

Toronto Torah

YU Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Balak (*Diaspora*)

17 Tammuz, 5779/July 20, 2019

Vol. 10 Num. 43 (#421)

This issue of Toronto Torah is sponsored by Esther and Craig Guttman and Family
in honour of the upcoming yahrtzeit of Sheila Guttman ל"ש"ה שרה טובה בת יהושע ז"

Tears for Moav

This week's version of Moav is both mortal enemy and moral enemy; their king seeks our physical downfall (Bamidbar 22:6), and their women attempt to lure us into immorality and idolatry (ibid. 25:2-3). The animosity persists later in Tanach; early in the period of the Shoftim they dominate us, and during the middle of the period of the first Beit haMikdash they attack us again, as recorded in both Melachim II and the Mesha Stele. Moshe even says of them, "Do not seek their peace or their benefit for all of your days, ever." (Devarim 23:7)

Given the bad blood between us, we might wonder at Yeshayahu's apparent soft spot for them. Several sentences into an extended prophecy of Moav's future destruction, Yeshayahu exclaims, "My heart cries out for Moav!" (Yeshayahu 15:5) Similar sympathy is found in Yeshayahu 16:9 and Yirmiyahu 48:36. Why do our prophets feel anything for Moav?

In truth, medieval commentators Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra and Rabbi David Kimchi contended that these prophets were only describing Moav's own grief. But Rashi, citing a midrash we will see below, reads the sentence literally. Why do we feel Moav's pain?

Family

Perhaps we recognize Moav as family; after all, their patriarch was Lot, Sarah's brother and Avraham's nephew. [Indeed, our parshah begins with Moav's fear that Jewish cattle would consume their grassland – much as Lot and Avraham found their grassland too limiting in Bereishit 13.]

More, Ruth, ancestress of King David, emerged from Moav.

Yeshayahu supports this read, emphasizing Lot in presenting Moav's fall. He describes Moav fleeing to Tzoar, as Lot once did. (Yeshayahu 15:5, Bereishit 19:22) Per Rashi, Yeshayahu attributes Moav's suffering to their historic ingratitude for Avraham's care for Lot. (Rashi to Yeshayahu 15:7) And Yeshayahu demands that Moav reciprocate Avraham's mercy toward the refugee Lot, by taking in Jewish refugees. (Yeshayahu 16:1-5; see Radak ad loc.) King David, too, makes an appearance in Yeshayahu's prophecy. (ibid. 16:5) So perhaps Yeshayahu cries for the pain of these relatives.

Potential

Rabbi Tzaddok haKohen of Lublin argued that Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu would grieve for any nation which was slated for destruction, because of the loss of their potential. [However, it is worth noting that Yeshayahu predicts the downfall of numerous foes in Chapters 13-23, and only Moav receives his tears.]

As Rabbi Tzaddok haKohen expressed it, the tears come not from mercy, but from a calculated practicality. "The prophets wailed at the destruction of the nations... Certainly, they were not concerned about the loss of their bodies, for, 'There is joy at the destruction of the wicked. (Mishlei 11:6)' Rather, it is known that each nation possesses a special ability... And the destruction of a particular nation destroys the reign of that particular ability." (Tzidkat haTzaddik 47)

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Mercy

In a third approach, a midrash explained the prophetic tears as an expression of simple mercy for human suffering: "All of the prophets were merciful upon Israel and the idolaters, as Yirmiyahu 48 says, 'My heart moans for Moav, like wind instruments.' And so Yechezkel 27, 'Son of man, raise wailing for Tyre.' This cruel one [Bilam] arose to uproot an entire nation for nothing, for no reason! This is why the portion of Bilam was recorded [in the Torah], to explain why G-d removed Divine inspiration from the idolaters. [Bilam] arose from among them [as a prophet] – and see what he did." (Bamidbar Rabbah 20:1)

Rabbi Zev Wolf Torbavitz commented similarly on the blessing before the haftarah, with its thanks for "good prophets". He wrote, "We bless G-d for choosing them because they were good and merciful shepherds; Moshe and all of the prophets gave themselves for Israel. For the nations, too, Yeshayahu said, 'My heart cries out for Moav,' as our sages said..." (Ziv Mishneh to Hilchot Tefillah 12:15)

We might contemplate these layers when we read about human suffering anywhere in the world. In one breath, our "good prophets" conveyed both Divine condemnation and personal grief. We, who know nothing of the Divine plan, should certainly feel the pain of those who might be our family, and who are certainly people of abilities and people who suffer. May G-d soon bring the day when such suffering ends.

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**This is the last issue of
Toronto Torah, Volume 10.
Thank you for reading; see you for Parshat Reeh!**

Our 5780 Writers

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Summary

The final *Journey Through Tanach* column of the year coincides with the final chapter in Shimshon's story. In general, this chapter tells of the Philistine attempts to capture Shimshon, beginning with an attempt by the people of Aza to ambush him at dawn. (16:1-2) However, Shimshon rises at midnight, and uproots (and carries away) the city gates holding him inside the city, thus foiling their plot. (16:3)

Unfortunately, Shimshon then falls in love with a Philistine woman named Delilah. (16:4) Commentaries debate as to whether she converted (Rambam Issurei Biah 13:14, Radak, Ralbag) or not (Malbim, based on Yerushalmi Sotah 1:8), but either way, she meets with Philistine leaders and agrees to try to discover the secret of his strength so that her nation can defeat him. (16:5)

Delilah makes three attempts to discover Shimshon's source of strength and weaken him, each time with a group of Philistines waiting in ambush, but it turns out that Shimshon has lied to her all three times. (16:6-15) On her fourth attempt, Shimshon finally tells her that he is a *nazir* and that his strength will vanish if his hair is cut, and she alerts the Philistines that she

has learned his secret. (16:17-18) While he sleeps, Delilah brings in a Philistine barber, who shaves his head, and when Shimshon awakes, he is quickly subdued by Philistine warriors, who then blind him and jail him. (16:19-21)

Subsequently, Philistines gather in a large building to sacrifice to Dagon, their god, for their good fortune in capturing their greatest enemy, Shimshon. (16:23-24) As part of the merrymaking and festivities, Shimshon is brought out of jail to be mocked by the audience of Philistines, numbering over 3000 in the upper level alone. (16:24-25, 27) Shimshon asks the boy assisting him to position him against the pillars of the building, and then prays to G-d to return his strength one last time, so that he may avenge his lost eyesight. (16:26, 28) He takes hold of the pillars, and with the words "Let my soul die alongside the Philistines" on his lips, he bends the supporting beams, killing thousands of Philistines, and dying in the process. (16:29-30) His father's family recovers his body and buries him alongside his father. (16:31)

Food for thought

This story portrays a suicide attack implicitly condoned by G-d. However,

Ralbag suggests that Shimshon's last words of "Let my soul die alongside the Philistines" are not expressing such a wish, but rather a realization that he deserves death just as they do, in which case G-d simply puts them all to death. In a similar dilution of the suicide aspect, Professor Yael Shemesh of Bar Ilan University suggests that the goal of Shimshon's act was an attack, and not self-annihilation, which is why it is not condemned as a prohibited suicide. (<https://jewish-faculty.biu.ac.il/files/jewish-faculty/shared/JSIJ2/shemesh.pdf>) However, we must still ask ourselves whether sacrificing one's life, even to strike such a blow against the Philistines, was truly justified - and how that might inform tactics in our own day.

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Law of the Land: The Torah's Vision for the Economy

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Does Halachah mandate a specific economic theory? This question was asked in different ways by many Zionist thinkers, both religious and secular.

We detailed some aspects of this in past columns about the specific issues of Yovel and Shemitat Kesafim. Rabbi Chaim Dovid HaLevi (*Aseh Lecha Rav* 3:56) attempted to tackle the broader question. In last week's translation, we recorded his conviction that the Torah must have something of substance to say about the critical questions that face society. However, he was equally convinced that no specific economic system was dictated by Halachah. He claimed that different economic models are useful in different time periods, and thus Halachah would not mandate accepting a specific system permanently. Furthermore, he claimed that the Torah wanted to leave these issues to the free choice of human beings. However, certain mitzvot shed light on economic policies that should be taken, regardless of whether Israeli society would accept a more socialist or capitalist model.

To paint a picture, he pointed to several mitzvot that have economic implications.

- First, he noted that a system needed to be set up to take care of the poor, based on the mitzvot of tzedakah and on the agricultural mitzvot that mandate leaving produce for the indigent. The Torah provides for a basic safety net that includes enforceable philanthropy. In a Torah system, people would be encouraged to extend small, interest-free loans. However, for large loans, they would be allowed to take advantage of halachic workarounds to receive interest

equivalents.

- With regards to Shemitah, Rabbi HaLevi claimed that Beit Din should not allow Prozbul documents (to permit collecting loans after Shemitah) for loans that were given as acts of kindness. In such cases, when the original loan was given to help the poor, Shemitah should be allowed to wipe away the loan if the poor person is never able to repay the loan. A mortgage, on the other hand, where the borrower investing in his home is not usually destitute, should be protected by Prozbul.
- From Yovel, he concluded that the Torah wants to ensure that there is a final mechanism to return basic property to those who, despite the aforementioned protections, could not rise out of poverty.

However, none of the above forbid the accumulation of wealth. They simply ensure that there are mechanisms in place to take care of those who do not succeed in making enough to survive. Thus, Rabbi HaLevi proposed the following: while the Torah may not outline a detailed economic system, any nation that wants to be true to the ethical and religious voice of the Torah must ensure that the Torah's goals are met.

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Biography

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz

Rabbi Elihu Abbe

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel was once walking with Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, when they passed a shoe store. Rabbi Shmuelevitz began to tear up. When Rabbi Finkel inquired why, Rabbi Shmuelevitz explained that he had seen a basket filled with small shoes for young toddlers. These shoes would be the first pair of shoes that a mother would buy for her young child. When thinking about the emotions of joy that the mother would experience, he too was filled with that joy and the intense emotion caused him to cry. Such was the personality and sensitivity of the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz. (paraphrased from mishpacha.com)

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz was born on the 2nd day of Rosh HaShanah, 1902, in Kovno, Lithuania. He was educated by his father, Rabbi Raphael Alter Shmuelevitz, the Rosh Yeshiva in Grodno, until the age of sixteen, when his father passed away. Rabbi Shimon Shkop then became Rosh Yeshiva, and developed a close relationship with him.

At the age of 18, Rabbi Shmuelevitz was appointed to teach a shiur in the yeshiva in Grodno. About four years later, Rabbi Shmuelevitz transferred to the Mirrer Yeshiva, where he quickly became a favourite of the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Yehudah Finkel. Shortly thereafter, Rabbi Shmuelevitz married Chana Miriam Finkel, Rabbi Finkel's daughter, and began teaching in the Mirrer Yeshiva.

After World War II broke out, Rabbi Shmuelevitz accompanied hundreds of students to Shanghai, where they lived and studied throughout the war. In Shanghai, Rabbi Shmuelevitz turned down American visas for him and his family, in order to remain with his students.

After a brief stay in the United States in 1947, Rabbi Shmuelevitz joined his father-in-law in Israel. He served as the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva for 32 years, until his death in 1978. In 1964, he began to present *shmuessen* (ethics-oriented lectures) on improving character traits. [See accompanying translation.] In addition to his Torah knowledge, Rabbi Shmuelevitz was also known for his care and concern for fellow Jews. Approximately 100,000 people attended his funeral; he is buried on Har HaMenuchot.

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Torah and Translation

The Honour of Bilam

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, Sichot Mussar #79

Translated by Rabbi Elihu Abbe

אך נראה עוד טעם מדוע הבין בלעם כך, והוא עפ"י מה שכתב באוה"ח (במדבר כב: ט) לפרש את שאלת הקב"ה: "מי האנשים האלה עמך", שאמר לו הקב"ה: וכי אנשים אלו ראויים להיות עמך, שהכנסת אותם לחדר המיוחד לך, כי יקפיד ד' על כבוד בלעם, וכמו שמצינו שהרג את האתון משום כבודו של בלעם. וכיון שראה בלעם שהקב"ה מקפיד על כבודו, הבין שגם הציווי "לא תלך עמהם" משום כבודו הוא...

ובאוה"ח שם משמע שלא טעה בלעם בהבנת ציווי הקב"ה, אלא באמת נאמרו לו שני ציוויים, ראשית שלא ילך עמהם שאין זה לכבודו, ועוד ציווי שלא יאור את ישראל... ולמדנו מכך את גודל ההקפדה שהקפיד ד' על כבודו של בלעם...

ועוד יותר תגדל התמיהה, כשאנו מתבוננים במי אנו עוסקים ועל כבודו של מי הקפיד הקב"ה כל כך, ומיעט הקב"ה כבוד שמים כדי שלא יהא לו בזיון, הלא הוא בלעם הרשע, שהיה אבי אבות הפחיתות שבעולם, בעל עין רעה ורוח גבוהה ונפש רחבה...

למדנו מכאן כמה גדול ערך כבודו של אדם לפני הקב"ה, ואפילו הוא רשע גמור כבלעם הרשע, מ"מ עדיין שמו "אדם", וכדי למנוע ממנו בזיון יותר מן המגיע לו לפי מעשיו, כדאי היה הדבר להרוג את האתון, אע"פ שיתמעט כבוד שמים בכך.

An additional reason why Bilam understood [that G-d was refusing to allow Bilam to go with these messengers, and that Balak must send more honourable officers to bring him], is as the Or Ha-Chaim (Bamidbar 22:9) explains G-d's question "Who are these men with you?" G-d said to him, "Are these men worthy to be with you, that you have brought them into your private room?" For G-d was careful in regard to Bilam's honour. We [also] find this when G-d puts the donkey to death for Bilam's honour [so that people should not say, "This is the donkey who brought about Bilam's demise"]. And when Bilam saw that G-d was careful regarding his honour, he understood the command of "Do not go with them" to be because of a concern for his honour as well...

From the Or HaChaim it sounds like Bilam was not mistaken in understanding G-d's command. Rather, in truth, he was given two commands, the first of which was not to go with them because it would be beneath his dignity, and the second not to curse the Jewish People... We learn from here the great degree to which G-d was careful about Bilam's honour.

This is even more astonishing when we consider who we are dealing with, the one for whose honour G-d was so careful, for whom G-d was willing to limit the honour of Heaven, to prevent him from being disgraced. [Had the donkey remained in existence, people would have appreciated the wondrous nature of G-d's creation, a talking donkey.] It is Bilam the wicked, the source of all the world's lowliness, the one who possessed the traits of an evil eye, arrogance, and materialism (Avot 5:19).

We learn from here the great degree to which G-d values the honour of a person. Even if he is absolutely wicked like the evil Bilam, he is still a human being. To prevent him from being disgraced to an extent that he did not deserve based on his actions, it was fitting for the donkey to be killed, even though this would detract from the honour of Heaven.

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Weekly Highlights: July 20 – July 26 / 17 Tammuz – 23 Tammuz

Our "Kayitz Zman" semester ends July 21; see you in August for "Pre-Elul Zman"!

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת July 19-20				
After hashkamah	R' Alex Hecht	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
Before Avot	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi's Classroom
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. July 21	Fast of Shivah Asar b'Tammuz			
9:30 AM to 11:30 AM	THE FALL OF ZION: THREE FACETS SHIVAH ASAR B'TAMMUZ LEARNATHON AT YESHIVAT OR CHAIM Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: Tanach: The Zionism of Yeshayah Ezer Diena: Law: The Beautiful Zecher l'Churban Rabbi Alex Hecht: Talmud: When Humility is a Crime Free of Charge; Open to All			
Tue. July 23				
7:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Chapter 3	129 Theodore Pl.	Men

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	ROSH HASHANAH	YOM KIPPUR	SUCCOT
TANACH	9 AM A Shofar of Cruelty? R' Mordechai Torczyner	11:30 AM Yeshayah's Fast R' Mordechai Torczyner	3 PM When G-d Celebrates R' Sammy Bergman
TEFILLAH	9:30 AM HaMelech! R' Alex Hecht	12 PM When "Sorry" Isn't Enough R' Mordechai Torczyner	3:30 PM A Musical Answer R' Mordechai Torczyner
		12:30 PM Lunch Shiur The Feast which is a Fast R' Sammy Bergman	
PHILOSOPHY	10 AM A Breath of Fresh Air R' Sammy Bergman	1:30 PM Blame the Goat? R' Alex Hecht	4 PM The Great Escape R' Eitan Aviner
HISTORY	10:30 AM Auschwitz 1944 R' Aaron Greenberg	2 PM Vilna 1848 Ezer Diena	4:30 PM Bar Kochba's Etrog R' Mordechai Torczyner
HALACHAH	11 AM Sleeping in Judgment? Ezer Diena	2:30 PM Kapparot: All Shlugged Up? R' Moshe Yeres	5 PM Day 8: In or Out? R' Alex Hecht