

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Behaalotcha

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The Blank Note

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

If I were asked until two years ago if I had heard of Rabbi Nathan Adler, I would immediately respond, "Yes, of course, the Rabbi of the Chatam Sofer!" However, during my visit to the United Synagogue offices in England, I learned about Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, the Chief Rabbi of England between the years 1844 and 1890. I read his biography and discovered that Rabbi Adler was highly respected in England, received great honour even from representatives of the monarchy, and did tremendous work for the Jewish community in Britain.

Rabbi Adler was so esteemed that in the elections for the Chief Rabbinate of England, he surpassed his rivals and received the support of 121 out of 135 communities (each community counted as one vote)! The second candidate, Rabbi Hirschfeld, received 12 votes, while the third candidate, "won" only 2 lonely votes.

But there are few in the Jewish world who are not familiar with the third candidate - Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch!

What a terrible defeat! How can one not be discouraged? To receive only 2 votes out of 135? Undoubtedly, others would have "taken the hint" and abandoned their aspirations, trying their luck in another field... But thank G-d, Rabbi Hirsch did not give up and continued to serve the Jewish community in Germany, where he saved his community from assimilation and wrote books which still today adorn the Jewish bookshelf and serve as a source of

ethics and inspiration for many generations. How did Rabbi Hirsch find the strength to continue and not give up despite the scorching failure?

It is written in our Torah portion that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, as it is written (Bamidbar 11:26): "But two men remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other was Medad ... and they were among those recorded."

What does "they were among those recorded" mean? Rashi explains that in order to determine the 70 elders, each tribe sent six representatives to be an elder, however there were 72 elders and he needed only 70. So he held a lottery; he took 70 notes and wrote on them "Elder" and two were left blank. Eldad and Medad were among those who got "Elder" in the lottery.

Rabbi Michael Taubes, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University's MTA high school and Rav of Zichron Mordechai in Teaneck, New Jersey, asked: Why did Moshe write the word 'elder' (*zaken*) 70 times? Wouldn't it have been easier for Moshe to write on just two notes 'No' or 'X' instead of writing on 70 notes 'Elder'? Why bother writing 70 notes when you could write just two?

Rabbi Taubes answers this question with a wonderful message: A Jew should understand that on his note, there is never a "No" or an "X" indicating failure. If a Jew fails to fulfill a desire or a dream that he hoped to fulfill, he should not fall into despair and think that on his note, the Creator

(*HaKadosh Baruch Hu*) marked an "X" or "No". His note indicates that he didn't succeed, but it is a blank note. It is a note on which something else can be written. If not in this appointment, then in a subsequent one, and if not in this role, then perhaps in another role. But a Jew always has a role, always has a purpose, and he should not think that if he fails once, it necessarily means failure.

Therefore, Moshe marks seventy notes with the word "elder", indicating that they indeed merited the appointment and role of being "elders." But those who did not merit it have a blank note on which they can write their next role, their true purpose that suits them.

At times in our lives, we experience failures and consider giving up on our dreams. But we should not fall into despair, we should not think that we received a note with an "X". We should know that the difficulty we face now only strengthens and prepares us for the next destination, for the role that truly suits us, for the special purpose that the Creator has given us.

Maybe this was the reasoning of Rabbi Hirsch, when he suffered a devastating loss in England. He did not fall into despair, he did not think he was worthless. He knew very well that he had tremendous powers capable of doing great and mighty things. With these powers, he continued to serve as a Rabbi in Germany, and the rest, as they say, is history.

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Summary

There are several ways of understanding the opening of this chapter. Below we will follow the mainstream approach of Rashi, Radak, and others, who understand this chapter as depicting the prophet Yeshayahu's words as referring to himself. See the commentary of Shadal here for an alternate reading.

The prophet speaks to the nations of the world, about whom he has prophesied destruction, and explains that he is a legitimate prophet, chosen in utero for this purpose. Among his tasks is to bring the People of Israel back to the service of Hashem. And, not only for the sake of Israel, but also for Israel to serve as an *or goyim*, a light to the nations (49:1-6).

Yeshayahu speaks of Hashem's care for the people of Israel: how He causes them to be honoured and that He hears them, answers them, and frees them from bondage. And, ultimately, he describes how Hashem will lead them back to the Land of Israel (7-12).

Though nature will sing of Hashem's undying love for the Jewish people, the people themselves will not feel that way. And so, the prophet reassures them using imagery and simile. For instance,

Yeshayahu compares Hashem to a mother and the people to her children – just as a mother could never abandon her child, so too Hashem shall never abandon the Jewish people. This is the start of the Haftarah for Parshat Ekev, the second of seven Haftaratot of consolation following Tishah b'Av. (13-17)

Yeshayahu continues to tell the amazing experience of redemption that will occur – the population will boom, leaving the people amazed at their sudden unexpected growth. (18-21)

The prophet concludes with a description of the nations of the world bringing more and more honour to the people, returning them to their land, and finally admitting that Hashem is Israel's redeemer. (22-26)

Insight

This chapter contains the expression *or goyim*, "light to the nations." What exactly does this expression mean? Rashi (49:6) explains that this is a very practical concept. Since everyone hates Babylon, Israel's ultimate defeat of Babylon will lead to rejoicing and bring light to the world.

Commenting several chapters earlier,

Radak (42:6) offers an explanation that may sound more familiar. The "light" in question is the light of Torah. In the future, the Jewish people's observance of the Torah will inspire others to follow suit. [This accords well with Yeshayahu's mission as described in Yeshayahu 1:3-4.]

This latter idea took on new life with the creation of the State of Israel. In Rav Kook's eulogy for Theodore Herzl (Hesped BiYerushalayim in *Ma'amarei HaRa'ayah*, page 94), he describes the dream of statehood as a way to fulfill our Divine duty. In his description of the role a Jewish state will serve, Rav Kook writes, drawing from the words of Yeshayahu, that the Jewish State shall be an *or goyim*, a light to the nations.

Whether we are in Israel or not, may our actions always be good, and may we serve as a true light to everyone around us.

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Siddur Insights: Aleinu L'Shabeiach

Three times a day, we conclude our davening with the prayer of *Aleinu L'Shabeiach*. In the book *Machzik Berachah* by Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (#132), it is mentioned in the name of the Rabbi Hai Gaon that the first part of the prayer was instituted by Yehoshua upon entering the Land of Israel. This corresponds to the content of the first paragraph, acknowledging that the Jewish people are not like the nations of the world "who worship idols and emptiness... and we bow down and prostrate ourselves, acknowledging and thanking the King of Kings".

The second part opens with the words "(V)Al Ken Nikaveh" and is attributed to Achan (whose initials spell "Al Cen Nikaveh"), who composes it after the battle of Yericho (see Yehoshua, Chapters 6-7). When he confesses his sin of taking from the spoils of Yericho and repents, he expresses the hope that the Almighty will accept his repentance, and likewise, the rest of the world will return in repentance.

Rabbi Hai Gaon also expands and emphasizes the importance of this prayer, stating that "there is no praise like it to our Creator, surpassing all praises in the world." Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kohen also states in the *Mishnah Berurah* (132:8) that this prayer is extremely important, and one should say it with fear and awe, for the entire heavenly host listens, and the Holy One, blessed be He, stands with the celestial entourage, and they all respond and say, "Fortunate is the people who have such a portion..."

Why do we say "*Aleinu L'Shabeiach*" at the end of the prayer? Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (*Harerei Kedem* #109) discusses the various customs of when to recite Sefirat HaOmer. Some

customs say it before *Aleinu L'Shabeiach*, while others say it after. Rabbi Soloveitchik wonders that there is any question about this. After all, in Jewish law we have a principle that when two texts need to be recited, the more frequent one comes first. Accordingly, why is there any doubt as to whether *Aleinu L'Shabeiach* should be recited first? Rabbi Soloveitchik responds that according to some opinions, the purpose of saying *Aleinu L'Shabeiach* is, as stated by the *Bach* (Orach Chaim 133:1), to impress upon our hearts before departing to our homes the uniqueness of the Heavenly Kingdom [*Malchut Shamayim*]. Thus, *Aleinu L'Shabeiach* must always be at the end, to signify our separation from the synagogue and the transition to our worldly lives, where we must always remember that the Almighty guides the world.

Rabbi Soloveitchik continues this idea in his *Nefesh HaRav* (page 147), where he discusses the custom in several synagogues to immediately recite Maariv after Minchah without reciting first *Aleinu L'Shabeiach*. He suggests that the reason is that since the community is not leaving to go home, there is no need to recite the prayer of *Aleinu L'Shabeiach*.

By saying *Aleinu L'Shabeiach* every day may we constantly remember and feel the presence of Hashem in our mundane day-to-day life.

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Biography
Rabbi Judah Minz
Rabbi Josh Gutenberg

Rabbi Judah ben Eliezer haLevi Minz was born in Mainz, Germany, circa 1408. He lived in Mainz (also known as “Magentza”) until the Jews were expelled, when Archbishop Adolf II took control of the city in 1462. He subsequently moved to Italy, where he lived for the remainder of his life. He was blessed with longevity, as he lived close to, if not more than, one hundred years of age.

Rabbi Minz served as Rabbi in Padua, a city in the region of Venice, in Northern Italy, for 47 years. He established a yeshiva and had many distinguished disciples. Among these disciples were his son, Rabbi Avraham Minz, and Rabbi Meir Katzenellenbogen. Rabbi Katzenellenbogen published a collection of responsa (Shu”t Maharam Padua), and became a member of the Minz family after marrying Rabbi Minz’s granddaughter.

Some believe that in addition to his rabbinic duties, Rabbi Minz lectured at the university in Padua and even had his portrait hung up in the university. However, other scholars contend that this is incorrect; the lecturer was another Jew, either Elijah Delmedigo or Abraham de Balmes.

Although Rabbi Minz wrote numerous responsa, the majority of his written works were destroyed shortly after his death, when Padua was ransacked by a combination of invading armies. One of his grandsons discovered sixteen responsa that were not destroyed, and they were later published in the back of the Shu”t Maharam Padua.

Rabbi Minz died in Padua on 24 Tishrei, 5269 (1508).

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Weekly Halachah
Why Aren’t the Parshiyot Synchronized?
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

K’riat haTorah in Israel will be one parshah ahead of the Diaspora until July 1. Why don’t we catch up with Israel sooner?

K’riat haTorah was created to ensure that communities would have a weekly public reading of the Torah. Authorities debate whether the mitzvah is purely communal (such that individuals are not obligated to hear it personally), or whether there is an obligation for each individual to hear the Torah read communally. Either way, the original mitzvah did not require reading a particular parshah on a particular Shabbat; the mitzvah was just to continue reading where the community stopped on the previous week. (Megillah 29b; Tosafot Succah 52a *v’keivan*; Or Zarua II 45; Chatam Sofer Orach Chaim 1:69; Pitchei Teshuvah Orach Chaim 135:2; Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 2:72)

The Talmud and early authorities record preferences for holding certain readings on particular Shabbatot. We maintain at least one parshah between Parshat Bechukotai and Shavuot and at least one parshah between Ki Tavo and Rosh HaShanah, because Bechukotai and Ki Tavo contain severe warnings of Divine punishment. We also read Parshat Vaetchanan on the Shabbat following Tishah b’Av. (Megillah 31b; Teshuvot haGaonim (Emanuel) 25; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 428:4)

Halachic authorities were never concerned about making sure that the same Torah portion would be read throughout the Jewish world on a given Shabbat. This may be because mass travel between Israel and the Diaspora is a relatively modern phenomenon, or because the Sages always expected our stay in the Diaspora to end shortly. Regardless of the reason, the discrepancy is only resolved when we need to double a parshah outside Israel in order to put Bamidbar before Shavuot, or to have Vaetchanan after Tishah b’Av. This year, it is the latter; Chukat and Balak will be read separately in Israel, and together outside of Israel. [Waiting until Matot and Masei is not an option, because those are read together in Israel as well this year.]

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Sefer haChinuch #30:
Becoming (Too) Personal with Hashem
By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The Torah uses anthropomorphic language to describe Divine actions and moods, and encourages us to develop an emotional relationship with Hashem. One benefit of this approach is that it lays the groundwork for a sense of personal investment in our mitzvot; these activities are more than dry ritual or supernatural currency, they are demonstrations of love and loyalty. However, this approach also risks drawing us into treating Hashem with less than total respect, contending that Hashem will lovingly overlook our wrongs. (Bava Kama 50a)

Shemot 20:7 combats this concern by building a barrier to prevent overfamiliarity, instructing us, “Do not take the Name of Hashem, your Master, for naught.” We may not invoke Hashem’s Name for a false or vain oath; Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah’s 30th mitzvah.

The term “vain oath” includes taking oaths affirming well-known facts, or swearing to perform impossible acts. The issue is not falsehood; the problem is that taking such an oath demonstrates a lack of respect for the Name of Hashem, and therefore for Hashem directly.

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All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.
Some of our classes are now on summer hiatus, but many opportunities remain!

Shabbat June 9-10

Shabbaton at BAYT: VaYehi Binsoa: After Har Sinai

SHABBAT MORNING

Shiur after the Hashkamah Minyan: Rabbi Jared Anstandig: *Can You "Overdo" Mitzvot?*

Shiur before the Bais Medrash Minyan: Rabbi Steven Gotlib: *When Pragmatism Meets Religion*

Shiur after the Chabura Minyan: Rabbi Jared Anstandig: *Can You "Overdo" Mitzvot?*

Derashah, Main Shul: Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: *Learning to Create*

SHABBAT AFTERNOON

5:30 PM Women's Shiur: Idan Rakovsky: *Ukrainian Refugees in the Eyes of the Torah*

5:45 PM Daf Yomi: Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

6:30 PM Panel Discussion, Rebbetzin Judy Taub Hall

Journeys: Experiences That Help Us Become Better Jews

Rabbi Jared Anstandig, Rabbi Steven Gotlib, Rebbetzin Leora Leshner, Idan Rakovsky

Moderator: Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

8:00 PM Pirkei Avot: Rabbi Jared Anstandig: *Hillel's Approach to Self-Confidence*

Seudah Shlishit: Rabbi Steven Gotlib, *Raising Our Sparks*

After hashkamah R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

Sun. June 11

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

8:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, *The Sanhedrin: The Audacious Attempt to Reawaken the Assembly*, Week 1 of 2
For location email janstandig@torontotorah.com

Mon. June 12

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, *The Jewish Zoo*, Week 3, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

8:00 PM Prielle & Idan Rakovsky, *Song of the Week*, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklysong>

Tues. June 13

8:00 AM R' Steven Gotlib, *Sefer Emunah uBitachon*, Village Shul

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, *Wisdom of King Solomon: Kohelet*, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, *Contemporary Halachah*, Clanton Park (women)

Wed. June 14

7:30 PM END OF YEAR CELEBRATION AT SHAAREI SHOMAYIM

REGISTER AT <https://torontotorah.com/celebration>

FREE OF CHARGE

8:00 PM R' Steven Gotlib, *Ashkenazi and Sephardi Differences*, The Village Shul *not this week*

8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, *Shir haShirim*, Shaarei Tefillah *not this week*

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, *Contemporary Halachah*, Clanton Park *not this week*

Thurs. June 15

8:00 AM R' Steven Gotlib, *Jewish Mysticism*, Village Shul

8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, *Shir haShirim*, Shaarei Tefillah - *note the one-time change to Thursday*

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, *Beitzah* (advanced), for location: ymann@torontotorah.com *not this week*

Fri. June 16

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 JUNE 23-24

MACHLOKET: A SHABBATON OF THOUGHT AND INSPIRATION AT SHAAREI SHOMAYIM