



BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV TORONTO TORAH

PARASHAT EMOR

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Dedicated by Wayne and Zeldie Kurtz to commemorate the first yahrzeit of Ida Kurtz, Yocheved Chaya Yenta bas Chaim A"H.

THE BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV DAY OF GIVING WILL BE TAKING PLACE ON MAY 28–29, 2024.
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DVAR TORAH EMOR RABBI NOAH SONENBERG, DEAN

A Humble Approach to Inquiry

Sefer Vayikra is a book that is legal in nature with a very limited narrative. In fact, there are only two stories that occur in the sefer and they each have a parallel timeline that is found in other sefarim. The first story, in Parashat Shemini, which records the death of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, takes place during the inauguration of the tabernacle which is also recorded in Shemot and Bamidbar. The events recorded in Vayikra could have easily fit in the narrative of those other sefarim. The placement of that story in Vayikra gives us perspective on how we are supposed to approach the service of Hashem. We need to take care with our personal inspiration to make sure that we are serving Hashem in the way He wants to be served and not simply doing what we want which in a way is actually just serving ourselves.

According to the commentaries, the story in this week's parasha of the individual who cursed God occurred at the same time as the story of the individual who gathered wood on Shabbat. In terms of the narrative, it seems that our parasha's story would have been better suited to be written alongside that story in Sefer Bamidbar. The placement of the story in our legal sefer must

be understood to be providing insight into the laws that are found juxtaposed to it.

The story begins with the phrase "ויצא בן אשה" "ישראלית" "And a son of an Israelite woman went out." Rashi quotes the Midrash which connects the story to the laws of the לחם הפנים, the show bread, which immediately precedes the story in the text. The Midrash

Approach the study of God's laws with humility

teaches that this individual went out from learning the laws of the show bread to scoff at and ridicule the law. He felt that the law of leaving the bread out for a week did not make any sense and was inappropriate since week-old bread would not be fitting in the service of God.

If a student were to raise such a question in class, a teacher would likely be very happy to see that the student was engaged with the lesson and had an understanding of the honour and grandeur that is necessary in the service of God. By juxtaposing the law with the ultimate result of cursing, the Torah teaches us an important lesson about how to approach ritual laws

that don't always make sense to us at first glance. There are no questions that a person shouldn't ask when they are trying to reach an understanding of the profound meaning found in the laws of the Torah. The problem that the Torah identifies here is when a person sees a law and makes a conclusive determination that their perception that the law makes no sense is the only and correct way to perceive the law. Not everything will make sense to us but it is important to approach the study of God's laws with humility and the awareness that our first understanding of the law might be incorrect and in fact we might not be able to fully understand even after much investigation. The individual who cursed, instead of concluding that he needed to reflect further on the law, arrogantly thought that he understood all the details and nuances of the law and through this limited understanding of the law concluded that its author was worthy of ridicule. This need for humility is also found in the famous claim that Shlomo Hamelech knew the reasons for all of the laws except for the Red Heifer. Even the wisest of people must be aware of the limits of the human mind when contemplating the Divine.



Yirmiyahu 20

Drama has been building in the last several chapters of Yirmiyahu, as the prophet has used vivid demonstrations to describe the terrible fate coming to the Jews if they fail to repent. Most recently, Yirmiyahu smashed a jug and declared that Hashem would similarly smash the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. In the process, the prophet has antagonized the corrupt leadership.

A kohen named Pashchur, part of the hierarchy running the Beit HaMikdash as well as a false prophet, is angered by Yirmiyahu's condemnations and warnings. He attacks Yirmiyahu, beating him and placing him in a stockade in public for a day. [See Radak to 20:2.] On the following day he frees Yirmiyahu, who castigates him and proclaims that Hashem has named him *Magor*, meaning terror, to reflect the terror that is coming with the enemy's assault.

Pashchur and his family will die in captivity, and they will be buried there. The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Ketuvot* 12:3) sees in this two distinct punishments, as burial in Israel has value even if one dies elsewhere (20:1-6).

Yirmiyahu wears a brave face, but inside he rages

Yirmiyahu wears a brave face when addressing Pashchur, but inside he rages. He complains to Hashem that he is mocked and abused for conveying the Divine message. He cries out, "I said I would not communicate Hashem's message anymore, but it burned in my heart and I couldn't contain it!" And yet, he then declares that his enemies will not succeed; Hashem is with him, and will protect him (20:7-13).

But acknowledging Hashem's protection doesn't conclude Yirmiyahu's complaint. Like Iyov (chapter 3), Yirmiyahu curses the day he was born and the person who carried the news of his birth. Horrifyingly, the prophet declares, "Better to have died in the womb!" (20:14-18). [It is worth noting that Yirmiyahu has yet to see the worst of his opponents; his written words will be burned (Chapter 36), there will be an attempt on his life (38), and he will be exiled to Egypt (40).]

Hashem does not respond to Yirmiyahu's pain and outrage; the next passage begins a very different experience. King Tzidkiyahu sends a delegation to ask Yirmiyahu to intercede with Hashem, for aid against the impending assault by Nevuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.



Week 2: Sources of Knowledge

Before getting to his central thesis about the nature of the commandments, Rabbeinu Bachya outlines the different kinds of knowledge. He divides knowledge into three: science of nature, practical science, and theology, the last one being the highest kind of knowledge.

He notes, based on Rabbi Saadia Gaon, that there are three ways to access this knowledge. The first is direct intellectual analysis. The second is from the written Torah. The third is from the rabbinic tradition.

He then moves to his most well-known division—that the mitzvot found in Torah are divided into the *Chovot HaLevavot*, obligations of the heart, and *Chovot HaEivarim*, obligations of the limbs. The latter refers to external acts. Within those, there are the laws that one could have derived without command, the "rational laws," often referred to as *mishpatim*, and those that are only known to us by divine command, the *chukkim*. He contends, however, that all the obligations of the heart are

rationally derivable.

He further notes that all mitzvot can be divided into positive and negative commandments, or obligations and prohibitions. For the practical mitzvot, this needs no elaboration. However, the novelty of the book is to outline these same divisions within the obligations of the heart.

He notes that he found many books devoted to explaining Torah, such as those that explore its grammar and meaning (such as those written by Rabbi Saadia Gaon or ibn Janach). He gives several examples of practical halachic guides that outline the obligations of the limbs (such as the responsa provided by the Geonim). There are those, such as Rabbi Saadia Geon in *Emunot V'Deot*, who wrote works about belief, providing arguments for the content of such beliefs. However, he felt that no book systematically explained the obligations that related to one's inner world. After attempting to find a satisfying explanation as to this lack (that we will explore next week), he set out to fill this gap.



What Do We Count Today?

Question: Yesterday, a friend of mine asked me what we should count in the Omer, and I answered "twenty-one." Immediately someone jumped and said, "You can't count with a beracha anymore because you already counted!" Is that correct?

Answer: The *Shulchan Aruch* [Orach Chayim 489:4] indeed rules that when someone asks the other during the time when one can count the Omer, the answer should be to say, "yesterday was such and such"—because if one were to say the count for the current day, they wouldn't be able to count properly with a blessing. Thus, apparently, you made a mistake when you said what to count on the same day and won't be able to count the Omer with a blessing anymore.

However, in the case you're describing, there are several reasons to argue that you

answered your friend correctly and you would be allowed to count again properly with a blessing:

1. When your friend asked you what to count today, you answered him "twenty-one" and didn't say to him, "today is twenty-one." The *Mishnah Berurah* states clearly that there's no issue in stating just the number, but the problem arises only when saying, "today is such and such."
2. The *Mishnah Berurah* states that this ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* is only correct for the first six days of the Omer when only days are counted and not weeks, but starting from the seventh day of the Omer when both days and weeks are counted, if someone says "today is twenty-one days" without specifying the number of weeks, it's okay, and they can count again with a blessing.

3. A third allowance brought in the *Mishnah Berurah* to consider generally: if someone has intent in advance not to fulfill the Mitzvah of counting the Omer, even if they say the complete count of that day, they aren't fulfilling the mitzvah against their will, so they can go back and count with a blessing. Therefore, if someone wants to answer with maximum precision when responding to a friend's question "what is today in the Omer," such as someone who needs a special explanation or a young child, it's possible to specify in advance that we don't intend to fulfill the obligation with this count and explain elaborately that "today is twenty-one days, which is three weeks in the Omer."

Have a halachic question? Share it with Rabbi Mann at ymanntorontorah.com.



Week 3: Excuses



The Soul

By Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz
Maggid Press, 2018

"What are referred to as good middot, that is, a refined character, depend largely on the soul's influence. If we have bad middot, and negative character traits seem natural and acceptable to us, then we are probably oblivious to our soul. We can defend this ourselves by saying, 'This is my nature,' or, 'That is how I was raised,' but these are merely excuses ... [W]hen we become aware of certain unsavory middot in our own character, we should know that these are not super-

ficial behaviors or habits, but indications of a deficiency in our soul's manifestation." (The Soul, pages 45–46)

Rabbi Steinsaltz makes two fundamental points in this passage. First, he argues that we are inherently good. We become the best

version of ourselves, displaying our best middot, when we allow our soul, our essence, to shine through. If we ever thought to ourselves that we are not good enough, this passage reminds us that our pure soul most definitely is.

At the same time, Rabbi Steinsaltz cuts our defenses away for when we behave inappropriately. We may justify our misbehavior in any number of ways. Yet, Rabbi Steinsaltz writes, we are responsible for our actions. Our misdeeds are reflections of the disconnect between our actions and our souls. The onus to fix that rests squarely on our own shoulders.

If we want to become better people and more attuned to our souls, we must be willing to admit where we are wrong through an accurate self-appraisal.

The *Soul* can be purchased from Koren Publishers at tinyurl.com/KorenBMZD. Use the code *TorontoTorah* for a 10% discount on this or any other book on their website



TABLE TALK RABBI NOAH SONENBERG, DEAN

Source: Vayikra 23:2

Speak to the children of Yisrael, and say to them, The appointed times of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy gatherings, these are my appointed times.

Seforno

If you were to treat these dates as ordinary days, week days, they would turn from being holy gatherings to mundane assemblies devoted exclusively

to the transient life on earth and the physical pleasures people want to experience in this life.

Questions to Discuss

- What is the difference between the purpose of our religious holidays and the purpose of a vacation?
- During which of our holidays do you feel you are most able to actualize its potential?

After Shabbat, please share your family's answers with us at nsonenberg@torontotorah.com to enter our raffle for a \$15 voucher for Grodzinski Bakery!

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Shabbat	Halacha from the Parasha	Clanton Park	After Hashkama Minyan	Rabbi Mann
	Gemara	BAYT	Between Mincha & Maariv	Rabbi Gutenberg
Sunday	Tzurba M'Rabanan – Halacha	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:30 AM	Rabbi Shor
	Men's Semichat Chaver: Hilchot Smachot	Clanton Park	9:00 AM	Rabbi Spitz & Rabbi Mann
	Shiur b'Ivrit	BAYT (Milevsky/Mizrachi)	9:00 AM	Rabbi Mann & Rabbi Lax
	Sefer Shemot	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Cancelled this week	David Koschitzky
Monday	Halachah in the Holocaust	Zoom: tiny.cc/idanrak	2:00 PM	R' Rakovsky
	Men's Halacha	Shomrai Shabbos	8:30 PM	Rabbi Mann
	Introduction to Gemara: Learn how to learn	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg
Tuesday	Then and Now: Returning to the Land of Israel – a Study in Tanach	Zoom	1:30 PM	Rabbi Horovitz
	Women's Gemara Shiur	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:30 PM	Rabbi Anstandig
	Women's Contemporary Halacha Shiur	Clanton Park	8:00 PM	Rabbi Mann
Wednesday	Men's Contemporary Halacha	Clanton Park	1 hour before Mincha	Rabbi Mann
	The Torah's Insights on Building a Just and Equitable Society	Zoom	10:00 AM	Rabbi Sonenberg
	Men's Gemara Bekiut	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Sonenberg
	Antisemitism: From Tanach to our Campuses	Shaarei Tefillah	8:00 PM	R' Rakovsky
Thursday	Tanach: Sefer Shmuel	Zoom: tiny.cc/BMZDTanach	1:30 PM	Rabbi Horovitz
	Men's Tzurba M'Rabanan	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Turtel
	Men's Gemara Iyun	BAYT (Milevsky/Mizrachi)	8:00 PM	R' Diena
Sun–Thu	Men's Community Night Seder	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00-9:00 PM	

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Shabbaton with Rabbi Torczyner	Shaarei Shomayim	Shabbat, May 18	
"I Seek My Brethren": Dealing with Pro-Palestinian Jews	BAYT (registration required)	Sunday, May 19	9:30-11:00 AM
Midreshet Yom Rishon	Clanton Park	Monday, May 20	10:00 AM
BMZD Day of Giving	causematch.com/BMZD	Tuesday, May 28–Wednesday, May 29	

YOUR BEIT MIDRASH

Rosh Beit Midrash

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