

# Introduction to Studying the Year's Cycle

## Introduction

The broadest sense of Torah means both written and Oral Torah. Written Torah – the Tanakh (Torah – the Five Books of Moses; Nevi-eem – the Prophets; and K'tuvim – Writings). Oral Torah – all the commentaries to the Tanakh, the Talmud (Mishnah and Gemara) with their commentaries, Midrash, the vast expanse of Halakha, and other teachings of our sages.

During the next weeks and months, we'll try to acquire the tools that help us study Torah. We will use the Jewish Year Cycle as the framework through which we'll learn and exercise these tools.

Wherever possible, the original text in Hebrew will be presented, and we'll try to read it. Then the English translation. Each such reading will be followed by a short discussion, to enhance the understanding of the reading. The reference material that will be presented and used during the classes will be available (before and after the classes) on our websites for you to download or review online at your convenience.

Let us start with a verse from Proverbs (12:9):

וַיִּתֵּר שְׁהִיָּה קְהֵלֵת חָכָם עוֹד לִמַּד דַּעַת אֶת הָעָם וְאִזְנֵן וְחִקְרָר תִּקְוֵן מִשְׁלִיִּם הַרְבֵּה:

A further word: Because Koheleth was a sage, a very wise person. And more that he was knowledgeable for his own sake, he instructed and taught wisdom to the people. He listened to and questioned, balanced various aspects, researched and tested the soundness of many maxims, devised tools to handle the difficult passages and composed many parables and examples.

To better understand this verse, let's look at Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba, First Parashah, 8<sup>th</sup> teaching:

Rabbi Nahman said: it is similar to a big palace that has many openings; so many that anyone that entered would get lost. Came a smart one with a coil of rope, tied one end to the opening and rolled it out as he went, so he could retract his steps. So all others could enter and exit using that rope. So was King Shlomo – before him, Torah was not accessible and with his clarifications all could start grasping the meaning of Torah.	רב נחמן אמר לפלטיין גדולה שהיה בה פתחים הרבה, וכל שהיה נכנס בתוכה היה טועה מדרך הפתח, בא פקת אחד ונטל הפקעת ותלאה דרך הפתח, היו הכל נכנסים ויוצאין דרך הפקעת. כך עד שלא עמד שלמה לא היה אדם יכול להשכיל דברי תורה, וכיון שעמד שלמה התחילו הכל סוברין תורה.
He added: it is similar to an inaccessible forest of reeds, until a wise person came with a scythe and started cutting paths through the forest. Now all could enter and leave through the cut paths; So was Shlomo.	אמר דבר אחר: לחורשא של קנים ולא היה אדם יכול להכנס בה, ובא פקת אחד ונטל את המגל וכסת, התחילו הכל נכנסין דרך הכסות ויוצאין, כך שלמה.

<p>Said Rabbi Yosey: it is similar to a huge, immobile crate without handles, that was heavily filled with fruits. It wasn't until a wise person installed handles to the crate to enable its mobility. Similarly, until Shlomo, no one could comprehend Torah; once he came, all could start to learn and understand the teachings of Torah</p>	<p>אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסֵי לְקִפָּה גְדוֹלָה מְלֵאָה פְּרוֹת וְלֹא הָיָה לָהּ אֶזְנוֹ, וְלֹא הָיְתָה יְכוּלָה לְהִטְלֹטֵל, וּבֵא פָקַח אֶחָד וַעֲשָׂה לָהּ אֶזְנוֹת וְהִתְחִילָה לְהִטְלֹטֵל עַל יְדֵי אֶזְנוֹתָיִם. כִּךְ עַד שֶׁלֹּא עָמַד שְׁלֹמֹה לֹא הָיָה אָדָם יְכוּל לְהִשְׁפִּיל דְּבַרֵי תוֹרָה, וְכִינּוּן שֶׁעָמַד שְׁלֹמֹה הִתְחִילוּ הַכֹּל סוֹבְרִין תוֹרָה</p>
<p>Said Rabbi Sheila: to a big, handle-less, barrel that is filled to the top with boiling water. Attempting to move it would endanger the person. Until one came and installed handles around the barrel so it could be safely moved around.</p>	<p>אָמַר רַבִּי שֵׁילָא לְקִיתוֹן גְּדוֹל שֶׁהוּא מְלֵא רוֹתְחִין וְלֹא הָיָה לוֹ אֶזְנוֹ לְהִטְלֹטֵל, וּבֵא אֶחָד וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ אֶזְנוֹ וְהִתְחִיל לְהִטְלֹטֵל עַל יְדֵי אֶזְנוֹ.</p>
<p>Rabbi Hanina said: to a deep well with abundance of cool, tasty fresh water. No one could enjoy that well, until came one person and equipped it with a rope, tied to another rope and yet to another with a bucket at its end. Pulling the rope up he could retrieve the water and drink them. So, all other followed and started retrieving water and drinking.</p> <p>So, from one thing to another teaching, from one parable to another, Shlomo figured out the secrets of Torah, as it is said (Proverbs 1:1): “The proverbs, parables, of Solomon son of David, king of Israel”.</p> <p>Through King Shlomo's parables, proverbs and teachings, one can stand on (understand) the words of Torah.</p>	<p>אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא לְבֵאָר עֲמֻקָּה מְלֵאָה מַיִם וְהָיוּ מִימֵיהָ צוֹנְקִין וּמִתּוֹקִים וְטוֹבִים, וְלֹא הָיְתָה בָּרֵיהּ יְכוּלָה לְשִׁתּוֹת מִמֶּנָּה, בָּא אָדָם אֶחָד וְסָפֵק לָהּ חֲבֵל בְּחֵבֶל, מְשִׁיחָא בְּמִשְׁיחָא, וְדִלְגָא מִמֶּנָּה, וְשָׂתָהּ, הִתְחִילוּ הַכֹּל דּוֹלִין וְשׁוֹתִין. כִּךְ מְדַבֵּר לְדַבֵּר, מִמְשָׁל לְמְשָׁל, עָמַד שְׁלֹמֹה עַל סוֹדָהּ שֶׁל תוֹרָה, דְּכַתִּיב (מְשָׁלִי א, א): מְשָׁלִי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַל יְדֵי מְשִׁלּוֹתָיו שֶׁל שְׁלֹמֹה עָמַד עַל דְּבַרֵי תוֹרָה.</p>

Let us talk about the structure of this Midrash.

What is our take away from it? (discuss the various metaphors). Look at the opening and concluding quote – a closed loop, or the Tanakh is the two bookends.

A suggestion: through parables, metaphors, stories, interpretations, examples from our own lives, we understand Torah, learn it, find our own ways how to be inspired and follow the teachings and way of life illuminated to us by Torah.

This is essentially the method, the compass, that will direct us during our studies. Start with a source of text, likely from Torah, explore what are the different views that relate to that source within the Oral Torah, try to see the metaphors in the story and the texts, make them our own through stories, sharing own experience and insights that will enrich all participants.

There are no “Stupid Questions”. There may be stupid answers that tend to diminish the thoughts of the other that we may disagree with. There is not a single, right answer. Our own answer is the right answer, at least to ourselves, and by sharing it with the group of students, it may be the right answer to others as well.

## The fast of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet and The General Kaddish Day.

### **The Fast of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet**

This day happened almost two weeks ago, on Friday the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. Looking at it's source and learning a little about it will be used as an example to the structure of future learnings.

#### *Biblical Sources:*

II Kings, 25:1:

וַיְהִי בַשָּׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִית לְמַלְכוֹ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בְּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ בָּא נְבֻכַדְנֶאֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל הוּא וְכָל חֵילוֹ עַל יְרוּשָׁלַם וַיִּחַן עָלֶיהָ וַיִּבְנוּ עָלֶיהָ דָּיק סָבִיב:

And in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar moved against Jerusalem with his whole army. He besieged it; and they built towers against it all around.

Zechariah 8:19:

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת צוֹם הָרְבִיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית יְהוּדָה לְשִׂשׂוֹן וּלְשִׂמְחָה וּלְמַעֲדִים טוֹבִים וְהָאֱמֶת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אָהָבוּ:

Thus said the LORD of Hosts: The fast of the Fourth, the fast of the Fifth, the fast of the Seventh, and the fast of the Tenth shall become for the House of Judah occasions of joy, gladness and happy festivals; And you shall love (pursue) truth (honesty and integrity) and Peace (and wholeness - holiness).

#### *Commentary:*

We don't know yet what are the Fourth, Fifth and so on fasts. For that we'll look into Talmud. To understand the last part only, let us refer to RADAK (Rabenu David Kimkhi):

Radak – Rabbi David Kimḥi (1160-1235): **And the truth and peace you will love** This will happen provided that you love the truth and peace as I commanded you.

#### *Tosefta and Talmud:*

Tosefta is a supplement to the Mishnah. This is the first place in which the source verse is explained by Rabbi Akiva (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE).

צוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי זֶה עֲשָׂרָה בְּטַבַּת [יוֹם] שָׁבוּ סִמְךָ מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל אֶת יְדוֹ עַל יְרוּשָׁלַם שְׁנָאֲמַר (יחזקאל כ"ד א'): וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֵלַי בַּשָּׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִית בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי בְּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ

לאמר: בן־אדם כתב לך את שם היום את עצם היום הזה סמך מלך בבל אל ירושלים  
בעצם היום הזה:

**The fast of the tenth,” This is the tenth of Tevet, on which the king of Babylonia laid siege to Jerusalem, as it is stated: “And in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, write the name of the day, of this same day: The king of Babylonia has laid siege to Jerusalem on this very day”** ([Ezekiel 24:1–2](#)).

This passage in the Tosefta is longer, and actually elaborates Rabbi Akiva’s explanation of all the rest of the Fasts in a similar fashion: The Fourth – is the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz (the Breach of Jerusalem’s walls by the Romans); the Fifth – is the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av; the Seventh – is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tishrey (the Fast of G’daliah).

Rosh Hashanah Tractate, pg. 18b actually copies the Tosefta as it is. The bold letters are the translation of the Tosefta actual words, while the regular fonts help us better understand the meaning. We see here a debate between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Shim’on Bar Yohāyah (Rashbi, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE). Eventually, the tradition is according to Rabbi Akiva assertions.

**And why did he call it the fast of the tenth?** Because it is in Tevet, which is **the tenth of the months. Wouldn’t it have been fitting to write this fast first**, as the series of events began with the laying of the siege. **Why was it written here** at the end of the list? This was done **in order to list the months in their proper order**, as the prophet began with the fourth month and ended with the tenth month. This is the statement of Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Shimon disagreed and said: **I do not say this, but rather** I expound the verse as follows: **“The fast of the tenth,” this is the fifth of Tevet, on which the report reached the Diaspora that the city had been smitten, as it is stated: “And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came to me, saying: The city is smitten”** ([Ezekiel 33:21](#)); **and they made the day of the report of the destruction like the day of the actual burning** and decreed a fast on that day.

And Rabbi Shimon added: **And my statement seems more convincing than his statement, as I say about the first fast mentioned by the prophet that it marks the event that took place first, and about the last fast that it marks the event that took place last.** According to Rabbi Shimon, the fasts are listed in accordance with the chronological order of the events. **But he, Rabbi Akiva, says about the first fast mentioned by the prophet that it marks the event that took place last, and about the last fast mentioned that it marks the event that took place first, only that he lists the fasts in the order of the months, whereas I list them also in the order of the calamities that they mark.**

*Other tragedies happening close to this date:*

Megillat Ta-anit (The Scroll of Fasting) – 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE – states:

ב'ח' בטבת נכתבה התורה יגנית בימי תלמי המלך והחושך בא לעולם שלושת ימים.

On the eighth of Tevet one year during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, a time of Hellenistic rule of Judea, Ptolemy, King of Egypt, ordered the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek (a work which later became known as the Septuagint). Darkness came upon the world for three days. The reason – translating the Torah into Greek can not reveal the whole depth that is meant in the original, Hebrew, Language.

On the ninth of Tevet, it is believed (according to some sources) that Ezra the Scribe, the great leader who brought some Jews back to the Holy Land from the Babylonian exile and who ushered in the era of the Second Temple, died. Other sources (e.g. Shulhan Arukh) say that "something happened, but we do not know what it was..."

Rather than fasting three days in a row, Sages determined that the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet will be the single fast day to all those events.

### Halakha

Kitzur Shulhan Arukh 121:6, 8, 9:

אם חל עשרה בטבת בערב שבת, מתענין ומשלימין.

If any of these fast days occurs on Shabbos, it is postponed until after Shabbos. When the tenth of Tevet occurs on erev Shabbat, we fast that entire day.

בשלוש תעניות הראשונות אוכלים בלילה שלפניהן עד שיעלה עמוד השחר,

On the first three fast days, you are permitted to have food during the preceding night until the break of dawn,

שלוש תעניות הראשונות, מתרות ברחיצה וסיקה ונעילת הסנדל ותשמיש המטה.

On the first three fast days, you are permitted to wash, to apply cream, to wear leather shoes, and have marital relations,

עוד יש קלא בג' התעניות הראשונות, דעברות ומניקות המצטערות, פטורות מלהתענות. וכן חולה, אף על פי שאין בו סכנה, לא יתענה.

There is still another lenient feature regarding the first three fasts: pregnant and nursing women, are exempt from fasting, if it causes them discomfort. *They are permitted to eat, even if they have no discomfort; except that our women have elected to be stringent and eat only if they experience discomfort. If they are weak, however, they should not practice this stringency, and they should not fast. (Mishnah Berurah 550:5)* Also, a sick person, even if he is not critically ill, should not fast. *It is forbidden to practice stringencies in this situation. (Ibid 550:4)*

## General Kaddish Day

The need of a specific day for remembrance of those whose date of deceased is not known became acute after the Sho-ah. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel decreed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1950 that the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet will serve that purpose. On one hand, there was no desire to add another fast day to the already loaded Jewish calendar. On the other hand, one can not ignore the need to have a time to mourn the victims of the Holocaust. The compromise was to set the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet as the General Kaddish Day, for those whose day of decease is unknown, including the victims of the Sho-ah.

It is customary to light Yahrzeit candles, Say Kaddish and study Torah (mostly Oral Torah) to the ascent of the deceased. In synagogues, the El-Maleh-Raḥamim for the Holocaust victims is also recited after the Torah service.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1951 the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) voted and decided that the 27<sup>th</sup> of Nissan will be the Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Uprising of the Ghettos. That date was already dedicated to the remembrance of victims in the struggle in Eretz Israel since the 1940's, and was in close proximity to the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. This decision turned into a law on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1959. We will review the language of that law when we study about Yom HaSho-ah.

The Chief Rabbinate and the ultra-orthodox world object the selection of that day in Nissan, mainly because the month of Nissan is considered the Month of Redemption, in which determining days of fast, prayers of plea and expressing eulogies are refrained from.