



Toronto Torah

Parshat Vayyera

Vol. I Num. 4

Cheshvan, MarCheshvan and Bul

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Many of us learned in grade school that the lunar month following *Tishrei* is called *Cheshvan*, *Marcheshvan* or *Mar Cheshvan*, but for much of Jewish history this month was known by another name: *Bul*. In an example from Tanach, at the end of the sixth chapter in *Melachim I* we are told, "And in the eleventh year, in the month of *Bul*, which is the eighth month, the house [the first Beit haMikdash] was completed..."

The name *Bul* was most fitting; it described the world of autumn perfectly. Our sages (Talmud Yerushalmi Rosh haShanah 1:2, Midrash Tanchuma Noach 17) taught that *Bul* בול may refer to the Hebrew word נבל, suggesting deterioration, because much of Israel's plant kingdom dies off during that time. In another direction, *Bul* may refer to a lump of food, since in this month Israel's pastures disappear, and animals must be fed out of stored supplies. Alternatively, *Bul* may refer to the way that the surface of the roads and fields is contorted into hard lumps, due to the rains. [In still another view, *Bul* בול refers to the מבוול, the deluge which began and ended in this month. The absence of the letter מ, which has the numerical value of forty, is linked to the

forty days of the flood's rains.]

Nonetheless, despite *Bul*'s rich agrarian message, Babylonian Jews imported the name *Marcheshvan*, the Babylonian title of this month, when they returned from exile to build the second Beit haMikdash (Talmud Yerushalmi *ibid*). Based on ancient scripts, it is likely that the Babylonians' eighth month was originally titled "ירחשמן", meaning "eighth month" (like the Hebrew ירח שמיני) which could have evolved into "מרחשוון" by the period of the Babylonian exile.

So why did we transition from an evocative autumn name to "the eighth month" - and in a Babylonian tongue, no less? Ramban (comment to Shemot 12:2) offered one explanation: "Initially, the months were counted based upon the departure from Egypt, but when we ascended from Bavel we saw the fulfillment of Yirmiyah's prediction, *No longer will it be said, 'By Gd, who brought the Jews up from Egypt,' but rather, 'By Gd, who brought the Jews forth from the land of the north.'* We therefore continued to use the Babylonian names of the months to remember that we had been there, and that HaShem had brought us forth therefrom." And so the

admittedly pedestrian *Marcheshvan* became a string around our finger, a means to remember the miraculous redemption Gd had engineered for us.

In the centuries since, Jews have also come to embrace the two separated words of *Mar Cheshvan* as a colloquial name for this month. Homiletically, we are taught that "מר" *Mar* may refer to bitterness, both for the absence of holidays in this month and for the sad historical events (including the Flood, and the slaughter of King Tzidkiyahu's family) associated with this month. "מר" *Mar* may also be taken to refer to a drop of water, since this is the month when Israel's rainy season begins in earnest.

The name *Cheshvan* has also entered common use. This title does not appear in Jewish sources until the 15th or 16th century, but that does not entirely invalidate it as a name. Such greats as the Levush, Radbaz and Rav Yosef Karo employed it, and it has become part of our lexicon.

Halachically, the authentic name of the eighth month remains מרחשוון, written as a single word. The Sdei Chemed (מערכת גט יז) cited numerous traditional sources in support of using only this name in a *get* (bill of divorce), although he did accept that a *get* would be kosher if the name *Bul* or *Cheshvan* was used (see also Aruch haShulchan Even haEzer 126:17), because of their use in Tanach and in colloquial speech, respectively. He was less certain that we would accept a *get* in which the name *Mar Cheshvan*, as two words, was used.

Building on the Ramban's thought about Babylonian names, may we soon merit the day when both the Egyptian servitude and the Babylonian exile are ancient history, and we instead invoke 'G-d, who brought the Jews from around the world and settled them in Israel.'

Parshah Questions

Meir Lipschitz

(Sources are provided to help the reader research answers)

- Do we know the identities of Avraham's שני נערים, two youths? (Rashi, Mizrahi, Gur Aryeh, and Sifte Chachamim to Bereishit 22:3)
- What were Avraham's ten tests? (Rashi, Rambam, and Rabbeinu Yonah to Avot 5:3)
- What lessons may we learn from the Akeidah? (Moreh HaNevuchim 3:24, Rabbeinu Bachaye Devarim 21:21 "ויכל ישראל", Abarbanel Bereishit 22:1 "ואומר", Hertz Chumash "The Binding of Issac (Akedah)")
- For children: What story in our parshah demonstrates that hosting guests (הכנסת אורחים) is a great mitzvah? (Rashi Bereishit 18:2, Shevuot 35b, Shabbat 127a)

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When the cities of Sodom and Amarah were destroyed, only Lot, his wife and two daughters survived. As these four people were escaping from the conflagration, Lot's wife turned around to look at the flaming cities, "And she became a pillar of salt" (Bereishit 19:26).

What grave sin did Lot's wife commit, to deserve so swift and severe a punishment? Chazal explain that Lot's wife, like the people of Sodom, was heartless. She despised the poor and refused to welcome the stranger: "On the night that the angels visited Lot, what did she do? She went about to all her neighbors and asked them, 'Give me salt, as we have guests,' her intention being that the townspeople should become aware of their presence and drive them from the town. Therefore, she became a pillar of salt" (Bereishit Rabbah 51:5).

The difference between bread and salt may be explained in the following manner: Bread is universally considered a staple food; man can subsist on bread. A meal in Hebrew is often described as "eating bread." Reciting *Hamotzi* on bread usually absolves us from repeating benedictions on the rest of the food. Salt, on the other hand, cannot and does not constitute a meal. Salt is useful only when it is combined with other ingredients, but it is useless--even harmful--when eaten by itself.

The opposition in the symbolism of bread and salt is even expressed in

their Hebrew spelling: The word for bread is *lechem* לֶחֶם and the word for salt is *melach* מֶלַח. Both words use the identical three letters-- *mem*, *lamed*, *chet*; the difference is that *lechem* begins with *lamed*, and *melach* begins with *mem*.

When *lamed* is used as a prefix, it means "to, toward, or drawing near." For example: *lachen* means "to them," *lanu* --"to us," *le'Elokim* --"toward G-d." Eating *lechem* together usually signifies that people are becoming closer and friendlier with each other. To this day we speak of "breaking bread" with someone, by which a spirit of goodwill and cooperation is promoted and enhanced. On the other hand, the word *melach*, meaning salt, represents the very opposite of *lechem*. It begins with the letter *mem*, which, at the beginning of a word, implies to draw away from something or someone. Thus *mimenu* means "from him," *mikem* --"from them," *me'Elokim* --"away from God."

Visitors came to the home of Lot seeking *lechem* and all that it represents - warmth, compassion, friendship - but Mrs. Lot, through an over-abundance of *melach*, treated them with callousness, cruelty and disdain. Even when she managed to escape from the holocaust of Sodom, Mrs. Lot expressed no sentiments of grief, experienced no feelings of remorse; she turned around and watched her neighbors roasting in the furnace and remained unmoved by the

catastrophe. Her punishment came devastatingly: "By salt she sinned and by salt she was smitten" (Rashi Bereishit 19: 26). Her sin was self-centeredness and cruelty, and her punishment was that she was forever to remain a pillar of *melach*.

A mishnah tells us that one who follows the principle of *sheli sheli*, "Mine is Mine," is a disciple of the people of Sodom (Avot 5:13). The slogan of the inhabitants of Sodom was, "Each one for himself. Do nothing for others." It is against such an attitude that Jewish law requires us to wash our hands (*mayim achronim*) after partaking of a meal, to rid oneself of *melach S'domit shemesama et ha'enayim*, "the salt of Sodom which blinds the eyes" (Chulin 105b). Chazal wished to impress us with a lesson in sharing: When one enjoys food, he should not act like the people of Sodom, but he should remember the hungry, the poor, and the needy stranger.

In contrast, Avraham was the great teacher of the doctrine of *lechem*. When G-d appeared before Abraham, the patriarch left the presence of the Divine visitor in order to welcome and feed three unexpected guests. By this deed he taught that *gedolah hachnasat orchim yoter mekabalat pnei hashechinah*, that it is even more important to take care of human guests than to welcome G-d (Shabbat 127a).

[based on a *dvar torah* from my father, z"l]

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The 613 Mitzvot - Mitzvah 4 : Calculating the Calendar

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

1. Sanctification of the start of each month by a *beit din* (Jewish court),
2. Public declaration of the new month, based on eyewitness testimony regarding the new moon, and
3. Calculation of leap months to ensure that specific lunar months will not stray too far from key points in the annual solar calendar. In the best-known example, the lunar month of Nisan, in which Pesach

occurs, must not wander too far from the vernal equinox.

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

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Ha'Am V'Ha'Aretz

Torah in Translation

Davening Minchah after the congregation has accepted Shabbat

Tzitz Eliezer 10:15

Russell Levy

Q: At the *Kotel HaMa'aravi* (the Western Wall), may one recite minchah next to a minyan that has already accepted Shabbat? The Shulchan Aruch ruled [OC 263:15] that one who delayed reciting Minchah on Friday until after the congregation accepted Shabbat should not recite Minchah in that synagogue.

A. It would seem that the *Kotel* is different from other synagogues.

A standard synagogue belongs to its congregants; therefore, whenever the congregation has accepted Shabbat, we are stringent in that site. One cannot remove the sanctity of the day and turn Shabbat back into a normal weekday.

However, the *Kotel* belongs to the Jewish People and not to any specific subgroup. Furthermore, the eyes and hearts of every Jew focus there every day. Therefore, a single group that has already accepted Shabbat cannot forbid another from reciting Minchah.

My strength emerges from the words of the Mordechai (Mordechai ben Hillel, 13th c.) [Bava Batra 475], who asked why the walls and towers of Jerusalem are funded by the Temple treasury, and not by the local residents. He explained that since Jerusalem was not given to one specific Tribe, and it belongs to all, the repairs should come from the Temple treasury to which Jews from all tribes donate.

Building on this comment by the Mordechai, the *Emek Berachah* (R' David Friedman of Karlin) [Ch. 3] added that since Jerusalem belongs to all Jews, and for it our hearts long, all Diaspora Jews are also considered residents. Therefore, those who physically reside there do not have the authority to impose ordinances upon visitors without their consent. Furthermore, residents have no jurisdiction to decree any edict upon visitors without the agreement of the majority of the great rabbis of the

R' Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg

Russell Levy

R' Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg was born on 3 Tevet, 5676 (1915), during World War I, in Jerusalem of the Ottoman Empire. A stand-out for his talent at an early age in the Etz Chaim and Hevron Yeshivot, he published his own novellae on Talmud, *Dvar Eliezer*, at the age of 19.

After the founding of the State of Israel, R' Waldenberg authored *Hilkhos Medinah*, dealing with the halakhic issues involved in administering a Jewish state.

R' Waldenberg founded Yeshivat Sha'ar Tzion, and later served as the *Av Beit Din* of the Supreme Rabbinical Council of Israel between the years 1981-1985.

R' Waldenberg's 22-volume set of responsa, entitled *Tzitz Eliezer*, contains questions on all aspects of *halakhah*. As the rabbi of Sha'arei Tzedek Hospital, he authored many famous *teshuvot* dealing with issues of medical ethics and modern technology, and those responsa may be found in his *Tzitz Eliezer* compilation.

R' Waldenberg passed away at the age of 90, 30 Cheshvan 5767 (2006).

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Diaspora.

This conclusion is all the more true regarding our case, for the rule that one cannot recite Minchah in the synagogue after the congregation has accepted Shabbat is only a stringency. See Magen Avraham 263:29 and Shulchan Aruch haRav Orach Chaim 263:24.

Based on the above, there is no need to discuss another reason for leniency: the *Kotel* area is not surrounded by walls on all sides. See Pesachim 86b and Rashi s.v. *hayu yosheim*. There is no need to extend the discussion here

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Sodom

Meir Lipschitz

Sodom, the capital city in the greater plains area which hosted Sodom, Amorah, Admah, Tzvoyyim and Bela, sits at the center of two debates.

The first debate is regarding the sins of those five cities. Unlike the generation of the Flood, the people of Sodom are never explicitly condemned for a specific crime; the Torah leaves the matter somewhat vague. English vernacular has since named one particular sin for Sodom itself, but that act earns barely a mention in the Torah's account. Instead, the sin cited in several sources in Tanach and in a well-known mishnah in Avot is that of arrogance and selfishness, a lack of hospitality, absence of concern for others, and a dearth of compassion.

The other debate relates to the exact location of these cities. The Torah tells us that they were located on a plain of the Jordan River, at the southern limit of Canaanite territory. The Torah also mentions, several times, that they were near the Dead Sea. Additionally, we know that Lot chose to settle in an area that afforded plentiful grazing.

The one-time presence of these cities near the Dead Sea has been substantiated by archaeological evidence; excavations conducted by Paul Lapp and Walter Rast in the 1960's and 1970's unearthed destroyed cities, ash and sulfur in the southern end of the Dead Sea region. Historians also claim that there was an abrupt end to inhabitation in the area around 2000 BCE, which is approximately when the Torah tells us the incident occurred. Ongoing excavations in this region aim to uncover more evidence of Sodom's location and destruction.

Today, the Dead Sea region is home to major salt mining and extraction operations which pay tribute to the area's biblical heritage. One of those facilities is officially titled, "The Dead Sea Works," but is often called, "Sodom." The southern end of the Dead Sea region is also known as "Sodom," and it includes a salt hill known as "Mount Sodom."

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This is a summary of a shiur delivered by Itamar Zolberg at Shaarei Tefillah on Monday November 2.

As we learned in a previous shiur, Ramban explained that eating the fruit of the *eitz hadaat* would introduce desires and passions into a person. Ramban considered this a negative development. We asked whether Ramban intended to condemn all desire and passion, and this led us to search for more information about the *yetzer hara*.

We learned the following story of Rav Amram Chasida (Kiddushin 81a):

Female captives came to Neherda'a, and they were brought to the house of Rav Amram Chasida [to be ransomed]. He removed the ladder from below the loft where they were staying [to avoid impropriety]. As one of them passed the entrance to the loft, light radiated from her. Rav Amram grabbed the ladder, which was beyond the lifting capacity of ten men, and lifted it himself. He began to ascend, but when he reached halfway up the ladder, a rung split. He cried out, "There's a fire in Amram's house!"

The sages came. When they arrived, they said, "You have embarrassed us!" Rav Amram replied, "Better that the house of Amram should be embarrassed in this world, and not be embarrassed as a result of his actions in the next world."

Rav Amram declared, with the power of an oath, that his desire should leave him, and a pillar-like flame emerged from him. He declared, "You are fire and I am flesh, but see that I am greater than you!"

In this story we find that Rav Amram himself feared sinning, and he found the power to remove a ladder that only ten men could move, to prevent himself from sinning. This piety is even indicated in his name, *Chasida* – "the pious one." Nonetheless, even Rav Amram's fear was insufficient, and he became tempted. At the last moment, a rung split and Rav Amram prevented himself from sinning by crying out, "There's a fire in Amram's house!" Maharsha explained that Rav Amram meant that there was a fire, the fire of *Yetzer Hara*, inside of him. Rav Amram then expelled his *yetzer hara* away. Emulating Rav Amram is not simple; the Gemara tells us about Tannaim who mocked their *yetzer hara* and were then showed that they should not be light-headed regarding this matter.

We then studied another passage of gemara (Succah 52a):

As Rabbi Yehudah taught: In the future, Gd will slaughter the yetzer hara before the righteous and the wicked. To the righteous it will appear as a great mountain; to the wicked it will appear as a hair. Both groups will cry: The righteous will cry and declare, "How could we have

conquered such a great mountain?" The wicked will cry and declare, "How could we have failed to conquer a hair like this?"

We asked whether this is the 'true' appearance of the *yetzer hara*, and why the appearance should vary between Rav Amram's story and our passage, and even within our own passage. We used Rav Amram Chasida's image of the *yetzer hara* as a flame, and we noted that a small wick may hold an impressive flame. Wicked people will see the small, thin, black, hair-like wick, that is at the source of the flame. [Next week, Gd-willing, we will discuss what the righteous people will see.]

We also asked why the righteous people will cry. Rashi explained that they will cry when they remember the mental pain involved with managing the *yetzer hara*, but the Maharsha disagreed with Rashi and suggested that they will cry for losing the *yetzer hara*, so that they will no longer struggle and they will no longer be rewarded for their actions.

To hear more on this subject, please download this lesson's audio file from www.torontotorah.com (the "Philosophy" section). All are welcome to attend the next session of "Classic Jewish Thought" on Monday night, 8:00 PM, at Shaarei Tefillah.

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Schedule for the Week of November 7, 20 Marcheshvan

Friday, November 6

7:45PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Oneg at Herman Home—"The Once and Future Repentance of Yishmael"

Shabbat, November 7

8:00AM R' Azarya Berzon: Ramban on the Torah, Or Chaim, Men and Women

3:15PM R' Azarya Berzon: Gemara b'Iyun, Mizrachi Bayit Men

Sunday, November 8

8:00PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Judaism's Ethical Dilemmas, Thornhill Community Shul Men and Women

8:30PM Russell Levy: Thought, Speech and Deed in Judaism, Clanton Park Men

9:00PM R' Azarya Berzon: Masechet Kiddushin in-depth, Shaarei Shomayim Men and Women

Monday, November 9

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

8:30PM R' Azarya Berzon: Rambam's Hilchot Talmud Torah, Clanton Park Men

Tuesday, November 10

1:15PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Trei Asar-The Twelve Prophets, Shaarei Shomayim Women, with Mekorot

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

Wednesday, November 11

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

8:45PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: TechnoShabbat-Bionic Eyes, Smart Houses and More!, BAYT Men and Women

Thursday, November 12

6:00PM R' Azarya Berzon: In-depth Talmud (Or Chaim Parents), Or Chaim

8:00PM Netanel Javasky: Torah and 21st Century Medicine, Bnei Torah Men and Women

8:30PM: R' Azarya Berzon: Machshavah and Life Issues, Clanton Park Men