

# Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayeshev/1st Candle

25 Kislev 5770/Dec 12, 2009

Vol. I Num. 9

## Praise G-d!

Russell Levy

Leah declared, after naming her fourth son Yehudah, "Now, I will praise G-d." A midrash teaches that Leah's descendants inherited her talent for exalting G-d:

*R' Levi said: Leah gripped the spindle of praise, and so praising people emerged from her. Yehudah declared [regarding Tamar], 'She is more righteous than I.' David HaMelech said, 'Praise G-d, for He is good.' Daniel said, 'I praise and thank You, G-d of my forefathers'.*

The verses describing David HaMelech and Daniel fit the message of this midrash, but Yehudah's citation is an admission of guilt, not a declaration of praise. Perhaps R' Levi was remarking upon the similarity between the Hebrew words for *admission* and *praise*, but this would fit neither the words nor the message of the midrash. So in what way did Yehudah praise G-d?

First, let us understand the remarkable nature of Leah's praise.

הכרת הטוב, Gratitude, is certainly a Jewish value, and it is demonstrated throughout Tanach. But Leah's act was to thank G-d – to take the accomplishment of pregnancy and childbirth, a labour for which she could have claimed some credit, and attribute her success to G-d.

That Leah was committed to expressing this gratitude is a tribute to her religious character.

This matches the examples brought from her descendants' behaviour. David haMelech, warrior and king, declared that we should thank G-d for our success, rather than demand credit for our own efforts. Daniel, high advisor in the Babylonian royal court, similarly assigned credit to G-d. This is the trait which Leah passed to her descendants: Actions which would bring honour to the Name of G-d.

Now let's turn back to the story of Yehudah and Tamar. Yehudah parted ways with his brothers at the beginning of Bereishit 38. He married the daughter of a Canaanite [see Ramban and Ibn Ezra for an explanation of her origins], and she birthed three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. Er married Tamar and died almost immediately; Onan then wedded Tamar, and likewise passed on. Afraid to instruct his young third son to follow custom and wed Tamar, Yehudah told Tamar to wait in her father's house until Shelah would mature. Many years later, after Yehudah's wife passed on, Yehudah saw a *zonah*, in fact a disguised Tamar, and commissioned her services. Giving his signet ring and walking stick as collateral, Yehudah promised to send

her sheep as payment. Three months later, Yehudah learned that Tamar, who was quasi-betrothed to Shelah, was pregnant. Yehudah thought that Tamar should be punished for adultery, but right before the punishment was performed, Tamar asked Yehudah if he knew to whom belonged the signet ring and walking stick she held in her possession. Yehudah then admitted that he was the future father of Tamar's children.

Yehudah could have concealed his guilt. Tamar's family and Yehudah's shepherding partner were unaware of the truth. Since Yehudah was separated from his brothers and was probably the only member of his family around, the only two people in the world who knew the truth regarding Yehudah and Tamar were themselves. Had Yehudah saved face and lied and not admitted to his impropriety, no one would be the wiser.

However, Yehudah still chose to admit his guilt, and his declaration is the first biblically recorded act of public repentance. This was a remarkable act of *kiddush HaShem*, sanctifying G-d's Name by choosing the route of honesty without regard to his own future. Just like Leah, David haMelech and Daniel, Yehudah brought honour to G-d.

Further, Kiddush HaShem is the first and most basic step in praising G-d. Kaddish begins, "Yitgadal V'Yitkadash Shmeih Raba – May G-d's great Name become great and sanctified." Only afterward, following Kiddush HaShem, do we say, "Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa'ar", "May His Name be blessed, praised and glorified."

We now understand the connection between Leah's praise and Yehudah's admission of guilt. This was not simply an apology, but a tribute to the Creator, and an expression of his mother's spiritual genes. Those genes were passed along to Yehudah's own descendants, and realized in David haMelech and Daniel.

[rlevy@torontotorah.com](mailto:rlevy@torontotorah.com)

## Parshah Questions

Meir Lipschitz

(Sources are provided to help the reader research answers)

- What is the connection between Chanukah and Yosef's pit? (Rashi Bereishit 37:24, Shabbat 22a)
- Through what sale(s) did Yosef move from the pit to Egypt? (Rashi, Rashbam, Ramban, Daat Zekeinim MiBaalei haTosafot, Chizkuni, and Netziv to Bereishit 37:25-28)
- What are the significance and/or meaning of the names Peretz and Zerach? (Rashi, Baal HaTurim, Ramban, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Radak to Bereishit 38:29-30, and Yevamot 76b)
- For children: Why did Yaakov say that Yosef's second dream could not be true? (Rashi Bereishit 37:10)

[mlipschitz@torontotorah.com](mailto:mlipschitz@torontotorah.com)



Yeshiva University  
Center for the Jewish Future

Torah  
מחנה  
Mitzion  
RELIGIOUS ZIONIST KOLLELS  
כוללים ציוניים בתפוצות

The story of Chanukah revolves around the war of the Maccabim versus the Greeks, a battle which was caused by several factors. The best-known trigger, mentioned in Megilat Chashmonaim, was the sacrifice of a pig in Modiin. However, Yehuda David Eisenstein's Otzar Midrashim (Chanukah, pg. 189-190) offers another version of the war's key catalyst: A woman who sacrificed her personal honor in order to sound the alarm in the Jewish world.

One of the Greek decrees was *ius primae noctis*, mandating that every Jewish bride be taken first by the Greek general. This practice was not unique to the Greeks – it is recorded in Herodotus and other historians regarding several ancient societies – and perhaps this was why the Jewish community did not rebel, at first. Many women refused to marry, but others endured this brutal treatment. The practice lasted for more than three years, until the day came when Chanah, daughter of Matiyahu, was prepared to wed her husband, Elazar.

When Chanah's escorts came to bring her from her wedding feast to the general, she tore her clothing, disgracing herself in public for all to see. Yehudah haMaccabee and his brothers wanted to kill her for committing this disgraceful public act, but she said to them, "You care that I stand like this before my brothers and friends, and you want to kill me for this, but you do not care that I am going to be disgraced before this impure non-Jew?"

Chanah continued, invoking Shimon and Levi and the classic biblical model for Jewish rebellion against immoral abuse of Jewish women. She challenged the

Chashmonaim: "Shimon and Levi were only two men, and they endangered their lives for Gd, and Gd saved them. You are five brothers, with more than two hundred young kohanim to assist you – trust Gd and He will aid you!" She then turned to Gd and pleaded for Divine aid.

The Chashmonaim were inspired by her message, and resolved to act. They clothed Chanah in royal garb and brought her to the ruler himself, claiming that with her unique lineage, she was worthy of more than a general. Once in the palace, they killed the ruler and began their campaign against the Greek forces, and the indeed triumphed over the many.

This story is but one example from which we may learn of the strength and self-sacrifice of Jewish women, and their historic impact.

Every period of time is invested with its own meaning and is suited for a particular breed of activism. For example: The three weeks from the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz to Tisha b'Av are known as days when it is better not to enter dangerous situations and not to seal business deals, for those are days of bad fortune for us. Elul is known as a time for personal spiritual activism, for repentance and self-accounting.

Chanukah is a time for heroism: The heroism of the Maccabim as the few opposite the many, the heroism of Yehudit when she cut off the head of Holofernes, and the heroism of Chanah, who spurred the Chashmonaim to action.

In the second berachah before lighting the Chanukiah, we say that HaShem

performed miracles for our ancestors in ancient times, at this season. We have, again, in our own time, arrived at the season of heroism.

I come from the city of Sderot. For the past eight years, Sderot has suffered from unceasing missile attacks. All through that time, the State of Israel barely responded - until last year, at Chanukah, when the soldiers of the IDF struck back with great heroism. As the gemara (Sotah 44b) records regarding *milchemet mitzvah*, even a groom left his chuppah to fight: A soldier named Aharon Karov was called up immediately after the conclusion of Sheva Berachot at his wedding, went to war the following morning and was critically wounded. My close friend's husband left his wife and his 3-month old daughter at home, went out to fight and did not make it back. I also sent my husband to reserve duty for a long period, when I had an infant at home.

Despite all of our concerns and fears, I and many wives and mothers sent our beloved husbands and sons to fight, out of complete faith in the righteousness of our mission: The return of security and dignity to the Jewish nation. We tried not to leak any sense of weakness to our soldiers, a feat that is not simple when you see friends lose their husbands and you know it could be you. We did all we could to avoid breaking the spirit of those who had to fight, and to give them the support they needed to carry out their mission.

This is the heroism of Chanukah, a strength and activism in which women have always played a most meaningful part.

## The 613 Mitzvot – Mitzvah 10 : Eating Matzah

Mitzvah 10 instructs us to eat matzah on Pesach night. The gemara (Pesachim 116b) explains that we do this because we left Egypt in a rush, and our dough did not have time to rise, as recorded in Shemot 12:39. This explanation is difficult, though; Gd had already instructed us not to have chametz for seven days (Shemot 12:19)! The dough didn't rise because we could not let permit it to rise, and not because of our haste!

Among many who have approached this problem, the

13<sup>th</sup> century sage R' Yeshayah diTrani (Tosafot Rid to Pesachim 116b) suggested a simple answer. He noted that when the Jews left Egypt, the prohibition against possessing chametz applied only for the first day of Pesach; the instruction regarding a seven-day holiday was for future generations (as indicated in Shemot 12:14). If so, then the dough the Jews took from Egypt could have been permitted to rise if not for their haste, and this haste is what we have commemorated every year since.

[torczyner@torontotorah.com](mailto:torczyner@torontotorah.com)

# Ha'Am V'Ha'Aretz

Rabbi Chaim Chizkiyah Medini, the Sdei Chemed

R' Mordechai Torczyner

## The Graves of the Maccabim

Torah MiTzion weekly Parshah sheet-  
Parshat Miketz 5765

The story of Chanuka starts near Modi'in. Today Modi'in is a large and developing city, but just a cross the road there is a small archeology site called the "Macabim Tomb's".

We know that they are buried there because it says in "Sefer Macabim", Chapter 13:25-30

And Simon sent and took the bones of Jonathan his brother, and buried him in Modein, the city of his fathers ...

And Simon built a monument over the tomb of his father and his brothers; he made it high that it might be seen, with polished stone at the front and back ...

This is the tomb which he built in Modi'in; it remains to this day.

In the early 20th century, identification of the Macabim Graves was completed by Sandertzki.

The local Arabs called the graves: "tomb of the Jews" and "the tomb of the Jewish sultan".

Since the establishment of the State, the I.D.F celebrates Chanuka there with a special candle lighting and marches following the Chashmona'im's heritage.

<http://www.torahmitzion.org/eng>

halachic decisions well-known and esoteric, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, practical and theoretical, on topics from every area of halachah and Jewish thought, and offers them in a loosely alphabetical order. In addition, Rabbi Medini's own opinions are presented throughout the eighteen-volume work.

When Rabbi Medini first publicized his work, one rabbi wrote to him that its name was problematic, because the word Sdei could also be read as a Name of Gd, Sha-ddai, and covers of its volumes might be discarded during re-binding. Rabbi Medini first conferred with other halachic authorities before replying that this was not a concern. The intent of the publisher was to write Sdei rather than Sha-ddai; similarly, writing the name Eliyahu or Daniel would not require any sort of hyphenation or shortening. [torczyner@torontotorah.com](mailto:torczyner@torontotorah.com)

### Torah in Translation Small Candles, and Wax vs. Oil Sdei Chemed – Asifat Dinim: Chanukah □

In this city (in the Crimea), olive oil is expensive and the population normally lights wax candles prepared and sold by the *gabbaim* of the community. The profit from these sales goes to the community chest, to provide for the needy of the city.

When I arrived here, I saw that they were making very small candles which would not burn for the half-hour threshold, and selling them for half a kopek. Their intent was acceptable in their eyes, to increase the profit; they did not know that this threshold is the law. I taught them that this was not appropriate according to the letter of the law that it must burn for half an hour.

Thank Gd, since then they have made large candles and sold them for a kopek each, double the price of the earlier candles, and people have purchased them with a pleasant smile. Israel is to be praised!

I also taught them that olive oil is the choicest form of the mitzvah. Granted that olive oil is expensive, still, the essential law dictates that one need not use a great deal of oil. Two and a quarter dirham of oil suffices for each light... It is certainly correct and just that one fulfill this mitzvah with olive oil, the choicest form of the mitzvah, using oil as he can afford, and based on the oil he should make a wick which will cause it to burn for half an hour. There is no specified size for the wick; it may be thick or thin.

[torczyner@torontotorah.com](mailto:torczyner@torontotorah.com)

Rabbi Chaim Chizkiyah Medini (1833-1904) was a leading Sephardic sage of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote what may be the greatest single-author encyclopedic Torah work of all time, the *Sdei Chemed*.

Born in Yerushalayim to an established family, Rabbi Medini displayed brilliance in his youth; he was licensed as a teacher of halachah at the age of 13. When his father passed away in 1853, though, Rabbi Medini was forced to move to relatives in Constantinople, where he was supported in his personal scholarship and publishing. He excelled in Talmud, Halachah and Kabbalah, and published *Michtav Chizkiyahu* on mishnah and gemara.

In 1867, Rabbi Medini was recruited to become the leader of the Jews of Crimea, a peninsula on the northern coast of the Black Sea. His son passed away the following year, and Rabbi Medini published a work of responsa and analysis in his memory, anonymously.

Rabbi Medini led the Crimean community for thirty three years, and during this period he became well-known as a halachist. People sent questions from afar to seek Rabbi Medini's advice. Rabbi Medini also became known as a major supporter of Jewish communities in Israel, urging people to support the communities which he admitted were currently small, but which he predicted would become great.

Rabbi Medini returned to Jerusalem in 1899. Two years later Rabbi Medini was called to Chevron, where he opened a yeshiva. He was also named Chevron's Chief Rabbi (Chacham Bashi) and Av Beit Din. During an illness he was given the additional name Chaim. Rabbi Medini passed away on the first night of Chanukah in 1904 and was buried in Chevron.

Rabbi Medini was greatly admired by the local non-Jewish population in Chevron. It is said that the Arab community tried to exhume Rabbi Medini and move his body to a mosque cemetery, until the Jews appointed cemetery guards.

Although Rabbi Medini published halachic works as well as piyyutim (poetic liturgy), his major fame is for his *Sdei Chemed*, which he compiled over the course of decades and published in Chevron. *Sdei Chemed* compiles

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov would like to extend a Mazal Tov to Rabbi and Mrs. Yehoshua Weber on the birth of a baby boy! May they merit to raise him in the ways of Torah, to chuppah and to good deeds.

# Come kick off your Chanukah with our Beit Midrash

Sunday December 13

Or Chaim, 159 Almore Ave

## Program:

8:15am .....Shacharit

9:00am .....Breakfast and Address by R' Shlomo Gemara

9:30am .....Shiurim (2 rounds of simultaneous sessions):

**Chanukah Presents: Permissible or Prohibited?**

Netanel Javasky

or

**We won, let's eat!**

Meir Lipschitz

or

**After the lights went out: The Fall of the Chashmonaim**

Russell Levy

10:45am .....Address by R' Yehoshua Weber

11:00am.....Keynote Address

**Symbols of Mashiach: Jews, Christians and**

**Zechariah's Menorah**

**R' Mordechai Torczyner**

For more info, please call 416-781-1777 or email [info@torontotorah.com](mailto:info@torontotorah.com)

**BABYSITTING AVAILABLE**



Yeshiva University  
CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE

## Schedule for the Week of December 12, 25 Kislev

### Friday, December 11

First Candle of Chanukah

Shabbaton at Shaarei Shomayim

### Shabbat, December 12

Shabbaton at Shaarei Shomayim (continued)

Second Candle of Chanukah

### Sunday, December 13

8:15AM Yom Iyun at Or Chaim; See Above

3:30PM Chanukah Mesibah with the Thornhill Community Shul

Third Candle of Chanukah

### Monday, December 14

12:30PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Lunch and Learn, "The Women of Chanukah", Kehillat Shaarei Torah Men and Women

8:00PM Itamar Zolberg: Classic Jewish Thought, Shaarei Tefillah Men and Women

Fourth Candle of Chanukah

### Tuesday, December 15

10:45AM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Parshah, BAYT Women

1:30PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Trei Asar-The Twelve Prophets, Shaarei Shomayim Women, with Mekorot

8:30PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Minchat Chinuch, Clanton Park Men

Fifth Candle of Chanukah

### Wednesday, December 16

11:00AM R' Mordechai Torczyner: The Torah of R' Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, 239 Franklin, Babysitting provided Women

8:30PM Meir Lipschitz: Parshah: Peshat, Derash and More, Clanton Park Men

Sixth Candle of Chanukah

### Thursday, December 17

8:00PM Netanel Javasky: Halachah and 21st Century Medicine, B'nai Torah Men and Women

Seventh Candle of Chanukah

### Friday, December 18

Eighth Candle of Chanukah