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Becoming More Than Perfect

Rabbi Alex Hecht

The Torah describes Noach as a "righteous man, perfect in his generations." (Bereishit 6:9) The Sages of the Talmud (Sanhedrin 108a) debate whether this emphasis on Noach's righteousness *in his generations* is intended as praise or criticism:

- Noach undoubtedly overcame tremendous challenges in order to do G-d's will while living in an immoral society, and remained righteous in spite of his surroundings. Reish Lakish argues that Noach would have been even greater if he had lived in another generation, among other righteous people. He says that Noach in his generation was analogous to a flask of perfume, which provides a pleasing fragrance in a foul-smelling area, but gives off an even better aroma amidst other perfumes.
- However, Rabbi Yochanan maintains that Noach's piety would not have been outstanding if he had been a contemporary of Avraham, just as the smell emitted from a barrel of wine is appreciated when among barrels of vinegar, but not against perfume.

It may be asked regarding Rabbi Yochanan's view: why should the fact that Noach might not have been the single most righteous person in Avraham's generation be a basis for criticism? After all, there is no indication that Noach would not have merited to be saved from a flood in such a time; he merely would not have been the most righteous person on earth!

Furthermore, the Torah instructs us to

seek guidance from and adjudicate cases before "the judge who will be *in those days*" (Devarim 17:9), even if the judges in one's day are not as distinguished as those in earlier times. (Rosh HaShanah 25b) This verse seems to warn us specifically *not* to diminish our esteem for great people who might - in a different generation - not be as outstanding. Why should Rabbi Yochanan consider it important, or even appropriate, to evaluate Noach's level of righteousness in relation to any generation other than his own?

The Torah's description of a later event may help shed light on this question. Rivkah and Yitzchak were childless for many years, until a fateful day when G-d answered their prayers. The Torah (Bereishit 25:21) tells us that "G-d allowed Himself to be entreated by [Yitzchak]", rather than Rivkah. The Talmud highlights the specification of Yitzchak, and says Hashem answered Yitzchak because "the prayer of a righteous person who is a child of a wicked person [Rivkah] does not compare to the prayer of a righteous person who is a child of a righteous person [Yitzchak]." (Yevamot 64a) This is challenging; shouldn't G-d be more responsive to someone who fought off negative influences?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explained that Hashem was more responsive to the prayer of Yitzchak because it can be more difficult for a person living in the shadow of great people to develop a unique, personal connection to G-d, and achieve an extraordinary level of righteousness, than for a person living in society of moral decay in which even

minimal righteousness will place one ahead of the curve. Despite the negative influences, it can be easier for a person in bad company to stand out as good. (Michtav mei'Eliyahu II pg. 205)

Returning to Noach's era: a person like Noach who was surrounded by immorality might not have worked as hard to actualize his full potential, since distancing himself from the corrupt society around him was enough to single him out. Perhaps, Rabbi Yochanan interprets "perfect in his generations" as a criticism because Noach had the ability to be even greater than he was.

The Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 5:2) emphasized the imperative for a person to strive for righteousness beyond the norms of his generation: "Each person is fit to be righteous like Moshe, our teacher, or wicked, like Yeravam. [Similarly,] he may be wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, miserly or generous, or [acquire] any other character traits. There is no one who compels him, sentences him, or leads him towards either of these two paths. Rather, he, on his own initiative and decision, tends to the path he chooses." Thus, even if a person is righteous compared to those around him - which the Rambam (ibid. ch. 3) says can even tip the scales toward a favourable judgment for others and for the world - he should nevertheless not be complacent with "good enough", and instead he should strive to achieve the greatest level of righteousness possible.

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Summary

Continuing the narrative of the crossing of the Yarden from the previous chapter, this one opens with a description of fear among the Canaanite nations. Hearing about the Jews' miraculous crossing of the Yarden breaks their spirits and leaves them unable to face Bnei Yisrael.

Once in Canaan, G-d commands Yehoshua to circumcise all the males among the people. The text explains that Bnei Yisrael did not perform circumcision while travelling in the desert. The entire generation which had left Egypt had died in the desert as a punishment for the sin of the spies. This meant that virtually all of the males needed to be circumcised. G-d informs the Jews that through this circumcision He has removed the "shame of Egypt" from them.

An additional purpose for the circumcision at this point was to prepare for the Korban Pesach, which the nation subsequently offers. They then eat from produce of the land, and the *man* which had been provided for them miraculously for the previous forty years stops falling.

After this, Yehoshua is visited by an angelic figure brandishing a sword. He tells Yehoshua that he is an angel of G-d, and orders Yehoshua to remove his shoes, since he is standing on holy ground.

Food for Thought

The command for circumcision in this chapter is worded strangely: "At that time the Lord said to Joshua, 'Make flint knives and proceed with a second circumcision of the Israelites.'" (5:2, JPS translation).

Why is this described as the "second circumcision", when we are told immediately afterwards that none of the men of this generation had been circumcised? Rashi explains that the first national circumcision referenced here was the one which occurred in Egypt before the first Pesach.

In fact, this entire section of the narrative mirrors the story of Egypt:

- The story of the exodus from Egypt in Shemot concludes with splitting of the sea. This feat struck fear into the hearts of the other nations. (Shemot 15:14-16) The entry into Canaan begins with the splitting of

the Yarden, which makes the Canaanite kings afraid.

- Before leaving Egypt the Jews were circumcised en masse and they brought the Korban Pesach. After entering Canaan, the Jews are likewise circumcised and they bring the Korban Pesach.
- What is the message of this parallel?

At first glance, one may have thought that the exodus from Egypt concluded with the destruction of the Egyptians at sea. The Egyptians enslaved us, and then G-d freed us. However, our chapter emphasizes that, in fact, the ultimate "shame of Egypt" was not slavery, but living as strangers in a foreign land. Only when Bnei Yisrael entered their own homeland, and were able to eat from its produce, was the story of the exodus concluded.

Given this, the conclusion of the chapter is fitting. Like Moshe on Har Sinai, Yehoshua is commanded to remove his shoes. But unlike Moshe, who was reacting to the local sanctity of the mountain, Yehoshua is informed that this entire land is sanctified, and must be treated as holy ground.

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Law of the Land: Where does Israel end?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

There are many debates regarding **how** to apply the Torah's agricultural laws, but one of the most confounding is the question of **where** to apply those laws. In which areas do the laws of terumah and maaser, or shemita, apply?

Some of this debate is due to doubt regarding which territory was settled by Jews who entered Israel when we returned to build the second Beit haMikdash. However, a more fundamental debate comes first: How do we locate the boundary markers named in the Torah? This is particularly evident when we look at Israel's southern boundary.

According to Bamidbar 34:3-5 and Yehoshua 15:1-4, the southeast corner of Israel is the southern tip of the Dead Sea. However, drought cycles change the extent of the Dead Sea. In the past century alone, we have seen shifts of nearly 400 meters in height, according to Rabbi Yosef Efrati, a leading contemporary authority. Per Josephus (Wars of the Jews 8:4) the southern tip of the Dead Sea extended to Tzoar in his day, some 2,000 years ago; archaeologists believe this is Ghor Safi, significantly east of today's southern tip.

On the other end, the biblical text identifies Nachal Mitzrayim as the southwest corner of Israel, but this is also unclear. Rabbi Chaim Kanaievsky (Derech Emunah, Hilchot Terumot 1:7) contends that this is Wadi el-Arish, but Rashi (Yehoshua 13:3) identified it as the Nile River.

Finally, a major point along the southern boundary is Maaleh Akrabim; most assume this is the southernmost part of Israel. [Note that Rashi to Bamidbar 34:4 disagrees, placing Maaleh Akrabim northwest of the Dead Sea.] But how far south is it?

- Today's "Maaleh Akrabim" is 45 kilometers southwest of the Dead Sea. However, as noted by the Chazon Ish (Sheviit 3:18), it's hard to assume that the sites known by biblical names today match precisely with locations named in the Torah.
- Rabbi Zalman Menachem Koren, author of the modern *Din Shevi'it b'Shetach ha'Aravah*, claims that if one would draw a line southwest from the Dead Sea at a 45-degree angle, Maaleh Akrabim would have to be north of that line – but this is vague, and it also contradicts the views of other prominent authorities regarding the location. [See *Admat Kodesh* pg. 4, and *Tevuot Aretz*, for example.]
- Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tukaczinski (*Ir haKodesh v'haMikdash* 3:248) contended that Maaleh Akrabim is near Eilat, some 140 kilometers south of the Dead Sea. This is based on Rabbi Saadia Gaon's 10th century identification of Maaleh Akrabim with Aqaba, on the northern tip of the Red Sea. However, Rabbi Koren notes that the word *Aqaba* is simply Arabic for "height" or "Maaleh"; Rabbi Saadia Gaon used it to translate the "Maaleh" modifier, and not as an equation of Maaleh Akrabim with a place called Aqaba. Also, based on various biblical texts it appears that Eilat should be in the Land of Edom, not in Israel.

For other approaches to identifying Israel's southern border, see my class at <https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecture.cfm/818687>.

In practice, it is generally assumed that Eilat is not part of biblical Israel for the purpose of agricultural law. Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ruled that one may adopt leniencies regarding the laws of shemita in that area, and even further north, in areas including Yotvata.

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Biography
Rabbi Yehonatan
Eibeschutz
Ezer Diena

*Adapted from a biography by
Rabbi Adam Frieberg*

Born in Cracow in 1690 to a rabbinic family, Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeschutz displayed proficiency in Talmud at an extremely young age. After his father's passing, he entered yeshiva in Prossnitz, and then Holleschau. He married Elkele Spira, and after living with her grandfather in Hamburg for two years, they settled in Prague in 1715. There he became Rosh Yeshiva and delivered many sermons; he was held in high esteem, second only to Dayan David Oppenheim, the Chief Rabbi of Prague. In 1741 Rabbi Eibeschutz became Rabbi of Metz, and in 1750 he was elected as Rabbi of the "Three Communities"-Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbek. He died in Altona in 1764.

A man of many talents, Rabbi Eibeschutz mastered and wrote on a variety of Torah subjects. He wrote more than thirty books of Jewish law; *Urim v'Tumim* on business law and *Kreiti u'Pleiti* on the laws of Yoreh Deah are perhaps his most famous. Rabbi Eibeschutz was known for his likeable personality, and his sermons (published in his *Ya'arot D'vash*) were very well received. The vast majority of his works were published only after his passing.

In addition to his other areas of expertise, Rabbi Eibeschutz was a great Kabbalist; this area of his life caused great controversy. Living and practicing mysticism as he did in the decades following the demise of the false messiah Shabbtai Tzvi (1626-1676), rumours began spreading that Rabbi Eibeschutz was a secret believer in Shabbtai Tzvi as the Messiah. One source of motivation for these claims were amulets (*k'mei'ot*) which Rabbi Eibeschutz wrote and distributed. The most well-known proponent of these claims was Rabbi Yaakov Emden, who claimed to have found connections between the kabbalistic writings of Rabbi Eibeschutz and the teachings of Yehuda Leib Prossnitz, a known Sabbatean. The Emden-Eibeschutz controversy was a major event of that era. Although most of his rabbinic contemporaries supported Rabbi Eibeschutz, and although he had even signed a decree excommunicating Sabbateans, the disagreement about Rabbi Eibeschutz's true beliefs continues among historians to this very day.

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Torah and Translation
An Early Moonshot
Rabbi Y. Eibeschutz, Tiferet Yehonatan to Bereishit 8:21
Translated by Ezer Diena

וא"כ למה שכתבתי שהרוח הולך מהארץ ממטה למעלה ראוי היה שהכלי הנעשה במלאכת עפיפה שהרוח מנשב בתורן שהרוח יגביה הכלי מעלה ולא ישוב עוד לארץ רק שובו לארץ הוא בסיבת היות האויר החזק ועב הסמוך לארץ הוא מכביד על הדבר ומגרשו לירד למטה.

ולכן נסעו האינשעניעהר שע"י אבק השריפה שקורין פולוור בכח רב אבק הניתן בקנה השריפה ולחצו לכדור הנתון בתוכו שילך מעלה מעלה עד שהשגיו במקום שהוא ולא ירד הכדור כלל למטה כי לא מצאו שום כדור על הארץ ואף כפי הטבע הוא יורד למטה בדרך קצרה למטה ומזה שפטו כי הכדור עלה תחלה למעלה מהאויר העב והעכור ע"י כח הפולווער וכשהיו למעלה ממנו הוא היה מעכבו אח"כ מליד

וא"כ אם אפשר להביא כל עופפות למעלה מהאויר העב הלזה יכול לילך ברוח מעלה מעלה עד הכדור הירחי כי הרוח יגביה אותו תמיד לילך ולמעלה הרוח הולך וחזק וכבר חברו בזה חיבורים איך לעשות ספינה כזה לילך לכדור הירחי אבל העיקר שיגיע תחלה ספינה זו למעלה מאויר העכור הזה.

וזה היה כוונת דור הפלגה ג"כ שבקשו לקבוע מושבם בכדור ירחי ששם יהיו נצולים ממבול וחשבו לעשות ע"י ספינה הנ"ל אפס כיצד יגביהו אותה הספינה למעלה מאויר העכור ולזה חשבו לעשות מגדל גבוה כל כך...

And if so, according to what I wrote that the wind goes from the earth from below to above [i.e. in an upwards direction], it would be fitting that for a vessel that is made for the craft of flying, where the wind blows the sail, that the wind will raise this vessel higher and higher, and it will not return again to the earth. Rather, it returns to the earth due to the [following] reason, that the thick and heavy air which is close to earth is heavy on an object and drives it to descend below.

Therefore, the engineers have ejected (using the fire-powder that is called 'pulver') with great strength the powder that is placed in the fire-barrel, [which in turn] pressures the bullet placed inside it to rise higher and higher. [Following this], they checked the entire area, and the bullet did not descend at all [back] down [to earth], as they did not find any bullet on the land [around them], and this is despite [the fact] that according to nature, it should descend in the shortest route downwards, and from this they decided that the bullet originally travelled upwards above the thick and turbid air, due to the strength of the 'pulver', and when [the bullet] was above [the thick air], [the air] prevented [the bullet] from descending.

And if so, if it would be possible to bring any flying vessels above this thick air, they would be able to travel by wind [power] upwards to the sphere of the moon, because the wind would constantly be raising [such a flying vessel] upwards. Above that, the winds continue and increase in strength [forcing such a flying vessel further upwards]. And they have already authored works [on] how to make a ship like this to go to the moon, but the [most] important [point] is that this ship must first reach above this turbid air.

And this was the intention of the generation of the dispersion also, that they wished to settle in the sphere of the moon, because there they would be saved from a [potential second] flood, and they intended to do so using the aforementioned ship. But how could they raise such a ship above the turbid air? For this [purpose], they thought to make such a tall tower [from which they could successfully launch the ship to colonize the moon and save themselves]...

(continued from last week)

If a firstborn animal develops a blemish which disqualifies it from eligibility as a korban, anyone may eat it. This law applies even when there is no Beit haMikdash, biblically within Israel and rabbinically outside of Israel. [One version of Rambam’s Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Bechorot 1:5 says that this law applies only in Israel, and Sefer haChinuch seems to adopt this view in mitzvah 393, but the consensus of authorities is that this edition of the Rambam’s position is in error; see Minchat Chinuch 393:7.]

The Torah’s special declaration that we may not redeem an unblemished firstborn animal is odd; we may not redeem any unblemished korban for money. Why might I have thought that the firstborn animal was any different? Sefer

haChinuch (393) suggests that this lesson is necessary because we do redeem the firstborn donkey; one might have thought that the same would be true for a firstborn kosher animal. Therefore, the Torah takes the time to note that one may not do so.

In truth, even a blemished firstborn animal is never “redeemed”, in the normal sense of the word; it may be sold, but its sanctity is not transferred to the money used for purchase. Because its holy status is a function of birth and not conferred upon it by the will of a human being, no human being can transfer the holiness to another entity. (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch to Bamidbar 18:17)

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Weekly Highlights: October 13— 19 / 4 Cheshvan — 10 Cheshvan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Oct. 13				
8:50 AM	Ezer Diena	Pre-Shacharit Parshah: Why Curse Canaan?	BAYT	TFBM
10:30 AM	R’ Alex Hecht	Post-Hashkamah Parshah	Clanton Park	
5:25 PM	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi’s Classroom
After minchah	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. Oct. 14				
8:45 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Halachah: Practicing Medicine in the Jewish Community	BAYT	Simcha Suite; Laypeople welcome
Tue. Oct. 16				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah: Chapter 1	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Yehoshua: Chapter 11	129 Theodore Pl.	Men
Wed. Oct. 17				
10:00 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Israel’s Chief Rabbis 1: Rav Ovadia Yosef	Beth Emeth	torontotorah.com/chiefrabbis
7:30 PM	R’ Alex Hecht	Controversies of the 20 th Century	Shaarei Tefillah	
Thu. Oct. 18				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel: Chapter 2	49 Michael Ct.	Women
8:30 PM	R’ Elihu Abbe	Gemara Beitzah	eabbe@torontotorah.com	Men
Fri. Oct. 19				
10:30 AM	R’ Elihu Abbe	Kiddushin	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM Sunday, Rabbi Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat

11:00 AM Sunday, Contemporary Halachah: Ezer Diena, Is Our Milk Treif?

8:30 AM Monday, R’ Elihu Abbe, Midrash on the Parshah

8:30 AM Friday, R’ Mordechai Torczyner, The Book of Yeshayah

For University and Adult Women, at Ulpanat Orot

9:30 AM Tuesdays and Thursdays, Mrs. Eliana Abbe

Seder Boker for Adult Men with Rabbi Moshe Yeres!

10:00 AM to Noon, Mondays/Wednesdays - Masechet Megilah and Eim haBanim Semeichah

10:00 AM to Noon, Tuesdays/Thursdays - Parshanut on Parshah and Pninei Halachah