfully schemed against Israel, I know that Hashem is greater than all the gods." Ramban explains that since Hashem had decreed that the nation of Israel would suffer through slavery and oppression (Bereishit 15:13), if the Egyptians had merely subjugated the Jewish people, Hashem would not have punished them so severely. However, the Egyptians went much further. They plotted to wipe out Israel altogether,

and threw male Jewish infants into the sea. Therefore, Hashem led the Egyptians to their destruction. Yitro praised Hashem's ability to detect the evil plans in the hearts of the Egyptians and punish them accordingly.

Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven ("Ran", Derashot HaRan 11) adopts a similar position, but adds another dimension to Hashem's precision in punishing Egypt. Ran notes that instead of simply coercing Pharaoh to free the Jewish people, Hashem waited until Pharaoh consented to let the Jews leave. Furthermore, by ordering Moshe to tell Pharaoh that the Jews only wanted to leave for three days to serve Hashem in the desert (Shemot 3:18), Hashem incited Pharaoh to pursue the nation of Israel even after he had freed them. Rabbi Nissim suggests that Hashem wanted to punish the Egyptians for the devious plot they had deliberately executed against Israel. Therefore, He caused them to willfully run into the water and drown themselves. Yitro understood the brilliance of Hashem's execution of justice and therefore proclaimed: "Now I know Hashem is greater than all the gods." (18:11)

A second approach to understanding Yitro's cryptic statement concentrates on the idea that Hashem punishes ***middah k'neged middah*** or "measure for measure". A midrash (Shemot Rabbah 22) explains our verse: "With the same thing they attempted [to use to eradicate] Israel, with that thing the Omnipresent punished them."

Rabbi Sammy Bergman

Don Isaac Abarbanel (Shemot ad loc.) explains that in return for attempting to drown Jewish children in the Nile, Hashem brought the Red Sea upon the Egyptians. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (Kedushat Levi ibid.) adds that the Egyptians worshipped and drew its spiritual strength from the Nile River. Therefore, it was doubly impressive that Hashem harnessed the power of water to vanquish them.

Other commentaries expand the concept of *middah k'neged middah* beyond the limited scope of punishment by water. Malbim (Shemot ad loc.) notes that all ten plagues corresponded to the various forms of suffering the Egyptians inflicted upon the Jewish people. [See Shemot Rabbah 9:10.] Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Birkat haNetziv to Mechilta Beshalach 6) uses this idea to explain a perplexing passage in the Haggadah which describes numerous plagues the Egyptians suffered at the Red Sea. He explains that Hashem personalized the punishment of each Egyptian. They each felt the same anguish to which they had subjected their Jewish slaves.

While we normally focus on Hashem's mercy, Yitro recognized that we can also learn by paying attention to Hashem's justice. Hashem's precise, multifaceted retaliation against the Egyptians demonstrated His omniscience and omnipotence. May we internalize the lessons of Divine justice without ever having to experience it ourselves.

sbergman@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, 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

We are grateful to
Continental Press

Summary

This chapter records the song that David sings “on the day that G-d saved him from the hand of all his enemies and the hand of Shaul.” (22:1)

The song is divided into thanking G-d for saving David from the travails he faced before he was king (2-20) and those he faced after he became king (33-51), and reflections about the nature of Divine providence in general (21-32).

David highlights how G-d saved him when he prayed (4-7), helped him in his wars (33-43), and enabled him to establish his kingdom (44-46). He further records that G-d saved him as reward for keeping the Torah (21-25), while punishing those who do not (27). David also reflects on G-d’s justice more generally, noting that G-d consistently treats people according to what they deserve (28-33). David then concludes by praising G-d (47-49) and committing to sing G-d’s praises because of all that G-d has done for him (51-52).

When Was it Written?

A similar song, with some minor changes, is included in Tehillim 18. Professor Yehuda Kil suggests that the song was originally oral, and the

authors of Sefer Shemuel (Shemuel, Gad, and Natan according to Bava Batra 14b-15a) wrote down this version, while David wrote down the version in Tehillim himself. (Summary of chapter in Daat Mikra edition of Shemuel)

Professor Kil (ibid.) concisely summarizes the views as to when this song was written.

1. Rashi and Radak contend that David wrote this toward the end of his life, after he had been saved from all of the enemies he faced during his lifetime. The fact that Shaul is mentioned as separate from David’s general “enemies” indicates that Shaul remained David’s primary foe, despite all that David faced in his later years. (Rashi, Daat Mikra possibility 1 in 22:1) Alternatively, the enmity with Shaul caused many of David’s later troubles, and thus Shaul and all he represented continued to be relevant to David throughout his life. (Daat Mikra possibility 2)
2. Abaranel, however, argues that David wrote this song when he was young, and Shaul was in fact the enemy from whom he had

been saved. However, the song is only recorded at the end of his life because David would sing this song whenever he was saved, similar to the way all of Tehillim can be used as prayers in a myriad of circumstances, regardless of the exact historical reason David wrote them originally.

3. Rabbi Ezra Tzion Melamed argues that David wrote this in the middle of his reign, close to when he requested from G-d that he be allowed to build the Beit HaMikdash. He notes that this is the only time in David’s life where the prophet records that David had peace (Shemuel II 7:1), and thus he could plausibly say that G-d had saved him from “all his enemies.” Like Abaranel, he writes that David continued to invoke this song and update it throughout his life.

jziring@torontotorah.com

The Israeli Farmer: Raising Sheep in Israel**Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, Peninei Halakha Kashrut 1, 13:15**

A mishnah forbids raising small [domesticated] cattle (e.g. goats) in Eretz Yisrael, but permits raising them in Syria or in the wildernesses of Eretz Yisrael. (Bava Kama 7:7) Is this prohibition applicable in modern Israel?

Early authorities provide two reasons for this prohibition – either for the sake of settling the Holy Land, as the animals severely impact grasslands (Rashi, Bava Kama 79b), or because of the severe damage these animals may cause when invading the property of other Jews. (Rambam, Laws of Damages 5:2) [Of course, one may not invade anyone’s property, whether Jew or non-Jew. However, the step of not raising animals which *might* invade property is a precaution specifically regarding Jews.]

The reason for the law may determine its application. For example: if the reason is the holiness of Israel, then it may not apply in mainly Jewish lands outside Israel. (Bava Kama 80a) Also, if the reason is the harm to Jewish neighbours, then the law may not apply in Israel when the population is largely not Jewish. In the latter case, *Kaftor vaFerach* 10 rules that the prohibition still applies, in line with Rashi’s approach, while the Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 409:1) rules that the prohibition does not apply. As the Vilna Gaon explains, the Shulchan Aruch seems to side with the Rambam’s explanation for the law. (Biur haGra ad loc.)

The obvious question is what should be the law now, as with Hashem’s mercy, we have returned to our land, and most of the fields now belong to Jews?

Contemporary authorities have debated this issue:

- Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook (Igrot haRa”ayah 1:32), and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer III, Choshen Mishpat 3) prohibit raising small cattle in Israel today.
- Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog (Teshuvot u’P’sakim, Choshen Mishpat 104), Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli (Amud HaYemini 23), and Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (Tzitz Eliezer, 7:24-25) are lenient.

Rabbi Melamed mentions a few reasons for permitting:

- 1) According to the Shulchan Aruch, the main reason for the prohibition is to avert potential damage. Today, landowners are willing to accept the risk as long as they will be paid for any damage that does happen.
- 2) In our times, small cattle can be raised without allowing them to graze on others’ property.
- 3) Even according to Rashi’s opinion, that the prohibition is related to the commandment to settle the land, it can still be argued that in our situation, shepherding small cattle is an important way to keep possession of Israeli land. This very rationale should lead to allowing the raising of small cattle.

Rabbi Melamed concludes that the common practice seems to follow the more lenient opinion, according to the general rule preferring leniency in disputes relating to rabbinic prohibitions.

bweintraub@torontotorah.com

Biography

Don Isaac Abarbanel

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Don Isaac Abarbanel was born in 1437 in Lisbon, Portugal. The Abarbanel family had lived on the Iberian Peninsula since the destruction of the Second Temple. There, they became an influential family in the Jewish community and amongst the Portuguese monarchy. Don Isaac Abarbanel's father, Yehudah, was a treasurer to King Alfonso V, a position that Don Isaac Abarbanel himself filled after his father's passing. He also became a close council to King Alfonso V; he wrote that the King relied upon his judgment.

Don Isaac Abarbanel's good fortune changed with the passing of King Alfonso V and the ascension of his son, John II, to the throne. Don Isaac Abarbanel was accused of taking part in a plot to usurp the new King's throne and had to flee Portugal for his life. He went to Toledo, Spain where he remained until 1492, the year of the Expulsion of Jews from Spain by order of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. He went to great lengths in his diplomatic and financial attempts to prevent the Expulsion. However, he was ultimately unsuccessful. The rest of Don Isaac Abarbanel's life is defined by exile, moving from location to location. Eventually, his travels led him around the coastline of Italy, ending in Venice, where he passed away in 1508.

After fleeing from Portugal, Don Isaac Abarbanel began writing his commentaries to Tanach. His style of writing is unique in a number of ways. Unlike many other Rishonim, "the Abarbanel", as he is generally known, did not write in a terse manner, preferring instead to explain his ideas at length. Many of his works are organized in a very specific, clear manner: At the beginning of many of his works, the Abarbanel lists questions and difficulties that he has with the text at hand. These questions guide his commentary throughout. Whenever he has answered a question he makes note of this, allowing the reader to maintain context and clarity.

Don Isaac Abarbanel sought a balance between clarifying the literal intent of the source material and tapping into the deeper lessons contained within. In a number of places, most notably his comments on the Passover Haggadah, one can find his life experiences woven into his comments.

enrosenzweig@gmail.com

Torah and Translation

The Thirteen Commandments?

Don Isaac Abarbanel, Commentary to Shemot 20:1

Translated by Ezer Diena

השאלה הא': במספר הדברות אמרה תורה "ויגד לכם את בריתו אשר צוה אתכם לעשות עשרת הדברים וגומר" והנה לא ימלט אם שנאמר שהם עשרה כפי מנין המצות שיש בהם או כפי המאמרים הגוזרים הנמצאים בס או כפי מספר הדרושים שבהם.

ושקר שנאמר שהם עשרה כפי המצות הנה כפי דעת מוני המצות יש בדברות האלה י"ג מצות והוא מבואר בפסוקים. ושקר גם כן שהמאמרים הגוזרים אשר בהם עשרה כי הם באמת י"ח או יותר כמו שתראה מהם, לא עשרה בלבד. ולא נוכל ג"כ לומר שיש בהם עשרה דרושים לפי ש"אנכי" ו"לא יהיה לך" עד "אלף דור" הוא דרוש אחד ומאמר מקושר יכלול שהוא ית' אלקינו שהוציאנו ממצרים ולכן לא יהיה לנו ולא נעבוד אלוה [חול] זולתו, ואם היה כל זה דרוש אחד יהיו אם כן כל דרושי הדברות תשעה לא עשרה אם לא שנשים החמדה שני דבורים – "לא תחמוד אשת רעך" אחד ו"לא תחמוד בית רעך" אחד - כמו שפירשו קצת מהמפרשים, והוא דרך זר מאד אין ראוי לקבלו. ואיך היו אם כן דברות עשרה...

אחרי הקדמתי זאת אומר ראשונה בדברו' שלא היה מספר' עשרה בערך המצו' שבהם ולא כפי הדרושים, אלא כפי הדבורים ששמעו וההפסקות שהיו בין דבור לדבור. כי הם שמעו ראשונה דבור "אנכי" עד "מבית עבדים" ונפסק... שעם היות שאמרו שכל הדברות נאמרו כאחד... לא כחשו שנאמרו גם כן בהפסקות והבדלי המאמרים והוא האמת. והותרה בזה השאלה האחת:

Question 1: Regarding the number of *dibrot*, the Torah says: "and He told to you his covenant, which He commanded you to do, the ten *devarim*...", and behold, [we] cannot escape [from a question], whether we say that the ten is according to the number of [formally counted] *mitzvot* in them, or for the directives that are found in them, or for the number of *derushim* [Rabbi Avishai Schotland interprets this word to mean topics] in them.

It would be false to say that they are ten according to the *mitzvot* [contained within], because according to the understanding of the *mitzvah*-counters, these *dibrot* contain 13 *mitzvot*, as is clear from the verses. It would be false to say that the number of directives in them number ten, because they are 18 or more, as you can see in them, not only ten. And we also can't say that there are ten *derushim*, because "I am" and "You shall not have" until "thousand generations" are one *derush* and a connected saying, [which] includes that He, the blessed One is our G-d who took us out of Egypt and therefore, we should neither have nor worship any god other than Him, and if this is all considered one *derush*, if so, the number of *derushim* will be nine, not ten, unless we would split desire into two statements – "do not desire your friend's wife" as one, and "do not desire your friend's house" as one, as some of the commentaries have explained - [but] it would be a very strange approach, and it is not fitting to accept it. If so, how were the *dibrot* ten?...

After this introduction I will say first about the *dibrot* that they were not numbered as ten according to the *mitzvot* contained in them, and not according to the number of *derushim*, rather, according to the number of pronouncements [as evidenced by] the breaks between each [section of] speech. Because they first heard "I am" until "from the house of slaves", and then stopped... Despite the fact that [the Sages] said all of the *dibrot* were said as one... they do not deny that they were also said with breaks and different pronouncements, and this is the truth. And with this we have answered the first question.

COME LEARN WITH US!

**Click Underlined Lines to Open Zooms. Clickable links also at www.torontotorah.com/letslearn
All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted**

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

**10:00 AM Sun. Feb. 7: A PURIM Midreshet Yom Rishon for Women <http://tiny.cc/purimmyr>
Rebbetzin Miriam Milevsky, Connections
Rabbi Hillel Horovitz, Did Mordechai and Esther Refuse to Make Aliyah?**

**10:00 AM Wed. Feb. 10: The Strongest Jew: Samson, a 3-part series
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Week 2: Restraint or Rule-Breaking?
Register at <https://torontotorah.com/samson>**

**8:15 PM Wed. Feb. 10: Supernatural Beings, a 5-part mini-series
With Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Week 3: Constellations**

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 Feb. 5-6

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

Sunday Feb. 7

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. 8

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

Tuesday Feb. 9

1:30 PM Megilat Esther, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

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

Wednesday, Feb. 10

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. 11

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 Metziah, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University women)

Friday Feb. 12, Rosh Chodesh Adar (Day 1)

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