

QOL HA'QAHAL

קול הקהל



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DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF SAM S AND NORMA HADDAD
ABE S AND ADELE HADDAD
ALICE HADDAD





Dedicated in Memory of
Sam S and Norma Haddad
Abe S and Adele Haddad
Alice Haddad

SCA MISSION

The Sephardic Community Alliance is an organization established to reinforce and preserve the traditional Sephardic way of life of our ancestors based on the principles set forth in our Declaration of Values. Our commitment is to serve as a platform for lay leaders to work in unison with Community Rabbis, institutions and organizations in promoting the perpetuation of these Values. We support all those who embrace our traditions and rich heritage and that uphold and endorse these values.

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The SCA would like to welcome our newest member organization:
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QOL HA'QAHAL MISSION

To promote Torah throughout our community by providing a platform for our rabbis, students and institutions.

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Cover Art: Cave of the Patriarchs 2010, Wikipedia

THE HAFTARAH OF VAYERA

Rabbi Joseph Mizrahi

The *Haftarah of Vayera* is from the book of Kings II and teaches us the importance of a society built on G-d's moral and ethical laws. Our Haftarah passage discusses two stories about the prophet Elisha. The overt connection to our *perashah* is made through the second story, in which Elisha foretells the birth of a baby to the woman from Shunem. Similarly, we read in *Vayera* how Abraham is told about the birth of Yishaq. Oddly though, the first half of the *Haftarah* narrative seems to have no obvious connection whatsoever to *perashat Vayera*.

This first narrative tells a tragic story with a very disturbing premise, but with a fairy tale-like ending. The story is that of a woman who approaches Elisha the prophet with a problem. The narrative does not express who this woman is, except to tell us that she was the wife of a "G-d fearing man". Josephus relates that she is indeed the wife of Obadyah. Obadyah was a virtuous and G-d fearing man, famous for risking his life during the evil reign of Ahab (אהאב) and his Phoenician queen, Izebel (איזבל). The queen was an enemy of Judaism and of morality in general. During their terrible tenure, this royal couple brought the Northern Kingdom to new depths of depravity with their idolatry.¹ Izebel personally supported the *Baal* and *Ashera* cults. We are told in chapter 16 of Kings II that Ahab sunk lower than any of his predecessors.² In addition, we read how Izebel goes on a killing spree to purge the true prophets who represent the Law and values of Israel. Obadyah, at great personal risk, hides two groups of fifty true prophets each, in separate caves and sustains them during this terrible period. With her husband [Obadyah] now dead, the widow is left with a large debt, and her creditors are about to seize her children as slaves to settle the family debts.

"The overt connection to our perasha is made through the second story, in which Elisha foretells the birth of a baby..."

When we read parts of the *Tanakh* that contain such moral and ethical corruption, readers may be puzzled. How did things ever get so out of hand? How could the Jewish people drift so far away from the paradigms and examples recorded in the book of *Yehoshu'a* and the book of *Debarim*?

Perhaps the solution to understanding this quandary can be found in a specific passage in the book of *Yehoshu'a*. In the very first book of our prophets, we are brought through the triumphant march of the children of Israel through the Promised Land. They are successful and have devotion in the Almighty throughout the book. In the entire book of *Yehoshu'a* there is only one exception to the paradigm of upholding G-d's law in an ideal society. Following the battle of Jericho, Achan (עכן) violates a ban (חרם) and takes from the spoils that were donated to G-d. As a result of this sin, 36 Israelites were killed in the first battle for עי. Soon after Achan is identified and punished, the Ai (עי) is taken in the second battle.³ G-d forgives the violation and *Bene Yisrael* are ready to move forward in the holy endeavor of conquest. The Nation experienced a small bump in the road, but quickly returns to the pristine state of adherence to G-d's Torah.

The very first battle of conquest, the battle of Jericho, was no ordinary battle. It was a supernatural, symbolic victory. The "City of Dates" was a wealthy, strong and ancient stronghold of the Canaanites. It contained an internal water source and produced honey, the single most expensive liquid in antiquity. The Israelite army crushed them in a miraculous battle that took only a week. Sieges of that magnitude could (and did) last years. The fact that the city fell so completely and quickly must have been a staggering

and shocking blow to the remaining inhabitants of ancient Canaan. *Bene Yisrael* seemed invincible, guided by an all-powerful G-d who had defeated mighty Egypt as well as two Canaanite kings on the east bank of the River Jordan.

When the battle is complete, Joshua makes a public oath which applies to all of Israel. Any person who attempts to rebuild the walls of Jericho will suffer a terrible fate:

(*Yehoshu'a* 6:26):

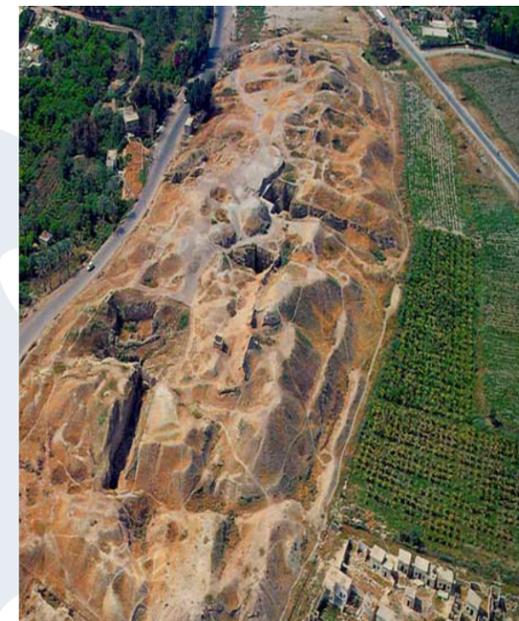
וישבע יהושע בעת ההיא לאמר -
ארור האיש לפני ה' אשר יקום
ובנה את העיר הזאת את יריחו
בבכורו ייסדנו ובצעירו יציב דלתיה

"Joshua swore at that moment and proclaimed: cursed is the man before G-d who builds this city Jericho; with his first born he will lay the foundation and with his youngest son will he fasten the door". In summary, the curse threatened: rebuild this city and your family will all die. This oath is sworn by Joshua and all the leaders of Israel in the name of G-d.

Oaths taken in public by leaders are taken very seriously and are the underpinnings of society. Our entire justice system is based upon the truthful testimony of witnesses. When there is a breakdown of the system to the point where words mean nothing, depraved events naturally ensue. Even today, a powerful politician who threatens war or military action had better be able to back his saber rattling or be seen as a fool! Judaism and our Torah treat oaths with the utmost seriousness. The most solemn part of the Yom Kippur service center around the annulment of vows in the *Kal Nidre*. It is a man's word, his bond.

In the book of Kings I, as the readers are being introduced to the evil King Ahab and his wife Izebel, we learn of a seemingly minor small de-

tail in chapter 16, verse 34. A man by the name of *Hi'el Bet Ha'El* attempts to rebuild Jericho. Indeed, he does so - as he buries his children, one by one. Yet he does not stop after the death of his eldest child; he goes on and stubbornly continues to bring the project to its completion at the cost of his entire family! It seems insane; yet on he goes. What propelled *Hi'el Bet Ha'El* forward in his self-destructive endeavor?



The Tel of Ancient Jericho

The answer, perhaps, lies in the chipping away, piece by piece, and eventual erosion, of all morality. When our society is based on law and a fear of G-d, we are promised in our Torah that we will

be successful. Joshua is given this message numerous times in the first chapter of the book of Joshua (1:7):

רק חזק ואמץ מאד לשמר לעשות ככל-התורה אשר צוה משה עבדי אל-תסור ממנו ימין ושמאל למען תשכיל בכל אשר תלה,

"Only be strong and very courageous, to observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go".

In everyday experience, human nature leads us to grow lax and degrade into rebellion. We prosper, grow fat and bite the hand that feeds us. וישמן ישורון ויבעט שמנת עבית כשית. This human behavior is all rooted in the very grave sin of hubris- גאווה. Hubris leads people to immoral and depraved behavior that they would never ordinarily consider and, ultimately, to rebellion against God Himself. This attitude manifests itself in idolatry, theft, cruelty to the orphan and the widow and eventually in a total breakdown of society. Without the Torah's laws and values, society can deteriorate into one akin to the de-

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THE RULE OF THE RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL FOR VAYERA

by Rabbi Haim Ovadia

First appeared in the Jewish Journal of Greater LA

“While all other sciences have advanced, government is at a standstill -- little better practiced now than three or four thousand years ago.” -- John Adams

If the art of government had improved, then war, disease and poverty- inflicted by the tyranny and selfishness of man, as well as the corruption of leaders -would not claim so many lives each minute, each second, around the globe. Man’s quest for a perfect form of government started at the dawn of civilization and is still far from a satisfactory conclusion.

The Bible describes the failure of monarchy, and history has proven that theocracy usually leads to fanaticism or hypocrisy. Even democracy eventually boils down to decisions made by individuals, and as long as it depends on the wisdom and discretion of one or several humans at the helm, it can take disastrous turns.

A system of checks and balances can put democracy back on track, but we must admit that stumbling, falling, hitting the ground and getting up again to repeat the process is not the ideal form of walking.

In the words of historian Barbara Tuchman: *“Mankind, it seems, makes a poorer performance of government than of almost any other human activity.... Why do holders of high office so often act contrary to the way reason points and enlightened self-interest suggests? Why does intelligent mental process seem so often not to function?”*

In the early chapters of Genesis, the Torah denounces different forms of government. The anarchy of the generation of Noah started with a corrupt oligarchy, the elite group of *Bene Ha'Elohim*, or the Sons of the Judges. The attempt of the builders of the Tower of Babel to create a totalitarian society, with communism as its flag and “one language, one ideology” as its motto, resulted in the dispersion and diversification of mankind.

In this week’s portion, we read about the destruction of Sodom, which came about not because of sodomy, but rather because of its total abandonment of the weaker layers of society. The prophet Ezekiel declares: “Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy” (16:49).

The model of Sodom was that of capitalism to the max. If you cannot make a living, don’t turn to me for help; it’s a free country, try harder.

In the midst of that political mayhem, there appears our first patriarch, Abraham. He is plucked by

“Abraham is chosen because he can prepare the ground for a utopian society, one in which every individual is raised with the understanding that the boundaries of law must be respected and justice must be pursued.”

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Guest Articles

HAYYE SARAH - HOPES & FEARS

by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Reprinted from *Covenant and Conversation*, available online at rabbisacks.org

The *sedra* [*parashah*] of *Hayye Sarah* focuses on two episodes, both narrated at length and in intricate detail. Abraham buys a field with a cave as a burial place for Sarah, and he instructs his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Why these two events? The simple answer is because they happened. That, however, cannot be all. We misunderstand Torah if we think of it as a book that tells us what happened. That is a necessary but not sufficient explanation of biblical narrative. The Torah, by identifying itself as Torah, defines its own genre. It is not a history book. It is Torah, meaning “teaching.” It tells us what happened only when events that occurred then have a bearing on what we need to know now. What is the “teaching” in these two episodes? It is an unexpected one.

Abraham, the first bearer of the covenant, receives two promises – both stated five times. The first is of a land. Time and again he is told, by G-d, that the land to which he has travelled – Canaan – will one day be his.

- (1) Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. (12:7)
- (2) The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north, south, east and west. All the land that you see, I will give you and your offspring forever . . . Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.” (13: 14-17)
- (3) Then He said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to take possession of it.” (15: 7)
- (4) On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates – the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.” (15: 18-21)
- (5) “I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your G-d and the god of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and to your descendants after you; and I will be their G-d.” (17: 7-8)

The second was the promise of children, also stated five times:

- (1) “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.” (12: 2)

Continued on page 8

(2) “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then (2) your offspring could be counted.” (13: 16)

(3) He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them”

Then He said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (15: 5)

“The land in its length and breadth will be Abraham’s and his children’s as ‘an everlasting possession’”

(4) “As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.” (17: 4-5)

(5) “I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky and as the sand on the seashore.” (22: 17)

These are remarkable promises. The land in its length and breadth will be Abraham’s and his children’s as “an everlasting possession.” Abraham will have as many children as the dust of the earth, the stars of the sky, and the sand on the sea-shore. He will be the father, not of one nation, but of many. What, though, is the reality by the time Sarah dies? Abraham owns no land and has only one son (he had another, Ishmael, but was told that he would not be the bearer of the covenant).

The significance of the two episodes is now clear. First, Abraham undergoes a lengthy bargaining process with the Hittites to buy a field with a cave in which to bury Sarah. It is a tense, even humiliating, encounter. The Hittites say one thing and mean another. As a group they say, “Sir, listen to us. You are a prince of G-d in our midst. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs.” Ephron, the owner of the field Abraham wishes to buy, says: “Listen to me, I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.” As the narrative makes clear, this elaborate generosity is a façade for some extremely hard bargaining. Abraham knows he is “an alien and a stranger among you,” meaning, among other things, that he has no right to own land. That is the force of their reply which, stripped of its overlay of courtesy, means: “Use one of our burial sites. You may not acquire your own.” Abraham is not deterred. He insists that he wants to buy his own. Ephron’s reply – “It is yours. I give it to you” – is in fact the prelude to a demand for an inflated price: four hundred silver shekels. At last, however, Abraham owns the land. The final transfer of ownership is recorded in precise legal prose (23: 17-20) to signal that, at last, Abraham owns part of the land. It is a small part: one field and a cave. A burial place, bought at great expense. That is all of the Divine promise of the land that Abraham will see in his lifetime.

The next chapter, one of the longest in the Mosaic books, tells of Abraham’s concern that Isaac should have a wife. He is – we must assume – at least 37 years old (his age at Sarah’s death) and still



The Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron

conceals a tough, even exploitative, determination to make a profitable deal. Eventually patience pays off. Rebecca leaves. Isaac marries her. The covenant will continue.

These are, then, no minor episodes. They tell a difficult story. Yes, Abraham will have a land. He will have countless children. But these things will not happen soon, or suddenly, or easily. Nor will they occur without human effort. To the contrary, only the most focused willpower will bring them about. The divine promise is not what it first seemed: a statement that G-d will act. It is in fact a request, an invitation, from G-d to Abraham and his children that they should act. G-d will help them. The outcome will be what G-d said it would. But not without total commitment from Abraham’s family against what will sometimes seem to be insuperable obstacles.

“The covenant is G-d’s challenge to us, not ours to G-d.”

the world – the safety and security of Israel as the Jewish home, and the future of the Jewish people. Abraham’s hopes and fears are ours. (Is there any other people, I wonder, whose concerns today are what they were four millennia ago? The identity through time is awe inspiring.) Now as then, the divine promise does not mean that we can leave the future to G-d. That idea has no place in the imaginative world of the first book of the Torah. To the contrary: the covenant is G-d’s challenge to us, not ours to G-d. The meaning of the events of Hayye Sarah is that Abraham realized that G-d was depending on him. Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we – inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise—who must bring it about.

Rabbi Lord Sacks is the former Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth

unmarried. Abraham has a child but no grandchild —no posterity. As with the purchase of the cave, so here: acquiring a daughter-in-law will take much money and hard negotiation. The servant, on arriving in the vicinity of Abraham’s family, immediately finds the girl, Rebecca, before he has even finished praying for G-d’s help to find her. Securing her release from her family is another matter. He brings out gold, silver, and clothing for the girl. He gives her brother and mother costly gifts. The family have a celebratory meal. But when the servant wants to leave, brother and mother say, “Let the girl stay with us for another year or ten [months].” Laban, Rebecca’s brother, plays a role not unlike that of Ephron: the show of generosity

A land: Israel. And children: Jewish continuity. The astonishing fact is that today, four thousand years later, they remain the dominant concerns of Jews throughout

A SYRIAN-SEPHARDIC APPROACH TO TORAH STUDY

By Mr. Morris Arking

When approaching the study of Torah, one must become proficient in all areas of the Torah, beginning with the most basic knowledge, and then progressing gradually to more advanced studies. The foundation of proper Torah study is the ability to read correctly. Therefore, all students must become proficient in reading skills (preferably at a young age).

The study of the entire Tanakh is a requirement for any serious student of the Torah.¹ At first, the focus should be on the simple meaning of the text with an emphasis on the meaning of each word. Knowledge of the Hebrew language and an understanding of Hebrew grammar are necessary; an appreciation of Hebrew poetry is most favorable. Generally speaking, *Midrashic* interpretations should be left for the next stage of study and eventually, for the most part, should be understood allegorically, as containing profound messages that the *Hakhamim* chose to encode in a *Midrashic* form.²

Our approach in general, and with regards to Talmudic and *Midrashic* statements in particular, is in accordance with the writings of the *Geonim* and early Spanish *Rishonim*, including most notably HaRambam and Ibn Ezra.

The next stage is Talmudic study, beginning with the *Mishnah*, then *Gemara*, commentaries and eventually super-commentaries of the *Gemara*. At all stages, the true meaning of the text should be derived by properly reading and explaining the texts in a genuine effort to reach the true intention of each commentator. Intellectual presentations that stretch the imagination by not remaining loyal to the words of the Talmud and *Rishonim* are frowned upon³

Halakhah is decided based upon the rule “*Qibalnu Horaot Maran*”⁴ – “we accept the ruling of R’ Yossef Qaro” -which is well attested to by our Sephardic Rabbis in general and *Halabi* Rabbis in particular. Legitimate grounds for leniency are sought in an effort to make life more livable for the people. Stringencies are appropriate for some in certain situations, but are unnecessary and sometimes inappropriate in other situations.

“In accordance with the approach of HaRambam, we believe that in addition to Torah studies, which are of paramount importance, it is necessary to acquire general knowledge (secular studies) as a supplement to our knowledge and understanding of the Torah”

We stay true to our *Sepharadi* / *Halabi* customs, traditions and *Halakhic* practices. We are familiar with our *Hakhamim* and with their writings. We continue to conduct our prayers, read religious texts and sing *Piyutim* and *Pizmonim* in accordance with the traditions of our forefathers, as we consider all links to the past generations essential in maintaining authentic and legitimate practices to pass down to future generations.

We have a genuine respect for the *Mequbalim*, but we view their teachings as intended for those that possess a profound understanding of *Qabbalah*. Their teachings are not appropriate for the masses or

even those that are knowledgeable in the standard teachings of the Torah. We only follow the *Mequbalim* in cases where the custom has been firmly established according to their teachings. Otherwise we adhere to the teachings of the *Shas* and *Posqim*.¹

We are instilled with the utmost respect for the great figures of the Tanakh, the Rabbis of the Talmud and all of the Rabbis of the subsequent generations. We find any disrespect of our great Jewish figures to be inappropriate and therefore we choose our words carefully when discussing biblical commentary or Talmudic/ Halakhic disagreements.

In accordance with the approach of HaRambam, we believe that in addition to Torah studies, which are of paramount importance, it is necessary to acquire general knowledge (secular studies) as a supplement to our knowledge and understanding of the Torah.

Furthermore, with the exception of a select few, all should engage in gainful employment to support themselves and their families financially. If it is possible, it is even praiseworthy for Torah scholars to support themselves independently of their religious activities⁷. This is all part of viewing participation in society as an important aspect of the Torah’s program. When participating in a non-Jewish society, we reject those aspects of non-Jewish culture that contradict the Torah, but we may accept those aspects that do not. Oftentimes, we use elements of our surrounding culture in a modified way and integrate them into our religious observances⁸.

Consistent with our approach is a positive attitude towards the establishment of the State of Israel and a heartfelt desire to settle there. While we all hope for a much improved state of affairs, we are thankful for what we have so far and feel obligated to show our appreciation publicly at the appropriate opportunities.

All of the above must be practiced together with fine character traits that include modesty, humility, tolerance, kindness and generosity towards others, and an effort to maintain peace and unity in the local community as well as in the larger Jewish world.



The adaption of popular secular songs to our pizmonim is a prime example of cultural diffusion

¹ See for example.

² See for example Maimonides on his introduction to *Perek Heleq*

³ See R’ Meir Mazauz in *Darchei Haiyun* (1984/2012) for a more full discussion on this point

⁴ This is a general rule, however there are many well known exceptions to this rule. For instance, we begin and end Shabbat according to the interpretation of the *Geonim* as opposed to *Rabbenu Tam* which was codified in *Shulchan Aruch*

⁵ See *EnYisshaq* volume 3 pg 264 by RYisshaq Yosef published 2009

⁶ See Maimonides *Mishneh Torah, Hilkot Teshubah* 10:6 regarding the importance of *Hohkmat* and *Tebunot* and further *Hilchot Yiode HaTorah*

⁷ Mishna in Tractate *Abot* (2:2): “Beautiful is the study of Torah *working*” or later in the same tractate (3:20): “If there is not flour (ie income) there is not torah”

⁸ The adaptation of popular secular songs to our pizmonim is a prime example

Mr. Arking teaches in Beth Torah and Bene Yosef



RABBI MENAHEM DE LONZANO (D.1611)

By Rabbi Yosef Bitton

It is not known when and where Rabbi Menahem ben Judah de Lonzano was born. He was probably born in Turkey or Italy. We do know that at a very young age he settled in *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem).

Rabbi de Lonzano had a very difficult life. He lost both his father and mother at a very young age, and throughout his entire life he was haunted by poverty and sickness. He was paralyzed in both feet and lost his sight in one eye. He still was a great Talmudist, a poet and a distinguished grammarian.

Or Torah is perhaps his most famous work. This book is all about the Masoretic Biblical text. The *Sefer Torah* is written without vowels and without *te'amim* (punctuation marks). The *Humashim*, the printed books of *Torah* from which we study and follow the Torah reading, include the vowels, *te'amim*, etc. This is the *Masoretic* text. Many times there are small variations in the vowels and *te'amim*, almost irrelevant for beginners but very significant for the expert readers, teachers and rabbis and for those who publish Torah books. In *Or Torah*, Rabbi de Lonzano goes through the text of the Pentateuch and clarifies the right Masoretic version. Rabbi de Lonzano follows a rigorous method of comparing our texts with old Biblical texts, some of which -he says- were more than 600 years old, to arrive to the most precise version of the Masoretic text.



The Aleppo Codex - one of the best examples of a masoretic text

“He was an expert in the Greek, Arabic and Turkish language...”

Another important book he wrote is the *Ma'arikh*, a book that clarifies obscure words found in classic Rabbinic texts. The famous HID”A (Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulai ben Isaac Zerachia [1724 – 1806] wrote about the *Ma'arikh*:

Rabbi Menahem de Lonzano elucidated many unclear words in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* and the *Zohar* in a rather scientific way... because he was an expert in the Greek, Arabic and Turkish language... I saw that while many rabbis interpreted those words according to their context, Rabbi de Lonzano clarified these words based on his solid knowledge [of philology] and the impressive collection of old books and manuscripts which preserved the most accurate version of these words.

Rabbi De Lonzano died in 1611 and is buried on Har *haZetim*, in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Bitton is the Rabbi of Congregation Ohel David u'Shlomo and the author of *Awesome Creation* (Gefen Publishing 2013)



MOSES MONTEFIORE: JEWISH LIBERATOR, IMPERIAL HERO

By Abigail Green - Harvard University Press, 2010

Submitted by Mr. Daniel Harari

Humanitarian, philanthropist, and campaigner for Jewish emancipation on a grand scale, Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885) was the preeminent Jewish figure of the nineteenth century—and one of the first truly global celebrities. His story, told here in full for the first time, is a remarkable and illuminating tale of diplomacy and adventure. Abigail Green’s sweeping biography follows

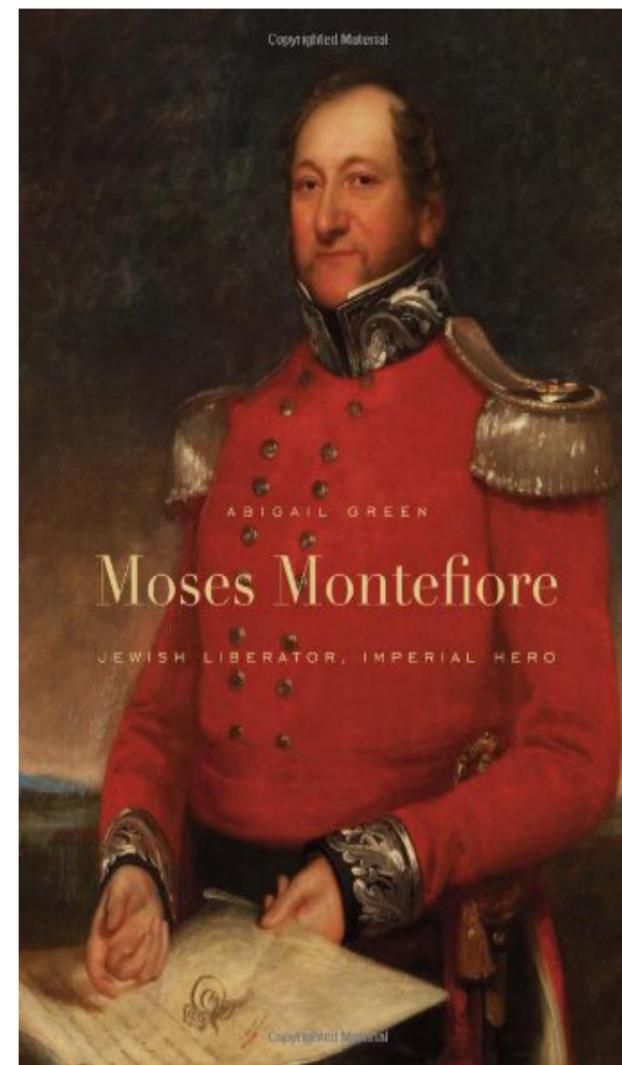
“Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885) was the preeminent Jewish figure of the nineteenth century”

Montefiore through the realms of court and ghetto, tsar and sultan, synagogue and stock exchange.

Interweaving the public triumph of

Montefiore’s foreign missions with the private tragedy of his childless marriage, this book brings the diversity of nineteenth-century Jewry brilliantly to life—from London to Jerusalem, Rome to St. Petersburg, Morocco to Istanbul. Here we see the origins of Zionism and the rise of international Jewish consciousness, the faltering birth of international human rights, and the making of the modern Middle East. With the globalization and mobilization of religious identities now at the top of the political agenda, Montefiore’s life story is relevant as never before.

Mining materials from eleven countries in nine languages, Green’s masterly biography bridges the East-West divide in modern Jewish history, presenting the transformation of Jewish life in Europe, the Middle East, and the New World as part of a single global phenomenon. As it reestablishes Montefiore’s status as a major historical player, it also restores a significant chapter to the history of our modern world.





Shabbat Table Talks

PARASHAT VAYERA

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Value: Being a True Descendant of Abraham

We have all heard the phrase, “oh you look just like your father (mother, etc.)” When we look at ourselves, can we see our first patriarch, Abraham? We have no way of knowing what he looked like, yet we do know how he acted. Ultimately, the most important part of being related to someone is not in the physical looks, but in the actions. Abraham’s actions, as described in the Torah, set a standard of behavior to which we can aspire, in our attempt to follow Hashem’s way.

Background

In addition to the stories, Hashem makes an important statement about Abraham’s virtues. This statement occurs in this week’s perasha, when Hashem decides to inform Abraham of Sedom’s impending destruction. In the following text, Hashem reveals His intentions of possibly destroying Sedom to Abraham. This invites Abraham’s critique and his negotiating with Hashem to save the city because of the righteous people in it.

Text: Beresheet 18:18-19, 23-25 (NJPS)

Now Hashem said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of Hashem by doing what is just and right, in order that Hashem may bring about for Abraham what he promised him....

Abraham came close and said: Will you really sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? Perhaps there are fifty innocent within the city, will you really sweep it away? Will you not bear with the place because of the fifty innocent that are in its midst? Heaven forbid for You to do a thing like this, to deal death to the innocent along with the guilty, that it should come about: like the innocent, like the guilty, Heaven forbid for you! The Judge of all the earth—will he not do what is just?

Analysis

Hashem reveals His plans to Abraham because Hashem chose Abraham to be the one who would teach his descendants about the “way of Hashem.” The Torah defines this as “doing what is just and right.” In this story, Abraham’s sense of what is just and right causes him to question even Hashem’s justice! When we teach our children about doing what is “just and right,” we are behaving like Abraham Abinu.

Discussion

What does “doing what is right” mean? (Give examples. If your child speaks about doing what he or she is “supposed to do,” raise the question about who decides what a person is “supposed to do,” and on what basis is that decision made.)

What if an important person (teacher, coach, boss etc.) tells you to do something that is wrong? Explore the question by giving an example that is appropriate for the age of your children. Here are

some examples.

Let’s say your coach tells you to lose a game intentionally to benefit the other team that made the national little league playoffs. What does “supposed to do” mean in this example? On the one hand, we follow the coach; on the other, he is telling us to do something that isn’t right because it is deceptive.

Your commander in the Israeli army tells you to violate the Shabbat in order to remove settlers from their land. Do you listen to your commander or to the *halakha* that says that Shabbat may only be violated when there is a life-threatening situation.

Your boss at work tells you to lie to a customer in order to make a sale.

Each of these examples contains a conflict between an authority that has power, and a moral value. Abraham had a sense of “right and just.” That sense gave him the courage to speak to Hashem in a respectful, but critical tone. When we see an authority figure who is not behaving to standards of morality, we can take a lesson from Abraham, criticizing with respect.

“Studying the Torah is an important part of the process of defining ‘right and wrong’”

How do we know what is “right and wrong?”

This sense of “right and wrong” must be cultivated by many years of education and example about living ethically. Some ways to do that include commenting on situations, real (in your life or that of your children or acquaintances) or fictional (taken from books, films, etc.), that reflect a choice between right and wrong behavior.

Studying the Torah is an important part of the process of defining “right and wrong,” if the Torah is studied in a way that focuses on issues of right and wrong.

One important way to define “right and wrong” is to raise the question about what Hashem wants in any situation. Although this appears obvious, we sometimes tend to follow other people’s behavior or “standard operating procedures,” without questioning their morality. We must constantly ask ourselves: “Is this right and just? Is this what Hashem wants us to do?” One way is to be very aware of the *halakha*, and to know which *halakhot* apply in which situations. Our children should be encouraged to consult with their parents, teachers, or rabbis concerning the issues of right and wrong.

For older children you might discuss the idea of “right” and “more right,” or “wrong” and “less wrong.” In example #1 above, what if instead of improving the team’s standing in the playoffs, the coach told you to lose intentionally to a team who has not won one game in the season. It is the last game of the season and he does not want the other team to feel totally dejected. (Not that the answer in this case is clear, but it pits the value of honesty against the value of consideration of another’s feelings.)

To be a true descendant of Abraham is not primarily to be genetically related to him (even righteous converts are true “descendants” of Abraham). Rather, we must make following Hashem’s way and doing what is “right and just” a part of our lives and the most important thing that we teach our children and students.

Rabbi Ralph Tawil is presently the principal of Yavneh School in Qiryat Tiv’on, Israel.

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...THE HAFTARAH OF VAYERA

Continued from page 5

pravity of Sedom. We are introduced to the evil King Ahab in this light; society is at its very lowest. Words mean nothing and neither does anything else.

“Models of morality are rewarded throughout the Tanakh for their fortitude and leadership in a way they deserve”

The story is a powerful reminder to society, which always faces the risk of devolving into a lawless, amoral valueless society such as Sedom. Elisha- the prophet who represents G-d's moral and ethical Law - steps in and solves the virtuous woman's financial problems with the miracle of the oil. Obadyah's wife is spared watching the calamity of her family being sold off as slaves. The narrative demonstrates the reader that although society may be crumbling, there are good people who do. indeed, catch the notice of G-d. Models of morality are rewarded throughout the *Tanakh* for their fortitude and leadership in a way they deserve.

Perhaps our Rabbis included this story in our *Haftarah* to highlight the commonality of Israel's amoral society with that of Sedom. Moral depravity is something that can happen in any society. Elisha the prophet brought justice to a society that was breaking down. Like the wife of Obadyah, Lot and the just will be rewarded and saved, and the wicked will receive their lot as well.

37 תהלים (Psalms)

3-6

ג) בטח בה ועשה טוב שכן ארץ ורעה אמונה
ד) והתענג על ה ויתן לה משאלת לבך
ה) גול על ה דרכך ובטח עליו והוא יעשה
ו) והוציא כאור צדקך ומשפטך כצהררים

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and cherish faithfulness.

So shalt you delight yourself in the LORD; and He shall give
you the petitions of your heart.

Commit your way unto the LORD; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass.

And He will make your righteousness to go forth as the light, and your right as the noonday.”

¹See Kings I 16:30 “And Ahab the son of Omri did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him.”

²Ibid

³See Joshua Chapter 7

⁴Deutoronomy 34:15

Rabbi Mizrachi is pursuing a PhD in Jewish History and currently teaches in Beth Torah and the Yeshivah of Flatbush.

...THE RULE OF THE RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL

Continued from page 6

God out of nowhere. He is not a king or a chieftain when he is addressed by God. Why was he chosen to be the forefather of Israel? What was special about him? The answer is disclosed by God: I have chosen Abraham – or better yet: - I have made Myself known to him – because I know that he will instruct his household members and his descendants in future generations to observe the path of God and to do justice and charity (18:19).

Abraham is chosen because he can prepare the ground for a utopian society, one in which every individual is raised with the understanding that the boundaries of law must be respected and justice must be pursued. At the same time, charity, loving kindness and understanding of other human beings are crucial to maintaining these very boundaries.

The path of God is to remember that all humans were created in God's image and therefore all have equal rights. The perfect government, therefore, starts with the individual governing himself.

A short while ago, two friends (with the help of many bloggers) created katrinalist.net a powerful Web tool for locating missing Katrina victims. As Discover magazine reports, it was “the kind of data management effort that could have taken a year to execute if a corporation or a government agency had been in charge of it.” The PeopleFinder group managed to pull it off in four days for zero dollars.

The activism of Bono and the philanthropy of Bill Gates are but two examples of what inspired and dedicated individuals can achieve despite the shortsightedness of governments. There is a world where the responsibility of justice and loving kindness lies first and foremost on the shoulders of the individual.

The goal still seems tantalizingly distant, but- inspired by the eternal message of the Torah - we are allowed and obligated to dream of a perfect world. Translate the dream to action. Assume leadership of yourself first and then exercise it, combining justice and loving kindness in order to help your family, your community, your neighborhood and eventually, the whole world. Imagine....

Rabbi Haim Ovadia is currently dedicating his time to writing his books.

MAQAM OF THE WEEK

Sephardic Pizmonim Project, www.pizmonim.com

by David Betesh DDS

On **Shabbat Vayera** (Genesis 18:1-22:24)

Maqam Nawah is applied to the prayers according to most Aleppo sources. Other *maqam* opinions include: Bayat, Hoseni or Nahawand. The following is an explanation by Hazzan Gabriel A. Shrem as reported by student Hazzan Mordekhai C. Nadaf: In the Psalms, a synonym for the word ‘angel’ is ‘*Nawah Qodesh*’. The reason why we use the *maqam* named ‘*Nawah*’ is because we read about Abraham's three visitors who are said to be ‘angels.’

PIZMONIM: “*Dar Rouma*” (page 365), “*Refah Siri*” (page 116).

ALIYOT: The entire *Aqedah* portion is given to the *Mashlim Aliyah* from 22:1 until the end of the *perasha*.

MISHMARA: *Vayera*, Judges 1-11, Psalms 35-42, *Mishnah Pe'ah* (Sephardic Pizmonim Project,

Continued on page 18

...MAQAM OF THE WEEK

Continued from page 17

www.pizmonim.com).

On **Shabbat Haye Sarah** (Genesis 23:1-25:18)

Maqam Hijaz, which is named after the Arabian Peninsula, is applied to the prayers according to all Aleppo sources (Damascus sources indicate to apply *Maqam Saba* for most sad occasions). This *maqam* is reserved for sadness and it is warranted here, because we read about the death of Sarah. According to Hazzan Gabriel A. Shrem, *Maqam Bayat* should be mixed in with *Maqam Hijaz* in order to differentiate this from *Shabbat Hazon*, which is viewed as much sadder.

HAZZANUT: (Hazzan Moshe Ashear): *Semehim: Boee BeRinah* (*Maqam Hijaz* version; page 156).

MISHMARA: *Haye Sarah*, Judges 12-end, Psalms 43-51, *Mishnah Qiddushin* (Sephardic Pizmonim Project,

www.pizmonim.com).

TANAKH STUDY UPDATE

By Charles Zami

The *Tanakh* Study Program is an initiative to promote the independent study of the books of the Bible through a web-based platform and weekly class. Every day, an email is sent with the necessary tools to study the daily chapter. The emails come in the optimal format for smart phones, tablets, or computers. There are links directly from the email to download the daily class given the instructor, as well as recordings of the reading with *te'amim* by Mr. Eli Cabasso, Rabbi Abraham Zarif, Rabbi Shelomo Levy and others. The email body includes a side by side Hebrew-English translation of the day's chapter. With the resources this program provides, it is by far the best opportunity to finally get a complete background in Nakh (Nebiim and Ketubim).

After an extraordinary program launch, with a lecture by the world renown Rabbi Yitzhak Etshalom introducing *Sefer Yehoshua* on September 20th in Beth Torah, it was already apparent that this program was going to be successful. To date, the program has over 1,000 subscribers.

The program is geared towards students with all different types of backgrounds and ages. Students with minimal *Tanakh* background can gain a great understanding of the daily portion by reading the Hebrew- English translation provided and listening to the daily *shiur*.

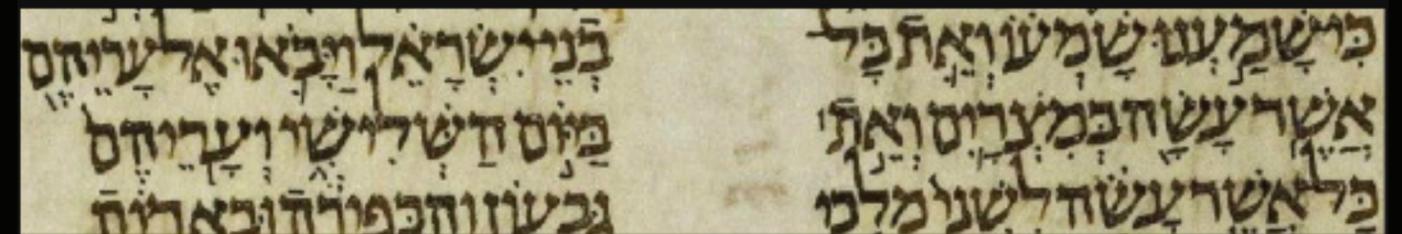
The weekly "live" class is an opportunity for students of all backgrounds to help develop their ideas from the previous week and understand the overarching themes that may have eluded their daily micro study of the texts. Students with a stronger background can utilize the classes to help attain more insight and complete more analysis on their own.

"The program is geared towards students with all different types of backgrounds and ages."

As a *Qoreh*, I know that much community focus is placed on teaching the youth of the community how to read the Torah with the proper *te'amim* and pronunciation. Many grow up not knowing the tunes and correct pronunciation of the *Nebi'im*, and certainly the many different books of *Ketubim*. The recordings with the *Te'amim* and text allow everyone the opportunity to spend five to ten minutes a day reading the passage the correct way, and enable everyone to learn our traditional *Halabi Te'amim* for all the books of *Tanakh*.

The ability to be part of a program with so many other people learning the same text, but in independent ways, is an exciting innovation. Using the knowledge that we will gain out of *Tanakh* Study, we will be better equipped to study *Talmud*, *Halacha*, Jewish Philosophy, and many other areas of Torah. May we be *zoche* to study *Torato Torat Emet bederech emet* and to use the knowledge that we gain from this project *le'ovdo be'emet uvlevav shalem*.

Mr. Zami is a graduate of Yeshiva University. To sign up for the study program, readers are encouraged to visit tanachstudy.com.



Tanach Study Presents

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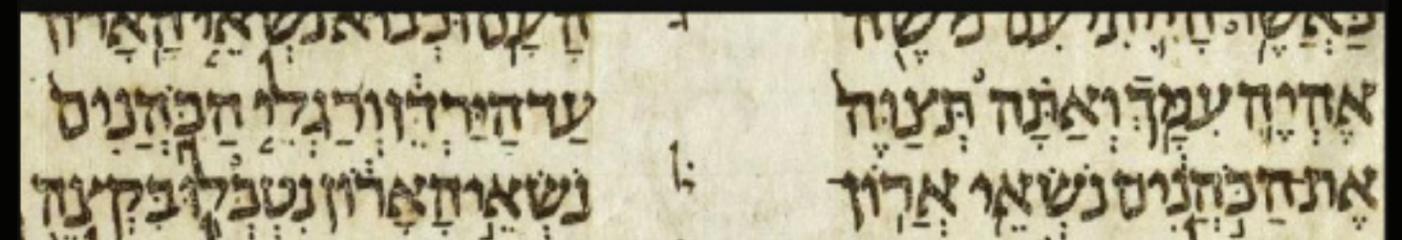
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