

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Shemini/Parah

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated in memory of Mrs. Julia Koschitzky ז"ל יהודית בת משה ושמחה נחמה ז"ל a leader of our community and the Jewish world as a whole

This issue of Toronto Torah is sponsored by the families of Irwin, Jim and David Diamond in memory of their father, Morris Diamond ז"ל משה בן דוד שלמה ז"ל לזכר ולעילוי נשמת אבינו מורינו ר'

## We Didn't Start the (Strange) Fire

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

Parshat Shemini opens with Aharon and his sons finally beginning their service as priests. Things take a turn for the worst, though, when Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu bring an *ایش zarah* ("strange fire"), which had not been commanded, to the altar for Hashem. This resulted in a fire coming forth from Hashem and consuming the two young priests, killing them. (Vayikra 10:1-2) To properly understand this event, we must examine what exactly this "strange fire" was and why it prompted such a striking reaction from Hashem.

The Talmud (Eruvin 63a) cites Rabbi Eliezer's explanation that Nadav and Avihu were punished for issuing a halachic ruling - to bring the fire - in the presence of their teacher, Moshe. This position is quoted by Rashi (Vayikra 10:2) in addition to an alternative approach in the name of Rabbi Yishmael. The latter's opinion (Vayikra Rabbah 12:1) was that Nadav and Avihu were punished because they brought their offering while intoxicated. The proof brought for this opinion is that a mere few verses later, Hashem commands that no sacrifices be drunkenly offered. (Vayikra 10:8-11)

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (*Likutei Moharan* 41) expands on this discussion, teaching that excitement in holiness can be likened to wine that gladdens, while the uncommanded "strange fire" can instead be likened to wine that makes one intoxicated and strengthens the evil inclination. In many ways, this position bridges the gap between

the two ideas that Rashi shares. Nadav and Avihu were so excited to serve Hashem that they could not wait to hear from Moshe about how they should go about it. That excitement unfortunately led them to do something that was ultimately against Hashem's will. In effectively becoming drunk with excitement, they went too far and caused profanity rather than sanctification.

But why would Nadav and Avihu have thought that they could take such important religious matters into their own hands in the first place? Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner, the Ishbitzer Rebbe, answers this question while adding yet another layer of depth to these happenings. Rabbi Leiner wrote (*Mei HaShiloach*, Shemini) that all sins recorded in the Torah have a lesson to teach all of Israel. So what can we learn from the deaths of Nadav and Avihu?

... the incident of Nadav and Avihu recorded in the Torah comes to teach the individual fear. For they too were clean [of sin] through their mother, for she was the sister of Nachshon son of Aminadav, from whom emerged the kingdom of the house of David. And a king may breach a fence, since he is confident that his will is the will of G-d, blessed be He. They could, therefore, rely on their will, which was surely from G-d, blessed be He. But G-d, blessed be He, showed that a person should do nothing without [first] clarifying it seven times. (translation by Rabbi Itamar Eldar)

In other words, Nadav and Avihu were at a high enough level that they would have been able to intuit the Divine Will. However, they didn't make sure that it was in fact what Hashem really wanted. They trusted their gut and went straight into service without taking time to confirm their intuitions, and that is why they were punished.

The four approaches we've seen are united in a fundamental way: Nadav and Avihu put themselves above what was expected of them as priests. Whether due to disrespecting the authority structure, being intoxicated on the job, getting too immersed in their excitement, or not using proper confirmation protocol, the two thought that their feelings were more important than those of anyone else in the camp.

This fire of self-gratification at the expense of the ideal system has, to quote Billy Joel, been "burning since the world's been turning." After all, the sin in Gan Eden, murder of Hevel at the hands of Kayin, and so many more sins, had a similar root. Billy Joel sang that even though we didn't light this fire, we still try to fight it. But Nadav and Avihu didn't. Rather than fight that fire, they added oil, resulting in a lesson for all Israel to learn: There is room for excitement in our service of Hashem, but we can never lose sight of our primary obligations as servants of Hashem.

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**Summary**

The chapter begins by introducing King Yoshiyahu, who became king at the age of eight and ruled for thirty-one years. He is described as righteous, following the ways of King David without deviation. (22:1-2)

In the eighteenth year of his monarchy, Yoshiyahu asked Shafan ben Atzalyahu, a scribe, to go to the Beit Hamikdash together with the kohen gadol, Chilkiyahu, to oversee repairs and renovations. They bought proper materials for the renovations, and the workers toiled honestly. (22:3-7)

In the process of the renovation, Chilkiyahu found a Torah scroll. He presented it to Shafan the scribe, and the latter presented and read it to King Yoshiyahu. Yoshiyahu heard the contents of the Torah and immediately tore his clothes. Commentators suggest that King Yoshiyahu was frightened because Chilkiyahu read aloud the warnings of punishment found in Devarim 28. [See Ralbag to 22:11 and Metzudat David to 22:8.] (22:8-11)

Commentators also suggest that the Torah scroll itself was special, aside from the contents which Shafan read to

the king. According to Rashi (commentary to 22:8), this Torah was a rare survivor of a purge of Torah scrolls conducted by a previous king named Achaz. However, this is difficult; as Radak notes, King Chizkiyahu succeeded Achaz and spread knowledge of Torah. Rather, many commentators suggest that this was the special Torah written by Moshe, stored in the Sanctuary. [See Devarim 31:24-26 and Divrei haYamim II 34:14, which support this understanding. See as well Sefer ha'Ikkarim 3:22.]

King Yoshiyahu commanded Shafan, Chilkiyahu, Achikam ben Shafan, Achbor, and his servant Asaiah to go to the prophet Chuldah, the wife of Shalum. The Talmud suggests that the king sent them to Chuldah, rather than the male Yirmiyahu, because women are more merciful than men. (Megillah 14b) (22:2-14)

Chuldah told them to tell the king that Hashem was indeed going to bring disaster upon this place and its inhabitants, because they didn't observe the Torah and were instead invested in idol worship. (22:15-17)

Chuldah also sent a special message

for King Yoshiyahu, telling him that if he would repent, soften his heart, and humble himself in front of Hashem, then He would die peacefully and be buried respectfully in the estate of his forefathers. He would not witness the disaster coming for Jerusalem. (22:18-20)

**Insight**

Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser (Malbim commentary to 22:7) notes that the kohen gadol Chilkiyahu found the Torah and presented it to Shafan, who was in charge of the renovation of the Beit HaMikdash. Malbim says that this conveys an educational idea: the one in charge of the renovations should specifically be the one to learn the Torah. Shafan was busying himself with building the Beit haMikdash externally - only making it better on the outside. However, it is more important to renovate the Sanctuary and invest in our personal service of Hashem on the inside. Often we spend a lot of money on the most beautiful etrog, megillah, kiddush cup or tallit. However, it is much more important to invest in our internal growth by learning and internalizing the teachings and values of the Torah.

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**It Happened in Israel: The Sound of Silence****Idan Rakovsky**

The relationship between the Jews in Israel and the Roman Empire has always been the subject of intense controversy. In a number of sources and midrashim we find our Sages arguing among themselves about the right attitude toward foreign rulers.

One of these stories (Shabbat 33b) tells of rabbis who sat together and discussed the deeds of the Romans. Focusing on this story gives us a glimpse into the political world of our rabbis and the ways they each chose to get involved and interpret the politics of their time.

Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yosi, and Rabbi Shimon were sitting, and Yehudah, son of converts, sat beside them.

Rabbi Yehudah opened and said: How pleasant are the actions of this nation, the Romans, as they established marketplaces, established bridges, and established bathhouses. **Rabbi Yosi was silent.** Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai responded; Everything that they established, they established only for their own purposes...

Yehudah, son of converts, went and related their statements to his household, and those statements continued to spread until they were heard by the monarchy.

[The Romans] said: Yehudah, who elevated the Roman regime, shall be elevated and appointed as head of the Sages. **Yosi, who remained silent, shall be exiled from his home in Judea as punishment, and sent to the city of Tzippori in the Galilee.** And Shimon, who denounced the government, shall be killed. (adapted from Koren tr.)

Of these sages, why did Rabbi Yosi remain silent? Did he really have no opinion regarding the Romans' deeds? In actu-

ality, Rabbi Yosi's silence may mean much more than indifference. By tracing various statements of Rabbi Yosi throughout the Talmud, we can understand why Rabbi Yosi said nothing here.

- Sources indicate that Rabbi Yosi tried to avoid disagreements and spoke about them as being less than ideal: "Rabbi Yosi said: Initially, discord would not proliferate among Israel. Rather, the court of seventy-one judges would sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone [and resolve all disputes]" (Sanhedrin 88b).
- Moreover, we find that Rabbi Yosi argued for peace when groups could not get along. See for example, an instance when Rabbi Yosi protested against a conflict between the schools of Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah. (Kiddushin 52b)
- Furthermore, even when he does not agree with his colleagues, Rabbi Yosi is found more than once acknowledging the value of his opponents' positions. (For example, Bava Batra 22b and Yevamot 32b)

All of this suggests that perhaps Rabbi Yosi's silence in our story does not stem from a lack of opinion, but from a desire to make peace between the parties. The desire to avoid controversy is the sound that Rabbi Yosi is making in his silence.

[It is worth noting that the Sages rejected silence when it could lead to others' suffering. Consider Rabbi Simai's statement that Iyov was an advisor to Pharaoh when he decided to enslave the Jews, and he was punished because he remained silent rather than protest. (Sotah 11a)]

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## Biography

### Rabbi Moshe Glasner

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

Rabbi Moshe Shemuel Glasner (1856-1924) was born and raised in Klausenberg (today Cluj, Romania). His father, Rabbi Avraham Glasner was the local Rabbi. On his mother's side he was a fourth-generation descendant of Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Chatam Sofer). The young Rabbi Glasner studied under his father and succeeded the latter as rabbi of Klausenberg upon his death in 1877. He retained this position until he retired in 1923 to move to Israel.

Rabbi Glasner's original thinking and methodology left him at odds with much of the rabbinic establishment of his time. He rejected the *pilpul* method of study and advocated for a return to the method of medieval scholars, which he understood to be a clear-headed pursuit of the truth at all costs. As such, Rabbi Glasner didn't hesitate to critique the works of earlier rabbinic figures when he understood something to be wrong.

Another display of Rabbi Glasner's originality was his support of Zionism, something highly unusual for Hungarian rabbis at the time. He was a founding member of the Mizrahi religious Zionist movement, and a personal friend of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook. He wrote and spoke openly about the importance of Zionism and the need for Jews to move to Israel. These positions prompted a lot of criticism from the local rabbinate, much of which was strongly opposed to Zionism.

In the introduction to his *Dor Revi'i*, Rabbi Glasner develops a fascinating approach to the nature of the Oral Law which dovetails with his method of study, as described above. In this theory, Halachah wasn't given by G-d as a complete and absolute set of rules. Rather, Halachah emerges over the course of history as scholars in different generations attempt to interpret the written Torah. This constant evolution is the reason why the Oral Law was never meant to be written down. Rabbi Glasner viewed the commitment of the Oral Torah to writing, while necessary, as contrary to its nature. His vision of Zionism included returning the Oral Torah to its original format.

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## Torah and Translation

### Written Torah vs. Oral Torah

Rabbi M. Glasner, Introduction to Dor Revi'i on Chullin

Translated by Rabbi Adam Friedmann

אבל דע, דהנה החילוק הגדול והנגלה לעין כל שבין תורה שבכתב לתורה שבעל פה הוא כי תורה שבכתב נמסרה למשה מלה במלה, מבראשית עד לעיני כל ישראל, ותושבע"פ נמסר לו הענין, ולא המלות.

ועל זה אמרו ז"ל "כל הנביאים נתנבאו ב'כה אמר ד'", הוסיף עליהם משה שנתנבאו ב'כה' וב'זה הדבר', "רוצה לומר הנביאים לא קבלו המלות למסור לישראל אלא הענין, והם מסרו את הענין כפי הבנתם בלשון עצמם, וזה "כה אמר ד'", אבל משה התנבא ב'כה' וב'זה הדבר', דהיינו תורה שבכתב "בזה הדבר" ותורה שבעל פה "בכה אמר ד'", תורה שבכתב מלה במלה כאשר קבלה, ותורה שבעל פה הענין בלשון עצמו. והיינו דאמרי חז"ל "אין שני נביאים מתנבאים בסגנון אחד, רוצה לומר אותה נבואה עצמה, כל אחד ואחד אמרה בסגנונו ובלשונו המיוחדת לו... דהלכה למשה מסיני לא נמסר לן רק הענינים, ומשה רבינו מסר לן מה שהבין מקבלת סיני.

והנה כל ענין הנמסר על פה, בטבעו מונח שישונה בהבנתו מאיש לאיש, דכל אחד מכניס בו מעט מהשגתו והבנתו הפרטית, ועיין רש"י כתובות נ"ז ע"א ד"ה הא קמ"ל וז"ל: "איכא למימר אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים הם, דזמנין דשייך האי טעמא, וזמנין דשייך האי טעמא, שהטעם מתהפך לפי שינוי הדברים בשינוי מועט" עכ"ל. ומהאי טעמא פסלו עד מפי עד, דכיון דהשומע לא ישמור המלות רק הענין, וימסור לשלישי כפי הבנתו, ובקל ישונה העדות, וממילא עשרה ששמעו דבר אחד, או ראו ענין אחד בכתב, כאו"א מבין אותם בסגנון שלו כפי שכלו ודעתו, כי אין דעות בני אדם שווין.

But know that the big and obviously discernible difference between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah is that the Written Torah was given to Moshe word-for-word from "Bereishit" through "before the eyes of all of Israel". Regarding the Oral Torah he was given only concepts and not words.

This is what the Sages meant when they said that all the prophets prophesied with "so said G-d", but Moshe prophesied with "so [said G-d]" and "this is the thing [that G-d said]". This means to say that the [other] prophets didn't receive words to transmit to the Jewish people. They received concepts and related these concepts in their own words based on their own understanding. This is the meaning of "so said G-d". But Moshe prophesied with both "so [said G-d]" and "this is the thing [that G-d said]". Meaning that the Written Torah [was transmitted in a manner of] "this is the thing", and the Oral Torah [in a manner of] "so said G-d". [Moshe transmitted] the Written Torah word-for-word as he received it, and the concepts of the Oral Torah in his own words. This is what the Sages meant when they said that no two prophets prophesize in the same style. This means that even the same prophecy is expressed by each [prophet] in his own unique style and language... The laws [of the Oral Torah] were given to Moshe at Sinai as concepts, and Moshe transmitted to us what he understood from what he received at Sinai.

And it is the nature of things transmitted orally that their understanding changes from person to person. Because each person inserts some of his personal conception and understanding. See Rashi (Ketuvot 57a) where he writes: "We can say that these and those are the words of the living G-d, because sometimes one conception applies, and sometimes another conception applies, because the [appropriate] conception changes based on small changes in the circumstances." For this reason, [the Sages] disqualified a witness who heard his testimony from another witness. This is because the one hearing the testimony [meaning, the second witness] doesn't absorb the words but rather the ideas. And he transmits

them to a third party based on his own understanding, so the testimony could be changed easily. Therefore, ten people who hear the same account, or read the same text, will each understand it in their own style based on their intellectual capacities. Because no two people's minds are alike.

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### Monday-Thursday

10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)  
Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot of Rav Kook ∞ Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

### Shabbat March 25-26

After 8:00 AM shacharit R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Gruda Beis Medrash (men)

### Sunday March 27

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

9 AM Shacharit, Parent-Child Program at Netivot haTorah: *The Four Famous Children!* Led by R' J. Anstandig

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, The Thought of Rav Shagar (university) *not this week*

10:00 AM-11:20 AM MIDRESHET YOM RISHON FOR WOMEN!  
In Person at Kehillat Shaarei Torah (2640 Bayview), and ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/myr82>  
Mrs. Prielle Rakovsky: Lessons from the Marror ∞ Idan Rakovsky: The Purpose of Our Slavery  
Light Refreshments Served! No charge, All women welcome!

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

### Monday March 28

A New Parshah Podcast: Parshat Tazria, with Rabbi Chaim Metzger & Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner  
Apple <http://tiny.cc/apodcast>, Google <http://tiny.cc/gpodcast>, Spotify <http://tiny.cc/spodcast>

8:45 AM Idan Rakovsky, Likutei Moharan of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

7:30 PM Prielle and Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/weeklysong>

8:15 PM-9:00 PM HAGGADAH NIGHT AT BAYT  
And on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/haggadahnight>  
Four ten-minute thoughts for your Seder!  
Rabbi Steven Gotlib, Rabbi Yehuda Mann, Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>

### Tuesday March 29

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 5-6), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 14), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Jews, Israel and Ukrainian Refugees, Beth Tikvah and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/bethtikvah>

### Wednesday March 30

6:10 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Avodah Zarah, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idolsarebad> New Time

10:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, The Foods and Customs of Passover #2 of 3  
Free of charge, Register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>; On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/customs>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park *not this week*

### Thursday March 31

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 25), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, email [ymanntorontotorah.com](mailto:ymanntorontotorah.com) for ZOOM options (advanced, men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Biur Chametz #1 of 2, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

### Friday April 1

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>

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