

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Beshalach

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Jeffrey, Annette, Zachary and Benjamin Brown.

Thank you!

Choosing the Cloud

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

What if we never built a Golden Calf, never wilted before the Spies' malignant report, and never spent forty years in the wilderness?

All of those events stemmed from a decision recorded at the start of our parshah. Emerging from Egypt, we could have marched north, hugging the Mediterranean coast and entering Philistine-controlled Gaza, but instead we headed east into the wilderness, to enter Israel from the Canaanite side, crossing the Jordan River. The northern route would have been direct. The eastern route turned into a long stay at Sinai, panic in Moshe's absence, and then the fateful choice to send spies into the land. And yet, Hashem chose to send us east.

We might have suggested that Hashem took us east in order to put an end to the Egyptian threat at the Sea, but the Torah provides a different explanation: "And G-d did not lead them on the path of the Philistines, for it was close, for Hashem said: Lest the nation regret when they see war, and return to Egypt." (Shemot 13:17) What does that mean? And wouldn't we face war with the Canaanites anyway?

1: We Weren't Ready

Some commentators suggest that we were not ready to do battle so soon. According to Rashi and Rashbam (commentary to Shemot 13:17), Hashem feared we would simply retreat to Egypt rather than deal with Philistine hostility. [See Ramban ad loc. for a variation on this theme.]

2: The Philistine Threat

In a second approach, commentators note that the Philistines and Egyptians share a common genealogy in Bereishit 10:13-14. The Torah's explanation for going a different route was not that the Philistines were *geographically* close to Egypt, but that they were *biologically* close to Egypt. The Philistines would be motivated to fight us; better to go a different route. (Daat Zekeinim and Rabbi Chaim Paltiel to Shemot 13:17, and see Rabbi Baruch Weintraub in Toronto Torah Beshalach 5781 [here](#))

3: War in Israel

Certain midrashim interpret "when they see war" to refer to later wars, once we were already in Israel. Within this view, the forty years in the wilderness presented an opportunity for Hashem to impress the inhabitants of the land by miraculously managing our needs. As a result, no foe would stand before us, and the detour east would be a blessing in disguise. (Shemot Rabbah 20:16) [See as well Bereishit Rabbah 54:2 and Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai 13:17 for additional positive views of the forty year delay.]

4: The Remnants of War

Multiple biblical passages collectively describe the tribe of Ephraim as wayward warriors murdered by Philistines in an early war; see Tehillim 78:9, Hosheia 9:13, and Divrei haYamim I 7:21. These verses lead a midrash to suggest that thousands of members of the tribe of Ephraim left Egypt early, and were massacred by the Philistines. (Shemot Rabbah 20:11) Hashem feared that the Jews would now come upon the wreckage of that battle, and panic.

But all of these explanations run afoul of one problem: the Divine arsenal. Who needs to worry about intimidation and opposition when Moshe can summon an airstrike against any foe? When the Jews panic, let Hashem send hail, wasps, earthquakes or fireballs against the opposing army and eliminate the opposition!

We might answer by pointing to another verse at the start of our parshah: "And Hashem travelled before them by day in a pillar of cloud to guide them on the path, and in a pillar of flame at night." (Shemot 13:21) The fire represents an intimidating and dangerous protector (see Devarim 4:23-24 and 9:3), and the cloud represents a protective image of Hashem. Indeed, Rabbi Shlomo of Radomsk proposed that the Hebrew word for "to guide them", *lanchotham*, is related to the word *nachat* – Hashem intended for our relationship to be gentle and sweet. (*Tiferet Shlomo*, Beshalach)

Hashem was certainly capable of bringing us into Israel with shock and awe, but wars are traumatic, even for the winners. As our fiery King, Hashem can march at the head of our armies, but as our cloudlike Parent, Hashem is concerned about what happens afterward in our homes. Perhaps this is why Hashem chose to avert battle – to shield us from the trauma which plagues could not prevent. There is more to success than victory; Hashem wanted our entry to Israel to come in a way that would be gentle and sweet.

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OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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This chapter begins with details of Yehoachaz son of Yehu, king of the northern kingdom of Israel. Unfortunately, Yehoachaz continued in the ways of his father and sinned, leading G-d to punish Israel by allowing King Chazael and his son King Benhadad of Aram to attack and invade. (13:1-4) Eventually, G-d had compassion on Israel and sent them an anonymous saviour who delivered them from Aram's hands. (13:5) Despite being saved by G-d, the people resumed their evil ways. (13:6-7) Yehoachaz died and his son, Yehoash (not to be confused with King Yehoash of Yehudah) took his place. (13:8-10) Like his father, Yehoash lived a sinful life. (13:11) At this point, the text jumps to the end of Yehoash's life and records his death. (13:12-13)

The text subsequently returns to Yehoash's lifetime and describes the final moments of the prophet Elisha's life. King Yehoash visited Elisha while the latter was on his deathbed, and wept and grieved. (13:14) Elisha instructed Yehoash to fire arrows out the window in the direction of Aram. Elisha told Yehoash that this represented future military success against Aram. He then had Yehoash take arrows and strike the ground, and Yehoash did, three times. Elisha told him that had he

struck the ground five or six times, Aram would have been decimated in war. But, since he only hit the ground three times, he would only defeat Aram three times. (13:15-19)

After this, Elisha died and was buried. Afterwards, under pressure from a Moabite attack, people buried another man in the same crypt. The dead man's body touched Elisha's bones, and the dead man returned to life. (13:20-21)

Ultimately, Elisha's prophecy to Yehoash came true and G-d delivered Israel from the hands of Chazael and his son Ben-Haddad. The chapter concludes by noting that Yehoash successfully defeated Aram three times. (13:22-25)

Insight

While Elisha is known to have revived the dead during his life (see Melachim II 4), it is striking that he retains this power even after his death. Commentators wonder about the purpose of the verses describing this miracle. Seen in context, placed between Elisha's prophecy to Yehoash and its fulfillment, it appears that the goal of this story is to continue conveying Elisha's power. Even in his death, Elisha can

bring others back to life.

Nonetheless, rabbinic tradition offers contemporary significance for this story. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 47a) records that it is inappropriate to bury a righteous person next to a wicked person. As proof, it points to this story, explaining that the man being buried next to Elisha was wicked and a false prophet. To prevent his permanent interment next to Elisha, the man returned to life temporarily, in order for him to leave and find a new burial plot.

Alternatively, Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (33:9) suggests that this man was a great philanthropist and that he lived a long time after this event, even fathering a child! This midrash points to his revival as demonstrating how acts of tzedakah can be impactful, even lifesaving.

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It Happened in Israel: Choni and the Storyteller**Rabbi Steven Gotlib****Story**

The Talmud presents the story of Choni the circle-maker (see Taanit 19a for the origin of this nickname), who noticed a man planting a carob tree. Choni asked the man how long it would take for the tree to bear fruit. The man answered that it would take seventy years. Choni asked him, "Is it obvious that you will live seventy years?" The man answered that just as his father planted carob trees that he saw bear fruit, so too would he plant them for his children to experience.

Choni sat down to eat his lunch, and he fell asleep. Little did he know that he slept for seventy years! When he woke up, he noticed a man picking fruit from a fully grown carob tree. "Are you the one who planted that tree?" Choni asked. The man shook his head and replied that he was that man's grandson. Choni then understood how long he was asleep and went back to his home, but no one believed him when he told them who he was. He then went to the study hall, where he had the same experience. Dejected, he prayed to Hashem and passed away. (Taanit 23a)

Insight

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Moharan 60) interprets this story in a fascinating way. He does so by first drawing a parallel between the planting of a tree and the telling of stories. Rabbi Nachman interprets the question of whether the planter will live to see the tree bear fruit as meaning, "Have you tried to inspire a better future by telling stories in the present?" The man's answer, that he was planting for the next generation just as the previous one had planted for him, is interpreted to mean that just as he was raised with stories

passed down from ancient times, so would the next generation. And Choni waking up and seeing another man with the tree is explained as the man telling stories to others. Finally, the question of "Do you know who planted this tree" is said by Rabbi Nachman to be asking, "Do you know where this story comes from?"

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, zt"l described the Jewish people as a "nation of storytellers." Being a nation of storytellers means representing a "remarkable cluster of ideas: about identity as a matter of collective memory; about the ritual retelling of the nation's story [and] above all about the fact that every one of us is a guardian of that story and memory." Rabbi Sacks went on to write that it is not only our leaders who are called upon to remember the past and hand it down to the next generation in the form of relatable stories, but each member of the community. Each and every one of us has the ability to hold onto our history, as well as to pass it on to those it can impact for the better. (The article by Rabbi Sacks is available [here](#).)

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Biography

Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah Goldberg

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah Goldberg was born in 1931 in Minsk. When he was five years old, the family moved to Israel after receiving documents with the assistance of the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook. He learned in Talmud Torah Eitz Chaim, and ultimately entered the Chevron Yeshiva at the age of 14. He also learned for a few years in the Ponevezh Yeshiva, in a special class designated for gifted students. In 1954, Rabbi Goldberg married Rachel, the daughter of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, one of the greatest halachic authorities of our time.

In 1965 Rabbi Goldberg was ordained to be a *dayan* (rabbinical judge), and was asked by the Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, Rabbi Isser Unterman, to lead a kollel training future *dayanim*. Many of his students became *dayanim* and asked him questions and sought his advice on a regular basis. In 1989 he was appointed as a *dayan* in the Beit Din of the Chief Rabbinate. There he dealt with the important issues in the areas of divorce and lineage, in particular. After a few years was appointed as a *dayan* on Israel's highest Beit Din.

Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah was also an expert in the field of Choshen Mishpat - financial and criminal law - and sat on several rabbinical courts which specialized in this field. After retiring from his position as a *dayan* he continued to be one of the leading authorities in those fields, and many *dayanim* from all over the world came to ask him for his advice.

Although he was identified with the Lithuanian Yeshiva world, Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah gave regular classes in many Zionist yeshivot, such as Kerem B'Yavneh and Kedumim. Some of those yeshivot published his lessons in books including *Chazon Kedumim* and *Shirat HaKerem*.

Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah was Chief Editor of the Talmudic Encyclopedia between 1997 and 2020. He also was awarded the Katz Prize, a prize given to leading rabbis for their achievements in implementing Jewish law in the modern era in the fields of medicine and the sciences.

Rabbi Zalman Nechemiah passed away on Rosh Chodesh Elul 2020.

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Torah and Translation

Performing Logical Mitzvot as G-d's Will

Rabbi Z. N. Goldberg, Approbation to *Nasiach b'Chukecha*

Translated by Rabbi Yehuda Mann

ולחביבות הדברים אכתוב הערה אחת.

בסי"ח כתב החיי אדם שאפילו מצוות מושכלות כמו צדקה, כיבוד אב, וגזל ועריות שהן הדברים שהשכל מחייב - לא יעשנה מחמת שהשכל מחייב אלא יעשנה עבור יראת ד'. וכבר הביא הרב המחבר שהרמב"ם בשמנה פרקים לא כתב כן.

ואני מוסיף תמיהה שבחכמת אדם עצמו כתב כן בהלכות כיבוד אב ואם, וצ"ע...

אכן, בעיקר הדבר נראה להביא ראיה מזה שהנה הש"ך בהלכות צדקה, כתב שהמפרנס בניו יותר משש מקיים מצוות צדקה, אבל במפרנס פחות משש לא קיים צדקה, מאחר שחייב לפרנסם מתקנת חכמים.

וקשה, הרי גם ליותר משש מכלימים את האב גם בלא אמיד שאין עליו חיוב צדקה, מ"מ מכלימין אותו שהוא אכזר, וא"כ איך מקיים מצוות צדקה והרי חייב מכח שלא להיות אכזר, וזה ודאי עבירה להיות אכזר, שאם אין זה עבירה מה היתר יש להכלימו והרי המלביץ פני חברו ברבים אין לו חלק לעולם הבא?

ובע"כ שגם מצוות צדקה טעם המצווה שלא להיות אכזר, ולכן מקיים מצוות צדקה.

ומטעם זה נראה שזה שאסור לומר "אני אפשי בבשר חזיר", היינו שאין זה הטעם למה אסרה תורה בשר חזיר, אבל לומר "אני נותן צדקה שלא להיות אכזר" זהו הטעם האמיתי למה צוותה תורה מצוות צדקה.

For the pleasure of Torah, I will make one point.

In 68:18 [Rabbi Avraham Danziger] wrote in *Chayei Adam* that even logical mitzvot like tzedakah, respecting parents, stealing and adultery, which are all logical commandments - still we have to perform those mitzvot out of awe for G-d [and not due to the logical appeal of the mitzvah]. And the author [of *Nasiach b'Chukecha*] brought that the Rambam wrote differently in *Shemonah Perakim*.

And I would add another question, that in *Chochmat Adam* [Rabbi Danziger] himself wrote the same thing [that one must fulfill the mitzvah out of awe of G-d, and not due to the logical appeal of the mitzvah] regarding the laws of honouring parents! This requires examination...

Regarding the essence of the matter, it appears correct to bring proof from the following. Rabbi Shabbtai haKohen, in the laws of tzedakah, wrote that one who supports his children beyond the age of six fulfills the mitzvah of tzedakah, but one who supports them before the age of six does not fulfill tzedakah, since a rabbinic enactment requires him to support them.

This is difficult; even beyond the age of six we shame the father [who does not support them], even if he is not wealthy and so he does not have a duty for tzedakah. We still shame him for being cruel. If so, how could he fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah [by supporting them]? He is required to do so, as part of his requirement not to be cruel, and it certainly is a sin to be cruel. If it were not a sin, why would we be permitted to shame him? One who shames another person in public has no share in the next world!

We must say that regarding the mitzvah of tzedakah, too, the reason for the mitzvah itself is so as not to be cruel. Therefore, he fulfills tzedakah [even though he is giving to avoid cruelty].

And for this reason, it appears that one may not say, "I don't want pork," since this is not why the Torah prohibits pork. But saying "I am giving tzedakah to avoid being cruel" is the true reason for why the Torah commanded the mitzvah of tzedakah.

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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 haTeshuvah of Rav Kook

Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat January 14-15

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)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

Sunday January 16

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

9:30 AM Human vs. Nature: A Special Tu b'Shevat Program

9:30 AM Tribute to Paul Forman z"l

9:45 AM Prielle and Idan Rakovsky: *Human vs. Nature - On Which Side is the Torah?*

10:15 AM Ruth and R' Steven Gotlib: *Judaism, Environmentalism and Us*

*Dedicated by the Forman Family and Congregation B'nai Torah
to commemorate the second yahrtzeit of Paul Forman z"l*

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, YOC or ZOOM

5:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Tu b'Shevat in Argentina? ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (univ women)

Monday January 17 Tu b'Shevat

New Episode of our Parshah Podcast: Parshat Yitro!

Apple <http://tiny.cc/apodcast>, Google <http://tiny.cc/gpodcast>, Spotify <http://tiny.cc/spodcast>

8:45 AM Idan Rakovsky, Jewish Thought in the Postmodern Age, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Introduction to Talmud 2 of 3, ZOOM <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

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

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

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Divorce in Modern Israel, Shomrai Shabbos: Main Shul (men)

Tuesday January 18

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 3), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 10), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday January 19

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Beitzah, Shaarei Shomayim and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/beitza>

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Chanah: Prophet & Fighter, #2 of 3 ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>
Fee: \$30 (or whatever you can pay), register at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>

7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Basic Introduction to Halachah #5 of 5, at Shaarei Tefillah

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

Thursday January 20

8:30 AM R' Chaim Metzger, Trei Asar, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/trei> (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 23), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, at BAYT (Gruda BM), email ymannt@torontotorah.com for ZOOM options (men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Gemara Bava Batra, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

Friday January 21

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>