

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Toldot

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Robert and Karyn Goldberger לעילוי נשמת אריה בן צבי ז"ל in memory of Robert's father Arye Goldberger z"l, on his eighth yahrtzeit

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Nathan Kirsh in memory of his father, Yehudah Pesach ben Naftali haKohen z"l, whose yahrtzeit is 3 Kislev

Rivkah and G-d

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

"And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." (Bereishit 25:22-23, Koren tr.)

While Sarah, Rivkah, and Rachel all face barrenness, the Torah records only Rivkah as being challenged more by her pregnancy than her inability to conceive. What scared Rivkah so, and what did she seek when she "inquired of G-d"?

Several commentaries (Ri Kara, Bechor Shor, Chizkuni) assume that Rivkah was afraid that the movement she felt in her womb indicated that she was going to miscarry. According to some, her exclamation of "why am I thus?" means that she wondered why she should have become pregnant if it was only going to end in miscarriage. Ibn Ezra understands similarly, that she asked other women if they experienced the same movement in their pregnancy. When she discovered that they did not, she panicked that her pregnancy was different. Thus, her fear was specifically that her pregnancy would not succeed.

Rashi, on the other hand, suggests that Rivkah was not worried about the pregnancy. Rather, she saw indica-

tions that the child (she did not yet know about the twins) would be problematic, as the fetus moved both when she passed the Beit Midrash and houses of idol worship. Amazingly, for Rashi, despite Rivkah's struggle to become pregnant, it was not enough for her to have a child. She wanted to ensure that her child would follow the proper path as well.

Whatever her concern, what did Rivkah do to alleviate her fears? According to many commentaries (Rashi, Bechor Shor, Radak), she went to ask G-d through a prophet. Ramban, on the other hand, understands that she prayed. According to the former interpretation, Rivkah sought out an answer from G-d and received it. Per Ramban, however, **she did not necessarily expect a response**. She prayed that her child would survive, but she expected the conversation to be one-directional. Thus, for Ramban, this part of the story is quite dramatic. G-d does not merely answer her prayer but speaks to her directly. Indeed, according to the former explanation, G-d does not speak directly to Rivkah. According to Ramban, as there is no intermediary in the story, He does.

Perhaps, according to Rashi, the comfort Rivkah receives is simply clarification of her situation. However, according to Ramban, the comfort is the fact that Rivkah has now transformed her relationship with G-d. Rivkah starts by praying, but ends by having G-d engage her in conversation. Knowing that G-d

is directly engaged in one's life transforms the way one experiences life, including the troubles therein.

Rav Saadia Gaon (Commentary to the Torah, [Zucker ed.](#)) suggests a more extensive approach. He notes that "seeking G-d" can mean: 1) asking prophets 2) praying 3) making a commitment to religion (often in the context of forging a covenant) or 4) repenting. Thus, Rivkah realized that to deal with struggles, there are many ways to approach G-d. One can try to figure out what the future holds, one can pray that the future be better, and one can take actions to ensure that they deserve that brighter future. According to this broader explanation, one can suggest that it was specifically because Rivkah understood the many ways in which one can improve one's religious life in response to uncertainty and/or tragedy that she merited G-d's response.

While we may not have prophecy, we can recognize the many ways in which we can respond to hardship and work on our relationship with G-d. And, as with Rivkah, we can hope that we find comfort in feeling that G-d is there for us during our struggles.

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Summary

In the Daat Mikra edition of Yeshayahu, Amos Chacham divides this chapter into four sections:

The first five verses are a song of praise to G-d. Initially, the praise is expressed in the past tense, from the perspective of someone who has already seen the outcomes of G-d's actions. The speaker declares acceptance of G-d because of the amazing things He has brought about in the world. G-d has destroyed the strongholds and castles of arrogant and powerful people. In the process He has protected the poor and vulnerable, who were being exploited by the powerful. As a result of G-d's actions even powerful nations stand in awe of Him. The "tumultuous sounds" and songs of these nations are subdued by G-d like a "thick cloud [subdues] a dry hot landscape".

The second section of the chapter (verses 6-8) describe a feast that G-d will make for the nations of the world in Jerusalem. The feast will include luxurious foods and fine wine. G-d will destroy the veils and masks that cover the faces of the nations. Death will also be destroyed and the embarrassment that the nations inflicted upon the Jews will be removed.

The third section includes only verse 9. It describes the response of the now vindicated Jewish people. They will explain that G-d is the one that they had been longing for, whose salvation they had been awaiting all along.

The final section (verses 10-12) moves back to the theme of punishing the evil and arrogant. G-d will rest His hands on Jerusalem and, from there, utterly humiliate Moav. As Moav is ruined, it will flail about like a person trying desperately to swim. In the end its fortified walls will be ground to dirt.

Insight

This chapter involves two main themes:

- 1) One is G-d subduing the arrogant nations of the world and revealing the emptiness of their claims to dominance. The proud Moav is reduced to a flailing mess. The sound and fury of other nations is revealed to be like the hot air of the desert, disarmed when clouds appear.
- 2) The second theme is the "feast" that G-d will prepare for the nations of the world in Jerusalem. We have followed Amos Chacham's positive reading (unlike the approaches of Rashi, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra and others), that this feast is a moment

of positive connection between G-d and the nation. In this feast G-d "unmasks" the nations and the latter are capable of experiencing the G-d that the Jewish people had been hoping for throughout history. Death is also destroyed in this process.

Perhaps the two themes are connected. Death came about when the first man, embarrassed, hid himself from G-d. Our chapter describes the reversal of this process. G-d reveals the arrogance of humanity as a mask, a way of hiding what we really are (perhaps even from ourselves). Once this mask is removed the proper relationship between G-d and man is restored and the need for death is obviated.

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Siddur Insights: Prayer for the State of Israel**Idan Rakovsky**

From the time that our Rabbis set the text of the prayerbook, it has largely been left untouched. In general, we try to preserve the siddur as it has been for thousands of years. There are some notable exceptions, such as the blessing against *malshinim* (heretical informers) that was added into the silent amidah by Shmuel HaKatan centuries after the amidah was initially written (Berachot 28b). Also, the *Yekum Purkan* prayer we say before Musaf on Shabbat was only added during the period of the Geonim of Babylonia. Also on Shabbat, the prayer of *Av HaRachamim* was instituted in memory of the Jews murdered during the First Crusade.

A recent addition took place in 1948. With the creation of the State of Israel, the Chief Rabbis of Israel, Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog and Rabbi Bentzion Uziel, decided to add a new prayer: the prayer for the State of Israel. The authorship of this prayer is unclear, but [recent research](#) has demonstrated that Israeli writer S. Y. Agnon was an editor.

By adding this prayer, the Chief Rabbis expressed the belief that the establishment of the State of Israel, along with the strong Zionist movement that led to its establishment, has spiritual and religious value. This idea is conveyed directly in the opening of the prayer, where Israel is called "the beginning of the flowering of our redemption."

As part of the prayer, we ask G-d to "send forth Your light and truth to its leaders, ministers and counselors." This line is based upon a verse from Tehillim 43:3: "Send forth Your light and Your truth; they will lead me; they will bring me to Your holy mountain, to Your dwelling-place." (JPS translation)

What do we mean in requesting light and truth, and how do they relate to the welfare of the country's leaders?

Rashi (Commentary to Tehillim 43:3) explains that this request refers to the coming of Mashiach who is compared to light, and to Eliyahu HaNavi who is a true prophet. Radak (ad loc.) explains that the light of G-d refers to the concept of salvation and *kibbutz galuyot*, which will happen since everything G-d says is true. Both of these approaches suggest that this is a prayer asking for our full redemption.

In the context of the State of Israel today, we might suggest a third perspective. We ask from G-d to send the power of truth to our political leaders – the leaders who argue about the correct way to shape the State – each fighting for his or her own personal truth. And, we add the prayer for light, asking G-d to help our leaders reveal the true light of the nation that will grow out of these true arguments, knowing that these are disputes for the sake of Heaven (see Avot 5:17).

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Biography

Rabbi Yair Bachrach

Rabbi Ezra Goldschmiedt

Unappreciated in his own day, Rabbi Yair Chaim Bachrach (1638-1702) was one of the greatest Torah scholars of his generation. Rabbi Bachrach grew up in Worms, Germany, raised by his father Samson (who was the local Rabbi) as well as his grandmother, Chava, who passed away on an attempted journey to Israel. His grandfather had also previously been the Rabbi of Worms. Chava was the granddaughter of the famed Maharal of Prague, and was known for her own vast knowledge of Torah; it is said that Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, the Shelah HaKadosh, asked for her hand in marriage but was refused.

Rabbi Bachrach is known most for his responsa, the *Chavot Yair*, which were named after his grandmother Chava. A major authority in Jewish law, Rabbi Bachrach also wrote *Mekor Chaim*, a running commentary on the Orach Chaim section of Shulchan Aruch. However, after finding that printers were beginning to include the commentaries of the Taz and Magen Avraham alongside the Shulchan Aruch, he humbly withdrew from having his work published. (In 1982, this valuable work was finally produced by Mechon Yerushalayim.)

Besides possessing a vast knowledge of Torah, Rabbi Bachrach was also well-educated in the arts and sciences. He compiled a 46-volume encyclopedia on a range of different topics.

Rabbi Bachrach served briefly as the Rabbi of Koblenz, Trier (Germany), before his position was denied renewal by the German authorities. When he moved back to Worms, the community was hesitant to hire him as Rabbi to succeed his father Samson. Though he was more than qualified, the community felt it inappropriate to hire Rabbi Bachrach, who had grown up alongside them. Ultimately, he did become the Rabbi of Worms in 1699, though he served for only three years until his death. The epitaph on Rabbi Bachrach's headstone begins, "A great and dark horror befalls us from the hiding of the light of our Rabbi..." It was too late when the community of Worms realized whom they had lost.

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Weekly Halachah: Mayim Acharonim

By Rabbi Steven Gotlib

Is there an obligation to wash one's hands before *birkat hamazon*?

Many have the custom of washing their hands, or at least their fingers, prior to reciting *birkat hamazon*. This is called *mayim acharonim*. This goes back to the Talmud (Chullin 105a) which cites worry over a particular kind of salt ("Salt of S'dom") that Rashi notes stuck to the fingers and caused blindness if it was rubbed in someone's eyes. Rabbi Yosef Karo (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 181:1) records that this handwashing is mandatory, with no disagreement from Rabbi Moshe Isserless. The Rambam (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Berachot 6:3) also codifies this obligation, citing the issue of safety arising from this salt.

Tosafot (Berachot 53b) argued that when there is no longer a concern for such salt, as it is not in use anymore. Therefore, there is also no obligation to perform *mayim acharonim* except for those who routinely wash their hands at the end of each meal as a matter of good manners. The purpose of *mayim acharonim* may be to clean one's hands before reciting *birkat hamazon*, and not only to avoid dangerous salt. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181:10) states that even those who do not have the general practice of *mayim acharonim* must still wash their hands before *birkat hamazon* if there is a concern for soiled hands. After all, the Talmud (Berachot 53b) states that one should not recite *birkat hamazon* with unclean hands.

Moving to later codifiers, Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (Aruch HaShulchan Orach Chaim 181:5) writes that one should still wash *mayim achronim* nowadays and although the Mishnah Berurah (181:22) notes the common absence of this practice, he cites the Vilna Gaon, Maharshal, and others encouraging stringency.

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Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvah 3: Gid haNasheh

By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The third biblical mitzvah (Bereishit 32:33) is the instruction that descendants of Yaakov may not eat the *gid hanasheh* (sciatic neurovascular bundle) of certain animals. This memorializes Yaakov's battle against his brother, Esav; a being representing Esav fought with Yaakov, and succeeded in wounding Yaakov in that part of the body.

The Rambam (Peirush haMishnayot, Chullin 7:6) noted that although this mitzvah pre-dated the presentation of the Torah at Sinai, it binds all generations of Jews only because the prohibition was reiterated in the Torah we received at Sinai. The same applies to all pre-Sinai mitzvot, such as circumcision.

As the *Sefer haChinuch* explained, this mitzvah reminds us that just as Esav's representative wounded Yaakov but could not defeat him, so our own enemies may be able to wound us, but they will never be able to destroy us.

In the eyes of Halachah, the *gid hanasheh* is not truly food, because it has no taste. (Chullin 89b; Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Maachalot Asurot 4:18, 15:17). Logically, then, one who ate *gid hanasheh* from a *neveilah* (an animal which did not undergo kosher *shechitah*) should be liable for *gid hanasheh*, but not for *neveilah*. However, Rambam (Mishneh Torah *ibid.* 8:6) says that one would indeed be liable for *neveilah* as well. Some explain that this is because the Torah treats it as food (Or Sameach), or because the act of eating it puts the *gid hanasheh* into the category of food. (Minchat Chinuch 281:7)

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Shabbat Nov 25-26

After hashkamah R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

Before minchah R' Steven Gotlib, Mussar, Village Shul

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT (Milevsky Bais Medrash) (men)

Sunday Nov 27

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

Monday Nov 28

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of Rav Soloveitchik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Eliyahu: Prophet of Fire & Water, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak> Week 5 of 5

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

Tuesday Nov 29

9:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, Tzidkat haTzaddik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 16-17), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

8:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud Topics, Shaarei Shomayim (university women)

Wednesday Nov 30

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Jews and Clothes Week 5 of 7

There is a fee, Register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>; On ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Issues in Jewish Democracy, Shaarei Tefillah Week 3 *note special time for this week*

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park

Thursday Dec 1

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 28), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Gemara Beitzah (advanced), email ymann@torontotorah.com for location (men)

Friday Dec 2

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

COMING UP!

7:00 PM Motzaei Shabbat December 3 at Yeshivat Or Chaim
HOW ARCHAEOLOGY SHEDS LIGHT ON THE TORAH
Rabbi Baruch Felberman, Rosh Kollel Torah MiTzion, Washington DC
Followed by Erev Shirah: An Israeli-Style Musical Melaveh Malka

Shabbat December 9-10
SHABBATON AT SHAAREI SHOMAYIM: THE PURSUIT OF PEACE
Leil Limmud in area homes at 8:15 PM Friday Night
Shiurim and Divrei Torah at Shaarei Shomayim during Shabbat day

10:00 AM-12:00 PM Sunday December 11
CHANUKATHON AT SHAAREI TEFILLAH
Four 30-minute shiurim about Chanukah; Open to all; Light refreshments served!

7:30-9:00 PM Monday December 12
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10:00 AM to 4:00 PM Sunday December 25
TANACH IN A DAY: JEWS AND NON-JEWS IN TANACH