

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayetzte

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A Prophet Reads the Parshah

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

The twelfth chapter of the book of Hosheia (part of which is included in this week's haftorah) includes several allusions to the story of Yaakov's life. These allusions are constructed to provide lessons from Yaakov's life for Hosheia's contemporaries. They offer a fascinating look into the way a prophet understood these parshiyot.

The chapter begins by offering a criticism of the northern Israelite Kingdom, and to a lesser extent the southern Judean Kingdom, about their deceitful behavior. Specifically noted is the foreign policy practice of sending tributes to both Egypt and their rival Assyria in an attempt to play both sides. Hosheia blasts this duplicitous behavior as "chasing the wind."

This criticism is the context for Hosheia's first allusion to Yaakov's life:

In the womb he tried to supplant (*akav*) his brother and when he became strong he fought (*sara*) with a godly being. He fought (*yasar*) an angel and defeated him. [The latter] cried and begged him. He (G-d) met him (Yaakov) at Beit El, and there He spoke to us. Hashem, the Lord of Hosts, "Hashem" is how He is recalled. (Hosheia 12:4-5)

This allusion refers to three scenes in Yaakov's life: His birth grasping the ankle of his brother Esav, the battle with a mysterious being in the night, and the prophecy he received at Beit El some time after this battle.

There are several things we can note about Hosheia's retelling:

- These scenes are from different parts of Yaakov's life. They are being contrasted in order to deliver a specific message.
- The Torah describes Yaakov as grasping (*ocheiz*) his brother's ankle at birth. Hosheia instead uses the verb *akav*, meaning to supplant through trickery (see Bereishit 27:36).
- There is an emphasis on the roots *a-k-v* and *y-s-r*. These allude to the two names Yaakov and Yisrael.

Hosheia's message seems to be this: The deceitful practices of the two kingdoms are parallel to Yaakov's own behaviour. He too (following Abarbanel and Malbim's readings) deceived his brother. In fact, this seemed to be his fate from the womb, either as part of his nature or because of the natural dominance that Esav projected. However, Yaakov transformed himself. He overcame the drive to deceit and gained the confidence to confront and defeat angels. This self-confidence came from his trust in G-d and is encapsulated by the prophecy at Beit El. There, G-d changed Yaakov's name to Yisrael, reflecting his transformation. G-d also promised Yaakov that his descendants would inherit the land. The land was meant for a people who follow the path of Yisrael. Hosheia emphasizes that G-d's commitment to this promise hasn't changed. If the Jews are willing to act honestly and forthrightly, G-d will help them overcome any adversary. [See Rashi to Hosheia 12:6.] Hosheia says to his fellow

Jews, "You act deceitfully because you feel weak and afraid. Instead, follow the path of your father Yisrael. Have the courage to be honest, kind, and just and trust that G-d will support you! This is the kind of country Israel is supposed to be."

Hosheia's second allusion to Yaakov's life serves to drive home this point. He describes the Israelite Kingdom as proclaiming that the riches and power they have gained through deceit were in some sense legitimate. This is because they gained them through their own efforts, and their deceit was so elaborate as to be undetectable.

In his response to this, Hosheia recalls Yaakov's time with Lavan. "Yaakov fled to the fields of Aram, and Yisrael worked for a wife and for a wife he guarded sheep." (Hosheia 12:13)

According to Abarbanel's reading, Hosheia is trying to depict the consequences of Yaakov's deceitful behavior. The result of tricking Yitzchak to receive Esav's blessing was that Yaakov was forced to flee. Instead of benefiting from his deceit he ended up penniless in a foreign country and was forced to tend sheep for years in order to get married.

With this allusion, Hosheia is responding to deceitful behavior from another angle: crime doesn't pay. Even when you think you've successfully pulled off the ruse, G-d sees your actions and repays you in kind.

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Summary

Summarizing this chapter is challenging; it contains multiple units, with different themes. This breakdown is informed by the commentary of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz.

Yeshayahu describes the song that will be sung in the land of Yehudah when the nation is redeemed from exile. The opening part of the song is about Jerusalem as a strong city, in which its citizens will receive peace and security from Hashem. Then, the song describes the opposite – a wicked city, with arrogant citizens who will eventually be brought low. The path of the pious is the way of justice and following Hashem. This is the path the people have been waiting for, and it will lead to the redemption. (26:1-8)

The song goes on to describe the private emotions of the pious, who walk in the path of Hashem. The pious desire the presence of Hashem, as Hashem's presence will inspire justice. Those who don't follow the path of Hashem, the wicked, will not experience this redemption, since they deny the presence of Hashem in the world. (9-11)

The song then turns into a prayer and an apology; the people of Israel desire

the peace of Hashem and acknowledge the fact that they have sinned. They sing a prayer for a closer connection with Hashem, and they complain that they have been waiting for a long time for a redemption that has not arrived. (12-18)

The ending of the song refers to a positive future: there will be life after death, and the resurrected will praise Hashem as well. (19)

Yeshayahu adds confirmation for the people who are awaiting redemption. He tells them that this crisis is temporary, and they should hide in their rooms. Punishment is coming for the wicked, whose crimes will be exposed. (20-21)

The chapter actually continues into the opening sentence of Chapter 27, which describes Hashem punishing two leviathans. According to Rashi and Don Isaac Abarbanel, that refers to punishment of the leaders of the nations who have harmed us.

Insight

In 26:20 Yeshayahu commands the people to "hide in their rooms," since Hashem is angry and will bring forth

trouble on the world. What does this hiding mean?

Rashi on the verse gives two explanations:

- 1) The "rooms" are the synagogues and Torah academies. The people will be deep in the world of Torah, so that no harm will be caused to them.
- 2) These "rooms" refer to the rooms of the heart of each individual, to have the self-contemplation that will lead to repentance. Similarly, Radak and Rabbi David Altschuler (Metzudat David) explain this hiding as hiding in good deeds and repentance.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra suggests a different approach: the rooms refer to Jerusalem, as it will be a safe city when the armies of Sancherev, king of Assyria, will arrive.

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Siddur Insights: The Power of Thank You

The first prayer recited upon waking up, and one of the first tunes that many learn to sing in day school, is *Modeh Ani*. On the surface, this prayer is deceptively simple:

"I thank You, living and eternal King, for giving me back my soul in mercy. Great is your faithfulness." (Koren Sacks translation)

Contained within these few words, though, is much more depth than meets the eye. Rabbi Sacks zt"l, in his commentary on the siddur, notes that if sleep is truly 1/60 of death (Yerushalmi Berachot 1:1), then waking is a miniature rebirth. He writes, *Modeh Ani* "articulates a transformative act of faith: the recognition that life is a gift from G-d. Expressing gratitude at the fact of being alive, we prepare ourselves to celebrate and sanctify the new day." (Koren Sacks Siddur, pg. 5) Likewise, Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried writes that "every morning a person becomes a new creation and should give thanks with all his heart to Hashem." (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 1:2, Davis translation)

Every morning, then, we are born anew with each day providing new opportunities to be our best selves in service of our Creator. This acknowledgement also helps direct our entire day. After all, Rabbi Moshe Isserles' opening comment in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:1) notes that people treat themselves and their surroundings with far more care when they realize they are always in the presence of Hashem.

The ultimate question, then, is what to do with that knowledge. Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, in a [Thanksgiving Day sermon](#) delivered at Congregation Shearith Israel (the oldest synagogue in the United States, known for their custom of

reciting half-Hallel – without a berachah – on Thanksgiving Day), noted that the Hebrew word *hodayah* can mean a confession of guilt as well as thanks. In that light, reciting *modeh ani* as one wakes up could indeed be understood as an expression of gratitude, but could also be read as a confession that we mortals have no real sovereignty in this universe. For Rabbi Dr. Lamm, this realization expresses "the true significance of thanksgiving in Judaism: the contrast between divine infinity and human finitude; between G-d's eternity and our transience; His endless might and our helplessness; His all-encompassing wisdom and our pervasive ignorance. Our gratitude is deepened when we face the fact that we are... undeserving." Despite our being undeserving, G-d still trusts us to do His will, and for that we are thankful.

There is also something inherently powerful about immediately beginning the first moments of our new life with thanks. As Rabbi Dov Zinger writes, "We think that one who receives says thank you, but really the opposite is true: The one who says thank you is the true recipient. This person knows how to receive." (*Prepare My Prayer* pg. 47) Knowing how to properly express gratitude for what we are given helps us to embrace our best selves and lead our ideal lives. As my childhood rabbi liked to say, "I thank, therefore I am."

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Biography

Rav Elyah Lopian

Rabbi Dovid Zirkind

Rav Elyah Lopian (1876-1970) was born in Grajewo, Poland where he received his religious education from the students of Rav Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the mussar movement. He emigrated to England in 1928, where he served as the Rosh Yeshiva of the Etz Chaim Yeshiva in London's East End. At the age of 74 he fulfilled his lifelong dream of moving to Israel.

Upon his arrival in Israel Rav Lopian intended to devote himself to his personal studies, but due to the encouragement of the Chazon Ish he accepted a position as *Mashgiach Ruchani* (Spiritual Counsel) at the Keneset Chizkiyahu Yeshiva in Zichron Yaakov. His discourses on the weekly *parshah*, known for their passionate mussar and astute psychological insights, were edited by his children and published after his death (see translation).

One of many powerful stories of Rav Elyah's greatness was retold by his nephew, Rabbi Dovid Lapin: 'I recall so clearly only a few years before his passing, how he got up in the middle of a *seder* (study session) in the Yeshiva one evening and spontaneously started saying *Kaddish*. The whole Yeshiva stopped learning, stood and answered his soul-wrenching *Kaddish*. No one knew what caused him to do this, and yet not a single person suggested it was the beginning of senility. We sensed we were witnessing one of those cosmic moments we would never understand. Several hours later the news came through that the Syrian Air Force shot down two Israeli fighter jets, not very far from Kfar Hassidim. The pilots were killed. The time of the incident: exactly as Rav Elyah was reciting *Kaddish*.'

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Weekly Halachah: Preventing Someone From Sinning

By Rabbi Jared Anstandig

The Torah describes Yaakov's exit from Lavan's house. While Lavan is at the sheep-shearing, Yaakov and his family sneak away. Before departing, Rachel curiously takes her father's "*terafim*" (Bereishit 31:19). While commentaries debate what exactly *terafim* are and why Rachel took them, Rashi, quoting a midrash, is very direct: "She intended to separate her father from idolatry." (Rashi on Bereishit 31:19) From the perspective of Halachah, is this acceptable? Are we encouraged, or even allowed, to steal or cause damage to someone to prevent them from sinning?

The Talmud (Berachot 20a) describes an episode in which Rav Ada bar Ahavah saw a Roman wearing a forbidden garment in the streets. [Commentaries disagree regarding what the garment was. See Rashi and Aruch here, and Beit Yosef Yoreh Deah 303.] Rav Ada bar Ahavah is praised in the gemara for tearing off the garment in an act of zealotry. The outcome of this passage seems to indicate that Rav Ada was correct in causing financial damage to prevent sin.

Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 421:13) rules that one may even strike a would-be attacker of a third party to prevent this attacker from sinning with his continued attacks. The Rama (Choshen Mishpat 421:13) expands this to permit the prevention of any sin performed by any sinner. However, Halachic authorities limit this permission in multiple ways:

- 1) Rabbi Shlomo Luria (*Yam Shel Shlomo*, Bava Kama 3:9) stresses that if this were to be the accepted practice chaos would ensue, and people would be unable to live. Accordingly, only a judge or person of significant authority is permitted to do anything to prevent a sinner from sinning. Obviously, this precludes nearly all of us from practicing this law.
- 2) Additionally, according to the Rama (Yoreh Deah 303:1) this halachah only applies if the transgression is biblical and being done willfully and intentionally. This ruling further limits its applicability.
- 3) Finally, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein (*Aleinu L'Shabeiach*, Vayikra, pg 411-412) cites Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv as ruling that the damager is obligated to financially reimburse the would-be sinner for any damage or suffering caused.

Ultimately, while the great Rachel was certainly well-meaning, it seems that according to practical Halachah she would be ill-advised to take her father's *terafim*.

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Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvah 4: The Calendar

By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The fourth biblical mitzvah is the instruction to institute and follow a lunar calendar, as seen throughout Tanach. This is usually understood to include:

- Sanctification of the start of each month by a *beit din* (Jewish court), based on the calculations made by a secretive group (Ketuvot 112a, and see Rashi *ibid*. 111a *hasod*);
- Public declaration of the new month, based on eyewitness testimony regarding the new moon; and
- Calculation of leap months to ensure that specific lunar months will not stray too far from key points in the annual solar calendar. In the best-known example, the lunar month of Nisan, in which Pesach occurs, must not wander too far from the vernal equinox.

Rabbi Saadia Gaon disagreed with the need for witnesses, though. As part of his 10th century stand against Aharon ben Meir regarding the calendar, Rav Saadia Gaon claimed that the original method was to set the calendar based upon rabbinic calculations, and that witnesses were only instituted in the period of the second Beit haMikdash in order to counter Sadducee challenges to rabbinic authority.

Our calendar year includes 12 months, or 13 months in a leap year. In every 19-year cycle, years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 19 are leap years. Years may be "normal", with 354 days (leap year: 384), "lacking", with 353 days (leap year: 383), or "complete" with 355 days (leap year: 385). The months of a "normal" year alternate between 30 and 29 days, starting with the 30 days of Nisan; in a "lacking" year Kislev drops to 29 days, and in a "complete" year Cheshvan grows to 30 days. The extra Adar in a leap year is always a 30-day month.

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Shabbat Dec. 2-3

TORAH MITZION INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS A SHABBATON: LEAVING THE COMFORT ZONE

Friday night

Dvar torah, Clanton Park: Zeev Schwartz, CEO, Torah MiTzion

Dvar torah, Or Chaim Minyan: Rabbi Eitan Maazari, Rosh Kollel, Torah MiTzion Montreal

Shabbat day

Shiur after Hashkama, Clanton Park: Rabbi Baruch Felberman, Rosh Kollel, Torah MiTzion Washington DC

Dvar Torah before Keriat haTorah, Or Chaim Minyan: Zeev Schwartz, CEO, Torah MiTzion

Shiur after Kiddush, Or Chaim Minyan: Rabbanit Hasida Pinchuk, Family Therapist, Torah MiTzion

Seudah shlishit, Clanton Park: Rabbi Ilai Grunwald, Rosh Kollel, Torah MiTzion Memphis

Seudah shlishit, Or Chaim Minyan: Nechemya Rosenfeld, Torah MiTzion Nashville

Motzaei Shabbat

7:00 PM SHIUR & COMMUNITY MELAVEH MALKAH 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

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

Sunday Dec. 4

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

Monday Dec. 5

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

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

Tuesday Dec. 6

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. 17), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday Dec. 7

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Jews and Clothes Week 6 of 7

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

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

Thursday Dec. 8

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 ymannt@torontotorah.com for location (men)

Friday Dec. 9

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!

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

LEGAL ETHICS: VACCINES AND YOUR CLIENT

On ZOOM at <https://tiny.cc/mtethics>; With CPD Credit; Register at <https://torontotorah.com/legal>

10:00 AM to 4:00 PM Sunday December 25

TANACH IN A DAY: JEWS AND NON-JEWS IN TANACH