

**Potomac Torah Study Center**

Vol. 9 #14, December 31, 2021; 27 Tevet 5782; Mevarchim HaHodesh; Vaera; Bo 5782

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. NOTE: since the Beth Shalom office is closed for the next week, I cannot guarantee that there will be copies at the shul this week.**

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**NOTE: Because I have a surgical procedure scheduled this coming week, I expect not to be able to prepare and send my Devrei Torah for Bo next week. I recommend that you download my material from Bo from last year at [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org) for next week.**

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After studying parsha for a quarter century, I rarely find truly new insights. This week, a discussion on Alephbeta.org with Rabbi David Fohrman and Beth Lesch opened an innovative insight on the Exodus, based on a theory of domestic abuse by Dr. Eitan Zerykier, a psychologist and former colleague of theirs. Eitan (as I know him) has deduced that domestic abuse always involves three parties: the victim, the perpetrator, and a savior. (He observes that one cannot be a bystander. A person who stays uninvolved in a domestic abuse situation enables the perpetrator to keep abusing and therefore logically is also a perpetrator.) His insight into domestic abuse helps one understand aspects of the Exodus, but it also provides insights to numerous other aspects of the Torah and Jewish history.

Dr. Zerykier's experience dealing with domestic abuse leads him to observe that those involved in such abuse model their own later behavior on patterns that they learn from abusive situations. A victim or perpetrator normally becomes either a victim or perpetrator. A key in working with domestic abuse is to teach those involved a new way of interacting – hopefully to become a savior instead of victim or perpetrator.

In Egypt, Paro's daughter Batya raises her rescue baby (Moshe) as Paro's grandson – but she also raises him to know that he is Jewish by birth. Moshe grows up and identifies as Jewish, not as Egyptian. In the three examples the Torah provides of Moshe as a young adult, he intervenes to protect a Jewish man from an Egyptian taskmaster's beating, then stops one Jewish man from attacking and fighting another. Later, when he flees to Midian, he protects seven young maidens from shepherds and draws water to feed their sheep. In these examples, Moshe acts as a savior in the face of abusive behavior of other people. Where does Moshe learn to act as a savior? That is the role that Batya plays in saving baby Moshe from drowning (as Paro had decreed for all male Jewish children).

When Moshe comes to Paro to ask for religious freedom for the Jews, the request is very personal. Paro sees the man he raised as his own grandson leading a revolt of his slaves. For Paro to face this revolt from his own grandson, raised in his household, Moshe's role is much more arrogant than it would have been if the Jews (God) had sent any other representative. Paro originally had acted like a father to Yosef and had treated the Jews as favored relatives. After the death of all of Yaakov's sons, Paro (either the same or a new Paro) changes and goes from protector to abuser. Paro's switch from father figure to abuser makes his behavior even more bitter for B'Nai Yisrael, because their father-like figure becomes their abuser. From Paro's perspective, he has a personal grudge reason for continuing to oppose his grandson's role in leading a revolt for religious freedom. He is very receptive to hardening his heart to oppose Moshe – and God helps by strengthening and hardening Paro's heart as needed to enable Paro to resist until the end.

The perspective of domestic abuse also helps explain why God decides to switch from His aspect of Kel Shakkai to Hashem. Kel Shakkai is God's aspect of shepherd – influencing man's world from behind (being subtle). For the first time, God will show His attribute as Hashem – visible, loudly proclaiming His role as the One in control of the universe. To teach Paro, B'Nai Yisrael, the Egyptians, and the rest of the world who is in control of the universe requires obvious miracles and enough time for the message to sink in. God brings ten miracles over a period of a year to introduce Hashem to Paro and the Egyptians, demolish the Egyptian gods, and show that Hashem is superior to all of the Egyptian gods. (For a clear exposition, see Rabbi Yitz Etshalom's Devar Torah on Vaera, attached to the E-mail or available to download from PotomacTorah.org.) Even more difficult than convincing Paro and the rest of the non-Jewish world of the power of Hashem is Moshe's task of convincing B'Nai Yisrael that they must do teshuvah before being worthy of being redeemed and sharing in the land that God had promised to the Avot. (For more on this point, see the Devar Torah by Menachem Leibtag, also attached by E-mail and available to download.)

The model of domestic abuse carries forward later in Tanach and Jewish history. Soon after the Exodus, God leads B'Nai Yisrael to Har Sinai for the Ten Statements. The first two statements are that Hashem is God and we shall not recognize any other deity. The next parsha, Mishpatim, translates the Ten Statements into many specific mitzvot (commandments). The primary theme of most of these mitzvot is that we should take the role of savior in inter-personal relations. The mitzvot have a heavy emphasis on caring for the weak, poor, and disadvantaged – widows, orphans, and non-citizens. Mishpatim in this framework focuses on chesed – one of the key lessons of Avraham Avinu. The theme of chesed and caring for the disadvantaged members in society repeat many times later in the Torah and Navi (prophets).

We see a similar story following the domestic abuse model as recently as the Holocaust. Hitler and the Nazis could not have murdered six million of our people (and many other victims) if the German people and many other people in Europe had actively opposed them. Those who stood by or claimed that they were only following the laws of the land were abusers, and many of them ended up tried and convicted as perpetrators. Righteous gentiles who did what they could to save Jews were able to save several thousand of our people. They were saviors in the midst of evil.

My message this week seems to me to be different from what I usually write. I hope that you find it interesting and appropriate for both Vaera and Bo (which together cover all ten of the plagues). Hopefully I shall be able to post again for Beshalach in two weeks.

As we turn the secular calendar to a new year, we also come to a new month with Rosh Hodesh Shevat on Sunday evening. This Rosh Hodesh is the fourth yahrtzeit of my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, our family Rabbi for nearly fifty years. Rabbi Cahan would have appreciated Eitan Zerykier's contribution considering the Exodus within a framework of domestic abuse. Rabbi Cahan frequently came up with innovative ways to relate lessons from the parsha during his Shabbas Torah discussions. He taught Hannah, our sons, and me for most of our lives. He also encouraged us to delve deeper in our study – a lesson that I try to continue both for my self and in his memory.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,

Alan & Hannah

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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**Drasha: Vaera: Raise the Baton!**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2002

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

In this week's portion, once again, Hashem sent Moshe and Ahron to Pharaoh in a second effort to sway his heart and have him change his mind to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. Unlike the unembellished appeal in last week's portion, this time they were equipped with more than pleas – this time they came with miracles. Standing in front of the ruler, Ahron threw his stick down and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed. He countered with a little magic of his own. His sorcerers matched the miraculous stick-to-snake act by having his spooks throw down their sticks and by transforming them into snakes.

Ahron one-upped the Egyptian magicians as his stick swallowed all of their sticks. But that obviously was not enough. Pharaoh's heart was once again hardened and he refused to let the Jews leave Egypt. And so, Hashem decided that the benign miracles would not be effective with the stubborn king. It was time for the heavy artillery — the ten plagues.

Hashem commands Moshe: "Go to Pharaoh in the morning — behold! He goes out to the water — and you shall stand opposite him at the river's bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand" (Exodus 7:15). A simple question bothers me. Moshe had only one special stick. There are various Midrashic explanations as to its origin, but everyone agrees it was a unique one. It was a special one with special powers. Moshe may have been a leader of many hats, but he only carried one stick. Why did Hashem need to define the stick as the one that turned into a snake? He could have simply asked Moshe to come with his stick. Moshe would surely have known exactly which stick Hashem wanted him to take.

**Charles Lutwidge Dodgson is better known to us as Lewis Carroll, author of the 1865 children's fantasy story, Alice in Wonderland. What most of us do not know about him was that he was also a brilliant mathematician spending more than twenty-five years teaching at Oxford University.**

**An apocryphal story relates that Queen Victoria was so delighted after reading his fantasy-laced novel, Alice in Wonderland that she asked him to send her any other works penned by the same quill. Dodgson responded immediately, but the Queen was somewhat taken aback when she received two of his other works, Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry and An Elementary Treatise on Determinants.**

We tend to look at the world and forget that routine natural events are also replete with awe-inspiring miracles and supernatural properties. We become acclimated to the mundane miracles of life so that we also shrug when Hashem turns proverbial sticks into proverbial snakes. We feel we can do that too!

Therefore, before orchestrating the largest insubordination of natural law in world history, by turning the flowing Nile into a virtual blood bath, Moshe is told to bring with him the stick that Pharaoh only considered to be capable of performing minor miracles. Moshe is told that the same stick that was not able to impress Pharaoh has the ability to shatter the Egyptian economy and with it the haughty attitude that kept the Hebrew nation enslaved.

Sometimes our marvel of G-d's wonders is dulled by the scoffing of the naysayers. They lead us to forget that the same power behind the minor miracles of life are the generators of great miracles that we can hardly fathom and surely not anticipate! Even the incomprehensible miracle of life itself is blunted by its ongoing regularity. Our emotions become bored and our intellect spoiled with the majestic events that are considered trite by their regular reoccurrence. And when we fail to see the greatness of genius in the wonderland in which we live, we expect G-d to send us a more prominent message. But we must never forget that even the most awe-inspiring message comes from the same Hand and Stick that bring us the simplest benign worms!

Good Shabbos

## When Teshuvah Seems Impossible

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

Is it sometimes not possible to do teshuvah? Or at least, can it feel that way?

Many commentators have noted that initially it is not God who hardens Pharaoh's heart in the Exodus story. It is Pharaoh himself: "When Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and listened not unto them" (Ex. 8:15). It is only later — once Pharaoh has, on his own, stood up to the terror of the plagues and strengthened and re-strengthened his resolve — that God then steps in and does it for him. The text narrates: "And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he listened not unto them" (Ex. 9:12).

The explanation often given for this progression is that after so many plagues, Pharaoh's willpower was beginning to falter. He was about to accede to the demands of Moshe and Aharon. To prevent this acquiescence from happening, and to make it possible to smite the Egyptians with all the ten plagues, God had to intervene and take over.

I imagine a different interpretation of these events. I think this chain of events has much more to do with what happens when we make bad choices.

The Gemara tells us that there are some people who "ein maspikim beyado la'asot teshuvah" — the opportunity is not given to do teshuvah (Mishnah Yoma 8:9). The phrasing is precise. It is not that these people cannot do teshuvah, or that their teshuvah won't be accepted. Rather, it will often seem to them impossible to do so.

In another passage, the Talmud tells a story about Acher, the name given to Elisha ben Abuyah, a great sage and the teacher of Rabbi Meir. After a certain event, Acher became a heretic and left the faith. Rabbi Meir begged him to repent. Acher refused: "I have heard that in Heaven they have declared: 'All my return, except for Acher'" (Hagigah 15a).

The point of these stories is not, I would contend, that God stands in the way of these people doing teshuvah. It is that they stand in their own way.

Sometimes we might make a bad decision. At that moment, we have an opportunity to try to get ourselves back on track, to regret, to repent, and to do better moving forward. But sometimes we go in the opposite direction. We say to ourselves: "I am not prepared to own up to that wrong thing that I did. The hurt that I caused. The guilt that I am feeling." So instead we double down. We refuse to acknowledge that it was, in fact, a bad decision. We strengthen our resolve and fully commit to this course of action. In short, we harden our hearts.

Then, after a while, after having gone further down this road, remorse sets in. We start to regret the path that we have taken. We long to go back to who we were and to where we were. But now it is so much more difficult. There seems to be an enormous chasm that now separates us from our previous lives before this pattern of sin.

At this point, it stops being me who is hardening my heart. I want to go back. But God, the universe — everything! — is now making that impossible. For me, "The opportunity is not being given to do teshuvah." I am not in that place anymore. "All may return" — except for me.

That is how it feels. Those are the voices that we hear. But it is not the full truth.

Our tradition teaches that no matter how difficult teshuvah seems, there is always a way back. Whatever we think the universe is communicating to us, and however small the opportunity or opening is, there is always a door we can walk through, there is always a first step that can be taken.

It doesn't come easily, and it certainly doesn't come quickly. Each step will be difficult, because with each step we are acknowledging how far we are from where we once were, how things that were once so easy are now so difficult.

To correct this old pattern, we must harden our hearts once again. We must commit to this new path, even while knowing that it might often be two steps forward and one step back. And we must be open to wherever this journey will take us. If

we are trying to recapture the past, we are doomed to fail. We must know that we will never get back to where we were before. It will be a different place. Maybe better, maybe worse. It will reflect our growth and our resolve, our sins and errors, our struggles and the lessons we have learned. It will be a place that brings us back to ourselves.

It all begins by taking the first step.

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2021/12/when-teshuvah-seems-impossible/>

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## **Passing on Judgment**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \* © 2021

The journey towards redemption was launched. Hashem had appointed Moshe as His emissary; Moshe spoke to Paroh about Exodus, and the most famous redemption was about to enter high gear. Sadly, the people did not hear Moshe's message. The Torah records, "They did not hear Moshe because of their shortness of breath and hard work."

We wonder, what difference does it make why they didn't hear Moshe's message? Why does the Torah have to tell us that it was because of the extreme duress that they were under?

I believe it is essential to know why the Jewish people did not hear Moshe's message. It is critical to understand that by nature the Jewish people are hopeful and are believers in redemption, both national redemption and personal redemption. The Torah is teaching us that as frustrating as it might be when things don't go smoothly, if we appreciate the mitigating circumstances, we can better understand what is really happening. By knowing that the Jewish people were tired and overworked we can better understand that they are ready for redemption; they are just exhausted.

This principle is useful in all areas of life. If we better understand people's circumstances, we can better appreciate the gems that we have the privilege of interacting with daily, even when things don't go exactly the way we would prefer or expect.

I recall, at one point when I was learning in Lakewood, I davened in a shul which had Shacharis minyanim at 6:30, 7:30, and 8:30. I would often daven at the 7:30 minyan, and would notice as I was leaving, one particular fellow would consistently show up at 8:40, huffing and puffing, rushing in for the 8:30 minyan. The fellow was a very diligent student who I knew peripherally from Yeshiva. The thought might have crossed my mind, "If you really value the prayers, maybe you should just come on time."

One day I had the privilege of sitting next to this fellow at a Sheva Brachos, and we exchanged thoughts and experiences about our daily routines. He described how his wife was a nurse on night shift and he was entrusted with childcare until 8:30 in the morning when the first babysitter within walking distance of their home would start accepting children. From the babysitter he always rushed to shul, trying to make it there as on time as possible. He shared how this schedule wasn't something that he would have ever anticipated, but, at least for now, it was working.

I listened in awe as I sensed his fervor in trying to balance all of life's complexity in a responsible way. This is what Chazal meant when they said, "Judge the entire person favorably." When you see the entire person — their situation and considerations — it is easy to judge favorably... if we feel that we must judge.

Recently I was in shul and encountered a gentleman who was collecting Tzedaka for his needs. With an encouraging smile I reached out my hand and gave him a contribution. As he walked by, I was struck with the intense smoking smell that permeated his clothing. I happen to find the smell of smoking extremely distasteful, and I felt myself — involuntarily — feeling emotionally uncomfortable and distant. In milliseconds, however, I was able to do a reality check on myself. I thought to myself how difficult it must be for this man to have extended himself to pay medical bills for a loved one, when insurance declined to pay for life saving treatment. I considered how difficult it must be for him to ask people for money to pay off the tens of thousands of dollars of debt that accumulated from the medical bills and lost wages during treatment. I reflected on how challenging it must be to stay away from family for weeks, traveling as a stranger from city to city. Is it

possible that he finds smoking an outlet to cope with his situation? I still disagree and think that smoking should not be the de-stressor in anyone's life. But quite frankly, I prefer not to sit in judgment.

If we can appreciate the situation, it is much easier to deal with people's behavior even if that behavior still is disappointing.

Moshe -- like Rabbis, teachers, parents, and spouses who would follow in his footsteps in sharing communications — encountered people that did not hear his message. But the Torah acknowledges the circumstances. Understanding the circumstances is critical. It enables us to empathize even as we seek resolution. Understanding people enables us to pass on judgment.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. [RMRhine@Teach613.org](mailto:RMRhine@Teach613.org). Teach613 recently started a new Shulchan Aruch Zoom class this week. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

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### **Stand Up, Stand Tall: Thoughts for Parashat Vaera**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

*"And the Lord said unto Moses: Rise up early in the morning and stand [tall] before Pharaoh... (Shemot 9:13)."*

Rabbi Hayyim Benattar, author of the Ohr haHayyim commentary on Torah, comments on this verse that God instructed Moses — a naturally humble man — to stand tall, not to bend his head in the presence of Pharaoh. Moses was not to think of himself as being subservient to Pharaoh; on the contrary, Moses was to consider himself to be Pharaoh's superior. Moses was coming at the behest of God; Moses was representing justice and morality. Although Moses was to retain inner humility, he was not to show deference to the wicked Pharaoh.

Often enough, people are confronted with wickedness and injustice; but instead of standing tall in opposition to the perpetrators of evil, people bow their heads. They lose self-confidence. They think: I am too small and too weak to resist. It's best to go along or to stay quiet. Resistance can be unpleasant, even dangerous. Thus, evil continues to spread.

God's command to Moses to stand tall before Pharaoh should be construed as a command to each of us to stand tall in opposition to tyrants, manipulators, liars, and agents of corruption of all kinds. While retaining our inner humility and gentleness, we must not bend our heads in the presence of wicked and unjust people. To show subservience is to give the forces of evil another victory over goodness and truth.

The late Professor Norman Geras, who taught at the University of Manchester in England, wrote about "the contract of mutual indifference." His basic thesis was that when people become indifferent to the injustices perpetrated against others, the general morality of society declines. If we don't care about the sufferings of others, we cannot expect them to care about our sufferings. If we look aside when others are being abused, we cannot expect them to stand up for us when we are the victims of abuse. Mutual indifference is the sign of a morally defective society/world. It is not only degrading to the victims of injustice, it is degrading to the perpetrators themselves. It robs everyone of their essential humanity.

Professor Geras writes:

*"To accept the world as it (more or less) is, is to help to prolong a state of grave danger. This world, accommodating and countenancing too much of what ought not to be tolerated — plain persistent injustice, stark avoidable human suffering — is a world very receptive to present and future atrocity, a world overpopulated with bystanders....As long as the situation lasts, it degrades the moral culture of the planet. It poisons the conscience of humankind." (The Contract of Mutual Indifference, Verso Books, New York and London, 1999, p. 120.)*

How can the contract of mutual indifference be rectified? How can humanity overcome widespread apathy in the face of injustice? How can the arrogant be humbled and the wicked be foiled? There is only one answer, and it is for each person to assume personal responsibility. It is for each good and moral person to express indignation, to resist the tyrants and demagogues. Unless each person is ready to shake off moral indifference and fearfulness, the forces of evil will continue to prevail.

"And the Lord said unto Moses: Rise up early in the morning and stand [tall] before Pharaoh." We are likewise commanded to stand tall before the Pharaohs of our times, to resist the agents of oppression, falsehood and injustice who undermine the fabric of our society and our world.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/stand-stand-tall-thoughts-parashat-vaera>

\*\* The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at [www.jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org)

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### **Guest Blog: Is Learning the Only Thing: Yeshiva Year(s) and Beyond**

By Mitch Morrison \*

A son returns from two years in yeshiva in Israel and informs his parents his desire to remain for a third year. The parents, mainstream Modern Orthodox, are a bit concerned but acquiesce. A year later, the son says he wants to stay in Kollel and is now, in sports vernacular, "questionable" about college.

A daughter returns from 1 ½ years of seminary in Israel and informs her parents she only wants to date a "masmid," and that she's prepared to be a mother, homemaker and breadwinner.

A man primed to attend a top-flight university hits the brakes when he meets a shaliach in Israel and is drawn to the yeshiva. After several years of learning, he works for a religious organization at a modest income for more than a decade. He is idealistic and accepts his financial challenges.

Suddenly, he falls victim to budget cuts. No transition, no parachute, no benefits. Several years later, and with a wife and family, the man scratches an income and rues not going college.

*"My parents were furious when I chose to go on the derekh [religious path]," he recently shared with me. "But the rav I met told me that if I learn and become a serious yid and have siyata d'shmaya (God will help), that the money will come.*

*"Instead, I have shalom bayis issues, money issues, and I don't see a clear path forward."*

For some readers, these 3 stories, playing out in real time, are not new. For others, it's their first go round, echoing across too many homes in Modern and Centrist Orthodox communities.

What has changed over the past decade is that shana bet (learning a second year in Israel) is more the norm than the exception.

Also changed is the refrain. The plaint of the 1990s and early 2000s was “when my son/daughter came home they no longer considered us kosher enough.”

Today, it’s “my son doesn’t want to come home. He wants to stay in yeshiva and make learning his life.” And for the daughter, it’s she wants to marry only to a Kollel guy, and to support him.

Before offering some solutions, we must first express enormous gratitude for where we are as a religious community. We have more yeshivot than any time in Jewish history, and more people wanting to learn. That’s a blessing.

But blessings in excess can become a curse: “love sometimes causes a straight line to be crooked” – as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches in Bereisheet Rabba, Parshat Vayera.

The generation of both baalei teshuva and Modern Orthodox families whose children chose to embrace a path of full-time learning with few job skills and no defined career path are hitting a serious roadblock. This isn’t just my view. This is what rabbis, parents and Jewish professional are sharing with me.

### **Changing the Narrative**

God instructs Noach and family that life is not intended to be spent in the ark.

It’s time to flip the script, to extol the virtues of not only learning Torah but living it outside of the protective ark. Parents must impart this value as an halakhic ideal at the earliest stage possible, buttressed by Modern Orthodox schools from elementary school onward.

The Gemara in Kiddushin 29A is clear about a parent’s role:

*“A father is required to circumcise his son, redeem him (if he’s a firstborn), teach him Torah, marry him to a woman and to teach him a trade. ... Rabbi Yehuda says anyone one who does not teach his son a trade is teaching him banditry.”*

Rambam, the epitome of Torah and worldly knowledge, is more direct in Hilchot Deot (5:11): (translation is my own)

*“It is the way of sensible people that a person should first establish for himself a profession to earn a livelihood, then he should acquire a house, and then he should marry a woman. ... But fools reverse it by taking a wife first, then after, if he be able, purchase a home, and after that, in his declining years, turning to find a vocation, or be supported on charity.”*

When I chose to go into journalism, I was met with naysayers. I went to my rav, Rabbi Yehuda Kelemer, tz’l, and he shared a fascinating insight from the Rav, Rav Soloveitchik. This is a paraphrase:

*“The Rav strongly held that the Torah lives in every space and every corner. It wasn’t intended just for doctors, lawyers and kollelim,” he said. “There is a reason that Levi is just one tribe and not representative of the entire Bnai Yisroel. We need our learners and teachers, but we also need our doctors, scientists, social workers and, yes, even journalists.”*

Yet today, many of our children attending yeshivot in Israel are learning only about Levi. Many of these roshei yeshiva and rebbeim devalue professional work, failing to take into consideration the young man or woman’s ability to make a living; nor do these rebbeim consult first with the parents.

I would like to offer a few strategies for consideration:

- Seek out yeshivot that value a liberal arts education and embrace a Torah u’Maddah or Torah im Derekh Eretz approach.
- If a Rosh Yeshiva or Rebbe encourages your child to stay in yeshiva longer than you had intended, immediately contact the yeshiva and arrange for a family conversation.

- If the yeshiva is pushing your child toward a “career” of full-time learning, request that the yeshiva then develop in writing a career path for your child that takes into account the high cost of religious living (kosher food, higher cost to live in a frum community, yeshiva tuition, etc). I personally would also push for the yeshiva to pay my child to stay past two years.

- If your child adopts this all-or-nothing approach, turn off the financial spigot by either requiring your son/daughter to accept responsibility for the entire tuition or, at least half of it. This is not a punishment but a welcoming to the real world.

- And lastly, remind them (sons) that the Talmud they are learning was composed almost exclusively by Sages who had paying professions.

In recent months, several people from their 30s to 50s have confided in me that they were “sold a bill of goods.” While they remain religious, they live with a bitterness that the promise of “God will provide as long as you focus only on your learning” was a lie.

How do we ensure our children don’t have to repeat this same painful lesson?

Our forefather Yaakov knows this lesson well. While his emunah in God was unshakeable, he learns quickly that God is not going to prevent missteps. Yaakov is going to have to learn on his own and recognize that his actions have consequences.

And maybe that is the lesson we have to instill in our children at a young age – decisions have consequences. If you don’t work, you don’t get paid. A life in yeshiva may be right for the few, but it is not the path for an entire people.

\* Journalist Mitch Morrison resides in Passaic, NJ. Executive Board member of the Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ). Reprinted from the Jewish Link.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/guest-blog-learning-only-thing-yeshiva-years-and-beyond-mitch-morrison>

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## **When It’s Wrong to Fear G-d**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

Pharaoh is a powerful illustration of the dangers of arrogance and what pride can do to a person. Over the course of a year, he is given numerous opportunities to acknowledge the Creator and allow the Jewish people to leave. He belligerently refuses and watches as his entire empire is brought to its knees. Their plagues start with the Nile, one of their gods, turning to blood. Their entire belief system is shattered. Their economy and infrastructure is collapsing. By the eighth plague, Pharaoh’s advisors tell him to let the Jews go because Egypt is already lost. Time and again Pharaoh begins to bend and says he will let the Jews go, only to renege on his word as soon as the plague ends. After the tenth plague, when afraid for his life, he finally lets the Jews go. Yet only a few days later he chases after them to bring them back, taking the remnants of his army with him. As he watches the miraculous Splitting of the Sea, he decides to send his army into the sea assuming somehow that the phenomenon will continue and that they will be safe in the sea. At this point, Egypt is fully decimated. There is not one soldier left. The crops, infrastructure and economy were already shattered. Pharaoh maintained his arrogance despite the risk and suffered total destruction.

Yet, we find that even this arrogant and prideful individual was truly moved at one point during the plagues. During the plague of hail, Pharaoh calls Moshe and Aharon and says “I have sinned this time, G-d is the righteous one and I and my people are the wicked ones. Pray to G-d and there has been enough sounds of G-d and hail and I will send you and you will no longer wait.” (Shemos 9:27-28) Although, we know it was short-lived, it would seem for this brief moment, Pharaoh acknowledged G-d. For this moment, he understood.

Surprisingly, it was specifically at this point that Moshe addresses Pharaoh’s habit of changing his mind, saying to Pharaoh, “I know that you do not yet fear G-d.” (Shemos 9:30) Rash”I explains that Moshe was telling Pharaoh that he was fully expecting Pharaoh to change his mind as soon as the plague ended. Yet, how could Moshe say that Pharaoh did not fear G-d now? While we know that Pharaoh did indeed strengthen himself and harden his heart, he was only able to make himself callous once the plague had ended, “and Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and sounds had stopped and

he continued to sin and he hardened his heart, he and his servants." (Shemos (34) Yet, so long as the hail continued to bombard Egypt, even Pharaoh could not help but recognize G-d. He had even gone so far as to clearly express his repentance, acknowledging that G-d is righteous and he and his entire nation are wicked. Why is Moshe saying that his statement is not fear of G-d?

In The Ways of the Righteous, in the chapter on fear of Heaven, he explains that there are two different types of fear of G-d. One type is when one is afraid of punishment or afraid of not receiving reward. This type of fear, he explains, is considered service of G-d, but it is not the fear of G-d which we speak of. The second type of fear is that one is afraid of G-d Himself, not just of G-d's power. He is afraid of what G-d will think of him. This begins with an understanding of G-d's omnipotence and power. When we are in the presence of greatness, we naturally desire to connect with that greatness. As one recognizes that G-d is the Creator and Sustainer of all, and that the laws of science are simply that which G-d has willed to be, one becomes overwhelmed by G-d's greatness. The more one feels that sense, the more one wants to come close to G-d.

Moshe understood that Pharaoh was only afraid of G-d's punishments, but he had no recognition or appreciation of G-d. Moshe was saying to Pharaoh, "You do not yet fear from before G-d." You only fear punishment – that is not fear of G-d. This is not what G-d wants from you. G-d does not want us to serve him out of submission. Rather, he wants us to recognize His greatness, and that despite our relative insignificance, we are nonetheless important to Him. This is what we call fear of G-d – when we are concerned about G-d.

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## A "Jewish UnJewish" Happy New Year!

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

Writing emails like these is like hosting a meal. It's fun to do on its own, but it's even more interesting to hear people's reactions to what you've managed to cook up.

After I wrote about China last week, I received a message from one of you offering an added insight beyond the historical reasons for why Jews eat Chinese over Christmas. We eat it because it's silly. And what's life without a little bit of silliness? What's life without a little abandonment of the "Bah Humbug" attitude? What's life without a little sweet and sour sauce?

As this idea percolated, I had another conversation this week with a friend about the topic of what makes an idea specifically "Jewish" as opposed to "not Jewish." Must it be from a Jewish source? Must it be only from familiar Jewish sources? Must we be so obsessive about the ideological purity of an idea?

Sometimes we can take this obsession about what's Jewish and conflate it with what has value. Especially scholars, teachers and rabbis. Sometimes we can get trapped in thinking that an idea or practice must have an explicit Jewish source in order to have value. If it can't be justified through Judaism, then it doesn't have value to a Jew right?

Not according to Maimonides who encouraged us to accept the truth from wherever it comes. Not according to our Sages who encouraged us to learn from the wisdom of the nations. Not according to those who remind us that it's perfectly okay and human to be a little silly.

So what about New Year's Day? A harmless secular holiday where we celebrate the newness of the solar year and restart the Gregorian calendar. The calendar that the whole world including us uses to some degree or another.

I could talk about the Jewishness of this holiday and how we can justify it within Judaism. I could talk about how Jews use the solar calendar to balance our lunar calendar so Pesach doesn't float through the seasons like it does for Muslims with Ramadan. I could talk about how this time allows us to reflect on the place for Jews within natural law even though our existence is nothing short of miraculous. (See my New Year's email for 2021.)

But this year, let's try a different tack. Suppose all we had was a fun little holiday where we join with our fellow human beings and celebrate the newness and hope of the upcoming 2022. Maybe the date is arbitrary. Maybe there is no

Talmudic source justifying our acknowledgment of New Year's. But it's fun. It does not go against any Torah precept, and it has personal meaning for many of us. Like eating Chinese on Christmas.

The Talmud says that the sage Rava would start his classes with "words of laughter" giving his listeners the chance to smile and thus open themselves to what was to come. Maybe in the long and winding road of Jewish history, we have found a way to open the new solar year by giving ourselves the chance to have a little non-Talmudically based fun whether through Chinese food, watching the ball drop, or having some New Year's Eve nachos. Maybe through this our hearts will be free to open to whatever comes in 2022. Maybe it will be easier to take a cup of kindness yet for auld lang syne.

So whether it's "Jewish" or not, may you have a happy and joyous 2022!

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Moshe Rube

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL. We joined KI when our son Evan lived in Birmingham while attending the University of Alabama Medical School. Roll Tide!

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### **Rav Kook Torah Va'eira: God's Name**

Why do we find different names for God in the Torah?

Different names correspond to the different ways in which God reveals Himself in the world. The Tetragrammaton, the special name composed of the four letters Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey, corresponds to a level of Divine revelation that was concealed before Moses' time.

*"I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai [God Almighty]. But I was not known to them through My name Y-H-V-H." (Ex. 6:3)*

What is the significance of these two names of God? Why did only Moses' generation merit knowledge of the Tetragrammaton?

In the same prophetic communication to Moses, God contrasted the Patriarchs' ties to the Land of Israel with that of their descendants. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were only travelers and foreigners in the Land:

*"I made My covenant with them, giving them the Land of Canaan, the land of their wanderings, where they lived as foreigners." (Ex. 6:4)*

*"Their descendants, on the other hand, were destined to settle permanently in the Land: "I will give it to you as an eternal inheritance" (Ex. 6:8).*

Is there some connection between the different names for God and residence in Eretz Yisrael?

#### **A Higher Level of Providence**

Dwelling in the Land of Israel means living with a greater degree of Divine providence. It is "a land constantly under the scrutiny of the Eternal, your God; the eyes of the Eternal your God are on it at all times" (Deut. 11:12). God gave Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people as an eternal inheritance, so that they will always benefit from this unparalleled level of Divine providence. God's providence will never leave the people of Israel; their history transcends the laws of nature.

This level of Divine guidance was only possible after they became a nation. Individuals, even the most righteous, may waver and stumble. Therefore, the Patriarchs could only be sojourners in Eretz Yisrael. They could only merit the Land's preternatural providence in a temporary, sporadic fashion.

The name Shaddai comes from the word shiddud, meaning “to intervene.” This name for God implies occasional Divine intervention in the natural realm. This was the degree of providence that the Avot experienced. They lived in a world of natural forces -- with occasional miracles. They were but travelers in the Land of Israel. God was thus revealed to them as El Shaddai.

With the formation of Israel as a nation, however, the special providence of the Land of Israel became the Jewish people's permanent inheritance. The generation of Moses was granted a higher revelation of God's providence, as reflected in the name Y-H-V-H. This Divine name comes from the word lehavot, “to cause to exist.” Their world was no longer a universe ruled by the forces of nature. They merited a constant, direct connection to the One Who continually creates and sustains all existence.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 293-297.)

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAERA63.htm>

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### **Va'era (5771) – The Birth of History**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

The parsha of Va'era begins with some fateful words. It would not be too much to say that they changed the course of history because they changed the way people thought about history. In fact, they gave birth to the very idea of history. Listen to the words:

*God said to Moses, “I am Hashem. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as E-I Shaddai, but by My name Hashem I did not make Myself fully known to them. (Ex. 6:1-2)*

What exactly does this mean? As Rashi points out, it does not mean that Abraham Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah did not know God by the name Hashem.

To the contrary, God's first words to Abraham, “Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house,” were said using the name Hashem.

It even says, just a few verses later (Gen. 12:7), Vayera Hashem el Avram: “Hashem appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So God had appeared to Avram as Hashem. And in the very next verse it says that Avram built an altar and “He called on the name of Hashem” (Gen. 12:8). So Avram himself knew the name and had used it.

Yet it is clear from what God says to Moses, that something new is about to happen, a Divine revelation of a kind that had never happened before, something that no one, not even the people closest to God, has yet seen. What was it?

The answer is that through Bereishit, God is the god of creation, the god of nature, the aspect of God we call, with different nuances but the same overall sense, Elokim, or E-I Shaddai, or even Koneh shamayim va-aretz, Creator of heaven and earth.

Now in a sense, that aspect of God was known to everyone in the ancient world. It's just that they did not see nature as the work of one God but of many: the god of the sun, the god of the rain, the goddesses of the sea and the earth, the vast pantheon of forces responsible for harvests, fertility, storms, droughts and so on.

There were profound differences between the gods of polytheism and myth and the One God of Abraham, but they operated, as it were, in the same territory, the same ball park.

The aspect of God that appears in the days of Moses and the Israelites is radically different, and it's only because we are so used to the story that we find it hard to see how radical it was.

For the first time in history God was about to get involved in history, not through natural disasters like the Flood, but by direct interaction with the people who shape history. God was about to appear as the force that shapes the destiny of nations. He was about to do something no one had ever heard of before: bring an entire nation from slavery and servitude, persuade them to follow him into the desert, and eventually to the promised land, and there build a new kind of society, based not on power but on justice, welfare, respect for the dignity of the human person and on collective responsibility for the rule of law.

God was about to initiate a new kind of drama and a new concept of time. According to many of the world's greatest historians, Arnaldo Momigliano, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, J. H. Plumb, Eric Voegelin and the anthropologist Mircea Eliade, this was the moment history was born.

Until then, the basic human drama was struggling to maintain order against the ever present threats of chaos, whether through natural disasters, foreign conquest, or internal power struggles. Success meant maintaining the status quo. In fact religion in the ancient world was intensely conservative. It was about teaching people the inevitability of the status quo. Time was an arena in which nothing fundamentally changed.

And now God appears to Moses and tells him that something utterly new is about to occur, something the patriarchs knew about in theory but had never lived to see in practise. A new nation. A new kind of faith. A new kind of political order. A new type of society. God was about to enter history and set the West on a trajectory that no human beings had ever contemplated before.

Time was no longer going simply to be what Plato beautifully described as the moving image of eternity. It was going to become the stage on which God and humanity would journey together toward the day when all human beings, regardless of class, colour, creed or culture, would achieve their full dignity as the image and likeness of God. Religion was about to become, not a conservative force but an evolutionary and even revolutionary one.

Think about this. Long before the West, the Chinese had invented ink, paper, printing, porcelain manufacture, the compass, gunpowder, and many other technologies. But they failed to develop a scientific revolution, an industrial revolution, a market economy and a free society. Why did they get so far and then stop?

The historian Christopher Dawson argued that it was the religion of the West that made the difference. Alone among the civilisations of the world, Europe "has been continually shaken and transformed by an energy of spiritual unrest." He attributed this to the fact that "its religious ideal has not been the worship of timeless and changeless perfection but a spirit that strives to incorporate itself in humanity and to change the world."<sup>[1]</sup>

To change the world. That is the key phrase. The idea that together with God we can change the world, make history, not just be made by it: that was born when God told Moses that he and his contemporaries were about to see an aspect of God no one had ever seen before.

I still find that a spine-tingling moment when, each year we read Vaera, and recall the moment history was born, the moment God entered history and taught us for all time that slavery, oppression, injustice, are not written into the fabric of the cosmos, engraved into the human condition. Things can be different because we can be different, because God has shown us how.

[1] Christopher Dawson, Religion and the Rise of Western Culture. New York: Doubleday, 1991, 15.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. For older Devrei Torah, footnotes are not always available.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5771-vaera-the-birth-of-history/>

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## Staff, Serpent and Scattered Sparks

By Aharon Loschak\* © Chabad 2021

More than a century has passed since the RMS Titanic sank in the Atlantic Ocean, but the public is as captivated by the ill-fated ship's history as ever. Why? It's hardly the only such occurrence!

There are a number of theories, but a popular one explains there's so much narrative, metaphor, and irony in this particular ship's tragic end. It was famously deemed "unsinkable," yet despite all of its bells and whistles, it proved no match for an iceberg, and 1,500 passengers and crew members lost their lives.

The hubris of humanity met its tragic end in the face of nature.

Humans, after all, don't run everything.

You know who does? You know who runs nature, too?

G d.

### **The Serpent Miracle**

When Aaron and Moses first storm into Pharaoh's palace, demanding the Israelites' release in the name of G d, Pharaoh brazenly demands a sign of Divine power. Aaron responds by throwing his staff to the ground. It instantly turns into a serpent. The Egyptian sorcerers are able to do the same, and a battle of serpents ensues: Aaron's serpent turns back into a staff and swallows all the others:

*Each one of them cast down his staff, and they became serpents; but Aaron's staff swallowed their staffs.<sup>1</sup>*

What is the meaning of this miracle? What's the significance of the staff turning into a serpent, then back to a staff, and swallowing all the others in the process?

And why was this unique act chosen to be the first miracle to open the floodgates of miracles about to transpire in Egypt?

### **A Cosmic Project**

To get to the bottom of this, let's go back to the very beginning of Creation.

Kabbalah explains that G d implanted Divine energy in every corner of this freshly created world. The Kabbalists called these bursts of G dly energy "sparks."

Of course, these sparks were, and continue to be, invisible to the naked eye. That's because the coarse and overly materialistic veneer of a base and depraved world covers them and doesn't let them "out."

The Kabbalists compared this material veneer to a "shell," akin to the peel that covers a delicious and desirable fruit.

It's a broad and far-reaching concept, but in a nutshell (pun intended!), this reality creates our very purpose on earth: To access these sparks and "redeem" them. Or, in other words, to expose the G dly energy that exists in every interaction and corner of the world.

### **The Egyptian Project**

Interestingly enough, the Kabbalists tell us, Egypt received an abundance of these sparks, making the job of "spark redemption" all the more important. At the same time, its "shell" was one of extreme depravity and moral degeneration.

Indeed, Egypt is seen as the prototype of evil that denies its creator. The prophet Ezekiel said, "O Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great crocodile<sup>2</sup> that lies down in the midst of its rivers, who said, 'My river is my own, and I made myself.'"<sup>3</sup>

This is the secret to the great plagues visited upon the Egyptians, to crush the thick shell of Egyptian defiance, and finally release those sparks to bring them closer to G d. When it was all done, the "Egyptians shall know that I am G d."

## **Back to the Serpent**

As a prelude to the cosmic shift that was about to happen, Aaron cast a staff in the Egyptian palace and got things going.

You see, the visual of a staff is representative of that G dly energy that descended from on High to be implanted in this world. The long, slender stick connotes a downward flow of energy, symbolic of the spark's journey through the cosmos into the Egyptian landscape. Though they've been cast far, they are directly attached to G d; a straight line can be drawn right back to Him.

The serpent, of course, is the exact opposite: Harkening back to the days in Eden, it is the prototype of evil and negativity in this world.

So, first Aaron transforms the staff into a serpent, representative of the sparks' sad journey from being before G d to being trapped in a depraved Egyptian cage. From staff to serpent.

But then, the serpent turns back into a staff, symbolizing what thankfully happens next: Eventually, even Egypt will be broken and the G dly energy will revert back to her source. "Ten wondrous plagues are coming, my Egyptian friends," Aaron broadcast. "And when G d is through with you, there won't be a corner of this country that doesn't know Him. Every last vestige of Divine energy in this land will be exposed."

From serpent back to staff—swallowing all the negative serpents along the way.

## **Stop Being a Serpent**

We sometimes get carried away with the Egyptian mentality. We delude ourselves into thinking we made ourselves. Not literally, of course, but Titanic-esque.

What does that look like?

You keep Shabbat, of course. But you're very worried about shutting off for too long, so you work until the last minute, inappropriately rushing into Shabbat like a madman.

Yes, you're honest in your business dealings, but when Amazon accidentally delivers an extra package, you don't bother letting them know.

Your friend wasn't nice to you, or somehow never has money when you request the hundred dollars you lent her last week, so you get upset at her, vowing never to be nice again, and start scheming her downfall.

Do you get the idea?

If you really, really believed that G d runs the show, that there is G dly energy behind everything, you wouldn't do any of the above. Shabbat is more important than that last email, Amazon may not need your money, but G d is still watching, and your friend? Eh, she's just a tool.

Instead, you've fallen into the Egyptian trap of "I made myself," getting carried away with how much you can manipulate your own destiny. You're effectively declaring the Pharaoh-like statement of, "I am in control, it's all up to me, and so now that X is or isn't happening, I'm upset and afraid."

But you don't. G d does. Lean back and let the holiness and Divinity around you come forward while you watch the show. You're a staff connected to G d, not an Egyptian serpent with a hubris problem. And when you internalize that, you will have experienced your own personal Exodus.<sup>4</sup>

## **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Exodus 7:12.

2. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for crocodile, tannin, is used in the Torah to refer to Aaron's serpent.
3. Ezekiel 29:3.
4. This essay is based on Torah Ohr, Vaera 56d-57b.

\* Writer, editor, and Rabbi; Editor of Editor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program. Note: I ran Steinsaltz's Devar orah on Vaera last yeara, so I selected a different Chabad article this time.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5351271/jewish/Staff-Serpent-and-Scattered-Sparks.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5351271/jewish/Staff-Serpent-and-Scattered-Sparks.htm)

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## Can You be Strict and Merciful at the Same Time?

An Insight from the Rebbe

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky \* © Chabad 2021

### Combining Mercy and Severity

*The hail was very heavy, with flashing lightning in the midst of the hail (Exodus 9:24)*

Water and fire derive from and express the Divine attributes of mercy and severity, respectively. Thus, the uniqueness of the plague of hail was its blend of ice and fire, Divine mercy and severity. Similarly, although this was a particularly severe plague, as indicated by the harsh warning preceding it, this very warning included merciful instructions how to avert it.

Only G-d can override nature and combine fire and ice. In the same way, it is only by rising above our natural limitations and connecting ourselves to G-d that we can be both strict and merciful at the same time — both for our own benefit and for the benefit of others.

\* — from *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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**Covenant and Conversation**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

**Freewill**

The question is ancient. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, then it was God who made Pharaoh refuse to let the Israelites go, not Pharaoh himself. How can this be just? How could it be right to punish Pharaoh and his people for a decision – a series of decisions – that were not made freely? Punishment presupposes guilt. Guilt presupposes responsibility. Responsibility presupposes freedom. We do not blame weights for falling, or the sun for shining. Natural forces are not choices made by reflecting on alternatives. Homo sapiens alone is free. Take away that freedom and you take away our humanity. How then can it say, as it does in our parsha (Ex. 7:3) that God hardened[1] Pharaoh's heart?

All the commentators are exercised by this question. Maimonides and others note a striking feature of the narrative: For the first five plagues we read that Pharaoh himself hardened his heart. Only later, during the last five plagues, do we read about God doing so. The conclusion they draw therefore is that the last five plagues were therefore a punishment for the first five refusals, freely made by Pharaoh himself.[2]

A second approach, in precisely the opposite direction, is that during the last five plagues God intervened not to harden but to strengthen Pharaoh's heart. He acted to ensure that Pharaoh kept his freedom and did not lose his resolve. Such was the impact of the plagues that in the normal course of events a national leader would have no choice but to give in to a superior force. As Pharaoh's own advisers said before the eighth plague, "Do you not yet realise that Egypt is destroyed?" (Ex. 10:7) To give in at that point would have been action under duress, not a genuine change of heart. Such is the approach of Yosef Albo[3] and Ovadiah Sforno.[4]

A third approach calls into question the very meaning of the phrase, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." In a profound sense God, Author of history, is behind every event, every act, every gust of wind that blows, every drop of rain that falls. Normally however we do not attribute human action to God. We are what we are because that is how we have chosen to be,

By Sheila Gaisin  
in appreciation of the love and moral support  
of her children and grandchildren

even if this was written long before in the Divine script for humankind. What do we attribute to an act of God? Something that is unusual, falling so far outside the norms of human behaviour that we find it hard to explain in any way other than to say, surely this happened for a purpose.

God Himself says about Pharaoh's obstinacy that it allowed Him to demonstrate to all humanity that even the greatest empire is powerless against the hand of Heaven (Ex. 7:5; 14:18). Pharaoh acted freely, but his last refusals were so strange that it was obvious to everyone that God had anticipated this. It was predictable, part of the script. God had actually disclosed this to Abraham centuries earlier when He told him in a fearful vision that his descendants would be strangers in a land not theirs (Gen. 15:13-14).

These are all interesting and plausible interpretations. It seems to me, though, that the Torah is telling a deeper story, one that never loses its relevance. Philosophers and scientists have tended to think in terms of abstractions and universals. Some have concluded that we have freewill, others that we don't. There is no conceptual space in between.

In life, however, that is not the way freedom works at all. Consider addiction: The first few times someone gambles or drinks alcohol or takes drugs, they may do so freely, knowing the risks but ignoring them. Time goes on and their dependency increases until the craving is so intense that they are almost powerless to resist it. At a certain point they may have to go into rehabilitation. They no longer have the ability to stop without external support. As the Talmud says, "A prisoner cannot release himself from prison." (Brachot 5b)

Addiction is a physical phenomenon, but there are moral equivalents. For example, suppose on one significant occasion you tell a lie. People now believe something about you that is not true. As they question you about it, or it comes up in conversation, you find yourself having to tell more lies to support the first. "Oh what a tangled web we weave," Sir Walter Scott famously said, "when first we practise to deceive."

That is as far as individuals are concerned. When it comes to organisations, the risk is even greater. Let us say that a senior member of staff has made a costly mistake that, if exposed, threatens the entire future of the company. They will make an attempt to cover it up. To do so they must enlist the help of

others, who become co-conspirators. As the circle of deception widens, it becomes part of the corporate culture, making it ever more difficult for honest people within the organisation to resist or protest. It then needs the rare courage of a whistle-blower to expose and halt the deception. There have been many such stories in recent years.[5]

Within nations, especially non-democratic ones, the risk is higher still. In commercial enterprises, losses can be quantified. Someone somewhere knows how much has been lost, how many debts have been concealed and where. In politics, there may be no such objective test. It is easy to claim that a policy is working and explain away apparent counter-indicators. A narrative emerges and becomes the received wisdom. Hans Christian Anderson's tale, The Emperor's New Clothes, is the classic parable of this phenomenon. A child sees the truth and in innocence blurts it out, breaking the conspiracy of silence on the part of the monarch's counsellors and townspeople.

We lose our freedom gradually, often without noticing it. That is what the Torah has been implying almost from the beginning. The classic statement of freewill appears in the story of Cain and Abel. Seeing that Cain is angry that his offering has not found favour, God says to him: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). The maintenance of freewill, especially in a state of high emotion like anger, needs willpower. As we have noted before in these studies,[6] what Daniel Goleman calls an 'amygdala hijack' can occur in which instinctive reaction takes the place of reflective decision and we do things that are harmful to us as well as to others.[7] That is the emotional threat to freedom.

Then there is a social threat. After the Holocaust, a number of path-breaking experiments were undertaken to judge the power of conformism and obedience to authority. Solomon Asch conducted a series of experiments in which eight people were gathered in a room and were shown a line, then asked which of three others was the same length. Unknown to the eighth person, the seven others were associates of the experimenter and were following his

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instructions. On a number of occasions the seven conspirators gave an answer that was clearly false, yet in 75 per cent of cases the eighth person was willing to agree with them and give an answer he knew to be false.

Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram showed that ordinary individuals were willing to inflict what appeared to be devastatingly painful electric shocks on someone in an adjacent room when instructed to do so by an authority figure, the experimenter.<sup>[8]</sup> The Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted by Philip Zimbardo, divided participants into the roles of prisoners and guards. Within days the ‘guards’ were acting cruelly and in some cases abusively toward the prisoners and the experiment, planned to last a fortnight, had to be called off after six days.<sup>[9]</sup>

The power of conformism, as these experiments showed, is immense. That, I believe, is why Abraham was told to leave his land, his birthplace and his father’s house. These are the three factors – culture, community and early childhood – that circumscribe our freedom. Jews through the ages have been in but not of society. To be a Jew means keeping a calibrated distance from the age and its idols. Freedom needs time to make reflective decisions and distance so as not to be lulled into conformity.

Most tragically, there is the moral threat. We sometimes forget, or don’t even know, that the conditions of slavery the Israelites experienced in Egypt were often enough felt by Egyptians themselves over many generations. The great pyramid of Giza, built more than a thousand years before the Exodus, before even the birth of Abraham, reduced much of Egypt to a slave labour colony for twenty years.<sup>[10]</sup> When life becomes cheap and people are seen as a means not an end, when the worst excesses are excused in the name of tradition and rulers have absolute power, then conscience is eroded and freedom lost because the culture has created insulated space in which the cry of the oppressed can no longer be heard.

That is what the Torah means when it says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Enslaving others, Pharaoh himself became enslaved. He became a prisoner of the values he himself had espoused. Freedom in the deepest sense, the freedom to do the right and the good, is not a given. We acquire it, or lose it, gradually. In the end tyrants bring about their own destruction, whereas those with willpower, courage, and the willingness to go against the consensus, acquire a monumental freedom. That is what Judaism is: an invitation to freedom by resisting the idols and siren calls of the age.

[1] Three different verbs are used in the narrative to indicate hardening of the heart: k-sh-h, ch-z-k and k-b-d. They have different nuances: the first means ‘harden,’ the second, ‘strengthen,’ and the third, ‘make heavy.’

[2] Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 6:3.

[3] Albo, *Sefer Ikkarim*, IV, 25.

- [4] See Ovadiah Sforno’s Commentary to Ex. 7:3.
- [5] On Enron, see Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind, *The Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron*, New York: Portfolio, 2003.
- [6] See *Beyond Nature*, a Covenant & Conversation piece on *parshat Noach*.
- [7] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, New York: Bantam, 1995.
- [8] Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- [9] Philip G. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, New York: Random House, 2007.
- [10] Toby Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*, London: Bloomsbury, 2010, pp. 72–91. It has been calculated, based on a ten-hour working day, that one giant block of stone weighing over a ton, would have to be transported into place every two minutes of every day for twenty years.

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

“And I will bring you into the land that I promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you as a *morasha* (heritage): I am the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> (Exodus 6:8)

It is only natural for parents to want to leave a legacy for their children and grandchildren. For those fortunate enough to be able to do so, this wish expresses itself in the form of an inheritance. But for most people, this is simply not realistic. How might they transmit a legacy to the next generation? I believe the answer can be found in the important distinction the Torah makes between the words *yerusha* (inheritance) and *morasha* (heritage).

We are all more familiar with the concept of *yerusha*, used throughout the Torah to describe the passing down of material possessions from parents to children. Far less common is the concept of *morasha*, mentioned in the Torah in reference to only two things: Torah [“Moses prescribed the Torah to us, an eternal heritage (*morasha*) for the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4)] and Land of Israel (the verse cited above at the outset).

The different contexts in which these words appear reveals a great deal about the different kinds of relationships between parents and children, and different priorities that these bequests engender, as they are handed down from generation to generation. I would like to explore three different examples in which the differences between *yerusha* and *morasha* will clarify the significance of each.

The first point of distinction is in the realm of effort. The Jerusalem Talmud [Bava Batra 8:2] speaks of *yerusha* as something that comes easily. When a person dies, leaving a *yerusha*, the heir need not do anything other than receive the gift. *Morasha*, however, requires much more.

The added letter *mem* in *morasha*, suggests the Jerusalem Talmud, is a grammatical sign of intensity, the *pi’el* form in Hebrew grammar. In

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order for an individual to come into possession of a *morasha*, he must work for it.

While an inheritance is what you receive from the previous generation (without your particular input), a heritage requires your active involvement and participation. A *yerusha* is a check your father left you; a *morasha* is a business that your parents may have started, into which you must put much sweat, blood and tears.

This certainly explains why *morasha* is used only with regard to Torah and the Land of Israel. Our sages [Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 5a] remark that there are three gifts that God gave the Jewish people that can be acquired only through commitment and suffering: “Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come.” And we understand very well that neither Torah nor the Land of Israel can be easily acquired.

Pirkei Avot 2:10 specifically teaches, “Prepare yourself to study Torah, for it is not an inheritance for you.” All achievement in Torah depends on an individual’s own efforts. A student of Torah must be willing to suffer privation.

Similarly, the Land of Israel cannot be acquired without sacrifice and suffering. One of the tests in the life of Abraham—and the source of the Jewish claim to Jerusalem—is the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah. The message conveyed by the Torah is that we can only acquire our Holy Land if we are willing to place the lives of our children on the line. Every parent in Israel who sends his/her child to the army understands this message very well. A heritage doesn’t come easily, and our national heritage is Torah and Israel.

The second distinction between the terms is not how the gift is acquired, but rather how it may be dispersed. Even the largest amount of money inherited (*yerusha*) can be squandered or legitimately lost. In contrast, a *morasha* must be given intact to the next generation. *Morasha* literally means “to hand over to someone else.” Silver is an inheritance, and can be used in whatever way the heir desires; silver Shabbat candlesticks are a heritage, meant to be passed down from parent to child and used from generation to generation.

Finally, in the case of an inheritance, one must have the object of *yerusha* in one’s possession. This need not be the case with regard to a *morasha*. Jewish parents bequeathed the ideals of Torah and the Land of Israel to their children for countless generations, even while living in exile far from the Promised Land, and even when poverty and oppression made it near impossible for them to become Torah scholars. Values can be passed down regardless of one’s physical or material station in life.

For this reason, an inheritance, regardless of its size, pales in comparison to a heritage. We all

want to be able to bequeath a *yerusha* to our children and grandchildren, and we should do what we can to make that possible. Nevertheless, the most important legacy that we can leave them is a *morasha*, the eternal heritage of Torah and the Land of Israel.

### The Person in the Parsha

#### Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

#### The Status of our Forefathers

This week's column follows up a thought that I shared with you last week. I suggested that one of our most difficult religious tasks is to "see ourselves as if we had personally left Egypt." I stated that it required a skill of imagination which most of us lack.

I wrote that the task seems difficult only if we understand it to mean that we must imagine ourselves as shackled in chains and then suddenly bursting out of confinement, dancing with exhilaration after witnessing miracles, and marching with confidence into an unknown wilderness. Accomplishing that would indeed be a tall order.

However, I argued, if we understand the task to simply "see ourselves as redeemed individuals," the task becomes much more attainable. This is especially so if we follow Ramban's definition of redemption, of *geulah*.

His definition is contained in his introductory remarks to the Book of Exodus. Ramban rejects that nomenclature and insists upon entitling this second book of the Bible as the "Book of Redemption." He defines redemption not as mere freedom from bondage, but as the recovery of "the status of our fathers," the exalted moral stature of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Following this redefinition of redemption, the task of "seeing ourselves as redeemed" no longer is one of creative imagination. Rather, it is one of personal moral and ethical refinement. We must attempt to emulate the model behaviors which our Patriarchs exemplified.

Last week, I presented one aspect of those behaviors, based upon a concept elucidated by the nineteenth century sage, Netziv, who points out that each of the Patriarchs were known as a *yashar*, an ethically straightforward person. Netziv defines a *yashar* as one who can adapt to neighbors who are very different from himself, who can live peacefully and cooperatively with others with whom he is at odds, religiously and culturally.

This is one distinctive feature of our Forefathers: they were pious and highly spiritual, but over and above that, they were *yesharim*, able to transcend the differences between themselves and their idolatrous neighbors.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Va'era* (Exodus 6:2-9:35), we learn of other

distinctive qualities possessed by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As we will see, although these qualities were evident in the lives of the Patriarchs, they were lacking in the person of Moses himself.

Hence, *Va'era* begins with the Lord himself addressing Moses, contrasting him with his forebears Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To understand the basis of this contrast, we must refer to the closing episode of last week's Torah portion. There, Moses intervenes on behalf of the people of Israel with Pharaoh, but that intervention, to say the least, backfires. Rather than accomplishing the slightest step toward freedom, it results in a disastrous exacerbation of the enslavement.

Moses complains to the Almighty, saying, "O Lord, why did You bring harm upon these people? Why did You send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak Your name, he has dealt worse with this people, and still You have not delivered Your people." (Exodus 5:22-23)

Rashi understands the Lord's opening address in this week's Torah portion as a rebuke to Moses for this plaintive challenge. Rashi employs an Aramaic phrase to capture the power of the Lord's ire and dissatisfaction with Moses: "Chaval al d'avdin v'lo mishtachkin. What a shame that the followers I once had are now lost and nowhere to be found!"

The Almighty bemoans the fact that He once had loyal followers like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who trusted Him absolutely. Such followers, He sadly admits, are no longer to be found.

"Moses," the Lord is saying, "you have not attained the 'status of your Forefathers.' After one minor frustration, you throw up your hands in despair. Your Forefathers experienced many greater frustrations, but they always trusted in Me and never questioned My ways, *lo hirharu achar midotai*."

Here we have an additional distinctive quality of the Patriarchs. *Lo hirharu achar midotai*. If we are to attain redemption, which for Ramban means regaining the "status of our Forefathers," then we must make every attempt to develop a level of religious faith which is firm and unwavering. That is how we can "see ourselves as having personally left Egypt," of having personally become redeemed.

But true spiritual growth is not limited to tolerating the frustrations of life, the suffering and the disappointments that we all experience to some degree or another. It is not limited to having faith in times of trial and challenge.

True spiritual growth extends to the ability to appreciate and to express gratitude to the Almighty for the successes that one experiences in life, for life's blessings.

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True spiritual growth goes beyond the saintly person's capacity to suffer in silence. It is much more glorious to be able to experience the wonder of the everyday gifts of life. Here, too, we find a quality which is distinctive of the Forefathers.

Permit me to share with you one Patriarch's, Jacob's, simple expression of appreciation and gratitude to the Lord for what we would call "the small stuff of life." I draw from a passage in the writings of one of the great Jewish moralists of the past century, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, known as the Alter, the "Old Man" of Kelm.

The Alter often reacted with deep emotion to biblical passages that most of us typically overlook. Just two weeks ago, we read Jacob's prelude to the blessings he was about to give Joseph and his children. The passage reads: "The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day." The Alter is moved by the Aramaic translation of this phrase, which simply renders it as, "He who has fed me from my birth to this day."

The Alter reacts: In my entire life, I have never heard a person, not the average person and certainly not a wealthy one, who would exclaim, "Baruch HaShem, I had a wonderful year. I had three square meals every day!" And yet, here we have our Forefather Jacob, the grandson of a very wealthy man, who praises the Lord for having fed him a meal. I was astounded when I heard from Jacob words that I never heard from ordinary people. I remain astounded!

He then continues, and here I paraphrase: That is, until I sat down to recite *Birkat HaMazon*, the Grace After Meals. Then I became astounded at myself! I have been oblivious to what I've been saying all my life. *Birkat HaMazon* is an expression of gratitude to the Lord for His freely given soup and sandwich and cup of coffee.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel provides us with the simple but dramatic example of what Ramban refers to as "the status of our Forefathers." They were capable of clinging to their faith even in catastrophic times. But they were also capable of the flipside of that tenacious faith in the face of dire circumstances. They knew how to celebrate blessings, large and small, with gratitude and joy.

Having adopted Ramban's definition of "redemption" as the reclaiming of the spiritual stature of our Forefathers, we now have become familiar with at least three aspects of that "spiritual stature." If, at the Passover Seder, we must "see ourselves as having been redeemed," we now know how to do so.

We must try to become *yashar*, able to overcome the prejudices which interfere with our ability to get along with those who differ from us; able to cling to our faith even in the

most trying circumstances; and able to appreciate all that we ordinarily take for granted, to be thankful for the many blessings that the Almighty bestows upon us b'chol eit u'v'chol sha'ah, at every time and at every moment.

### Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

#### What Was the Kal V'Chomer?

Parshas Shemos ends with Moshe's complaint to the Almighty: "Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he made matters worse for Your nation, and You have not saved Your people." [Shemos 5:23]. In the pesukim at the beginning of Parshas Vayera, Hashem appears to Moshe and tells him to again speak to the Nation of Israel and tell them that they are on the verge of redemption. However, when Moshe does speak to Bnei Yisrael "they do not listen to him because of shortness of spirit and hard work" [Shemos 6:9].

At that point, Hashem tells Moshe to go back and speak to Pharaoh once more. Moshe responds with a Kal V'Chomer argument: "Behold the Children of Israel did not listen to me (even though this would be "good news" for them); how can I expect Pharaoh to listen to me (when this will be "bad news" for him) and I am of uncircumcised lips." [Shemos 6:12]. Rashi notes that this is one of ten places where we find a Kal v'Chomer argument in the Torah.

Many commentaries point out that this Kal V'Chomer apparently has flawed logic: The pasuk explicitly states why Klal Yisrael did not listen to Moshe Rabbeinu. They did not listen because of "kotzer ruach v'Avodah kashe" (because of their depression and oppression). Pharaoh was a free man sitting in his palace. He might well be in a state of mind to pay attention to what Moshe was going to tell him!

This is a famous question that everyone asks. The sefer Ohr HaYashar answers very logically that the Kal V'Chomer is a legitimate Kal V'Chomer. Why? The truth of the matter is that in Parshas Shemos, when Moshe Rabbeinu came to Klal Yisrael, they did believe him [Shemos 4:31]. The Ohr HaYashar interprets the Kal V'Chomer Moshe argued as follows: "If the people who at one time believed me and were willing to hear my message – but now after my promises did not materialize and their situation has deteriorated, they no longer believe me, then certainly Pharaoh who never believed me in the first place, and on the contrary, was responsible for why it got worse – he certainly is not going to believe me now!"

I saw a second interpretation in the sefer Darash Mordechai from Rav Mordechai Druk: He rejects the "pircha" (the question posed to destroy the logical argument). The "pircha" was – the Jews didn't believe Moshe because they were oppressed slaves, but Pharaoh was a free man – he might believe Moshe. Rav Druk observes that Pharaoh was not a free man. He

was almost as oppressed as the people were. Why is that? Pharaoh was oppressed because he was forced to live up to the image that he created about himself that he was a deity!

Chazal say that Pharaoh had a major problem in trying to portray himself as a god. Gods do not need to go to the bathroom and that is one problem Pharaoh could not solve. What did he do? Once a day, in the early morning, before anyone else got up, he went down to the Nile and took care of his bodily needs. Imagine that – he could only go once a day and he had to ensure that nobody else saw him! Pharaoh was as oppressed as Klal Yisrael. This is not being facetious. He was so obsessed with his self-image and the image that he needed to maintain – that he literally drove himself to self-torture. He had to watch his every move! Pharaoh too was a slave. He was a slave to his own visions of grandeur. So, if Bnei Yisrael could not listen to Moshe because of their status as slaves – all the more so Pharaoh, who suffered a more intense force of slavery, would not be able to listen to Moshe!

#### Prayer Helps

After Pharaoh begged Moshe to remove the plague of Frogs from Egypt, "Moshe cried out (Va'Yitz'ak Moshe) to Hashem concerning the Frogs He sent to Pharaoh" [Shemos 8:8]. The Torah does not use this expression of Va'Yitz'ak by the other plagues. The Torah says that Moshe prayed (Va'Y'etar) when requesting the cessation of the other makkos, but not this expression of "crying out" (tz'a'kah).

The Zohar explains that tz'a'kah is a more dramatic or more panicked form of prayer. Va'Yitz'ak shows an urgency. What was Moshe Rabbeinu's urgency in stopping the plague of Frogs? Why not let Pharaoh suffer a little longer?

In our minds, Hitler y'mach shmo (may his name be obliterated) is the personification of evil to Klal Yisrael. That is because the Nazi's atrocities are relatively fresh in our memories. Pharaoh was as big a Rasha as Hitler, if not worse. He bathed in Jewish blood. He took Jewish babies and squashed them into the walls of the pyramids. It was no less horrible than the Holocaust. So – Pharaoh is feeling the pressure of the Tzefardim – what is the problem? Why didn't Moshe take his time with a long leisurely Shmonah Esrei when he prayed for cessation of the plague?

The Rebbe, Reb Bunim of Psische, asks this question. He answers that Moshe Rabbeinu was trying to prove another point. The whole purpose of the plagues was to demonstrate that there is a Ribono shel Olam that rules the world, and that He is the Master of the universe. He controls the world.

However, Moshe wanted to demonstrate here that there is another "Power" in the world as well, and that is the Power of Prayer (Koach

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haTefillah). Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to show that despite the fact that the Almighty wanted Pharaoh to suffer, there is something that – as it were – could stop the Will of the Ribono shel Olam. This is as much a fundamental of our faith as the fact that there is a Ribono shel Olam and that He runs the world and cares about what happens in the world. Another fundamental belief of our faith is the idea that prayer helps.

By employing the most intense form of Tefila – "Va'Yitz'ak," Moshe wanted to show the amazing power of prayer. I can stop a steaming locomotive in its tracks. Let the plague of Frogs end immediately!

#### A Novel Interpretation of an Ambiguous Pasuk

By the plague of Arov (Mixed Animals), the pasuk says "Behold if you do not send out My people I will incite against you, your servants, your people, and your houses the mixture of wild beasts; and the houses of Egypt will be filled with the mixture of wild animals and even the ground upon which they are" [Shemos 8:17]. Egypt was invaded by an army of wild animals. But what is the pashut pshat (simple reading) of the above cited pasuk?

The Vilna Gaon offers an incredible explanation. The Bartenura on the Mishneh in Kilayim [8:5] mentions that there is a type of animal (referred to as Adnei haSadeh in the Mishna), which obviously no longer exist today, that had an umbilical cord which was attached to the ground. If someone cut the umbilical cord of this animal, the animal would die. The pasuk reads as follows: All the wild animals that existed in the world at that time attacked Egypt, including this unique animal. But how would this animal come – since it is attached to the ground in some far away location? The pasuk therefore states that this animal came – together with the land upon which it resided! This is a fantastic interpretation.

However, I would like to share an interpretation which is a little closer to the simple reading of the pasuk! Those who have an appreciation of Hebrew grammar should enjoy this interpretation immensely.

The sefer HaKesav v'Ha'Kabbalah – like the Malbim and Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch – analyzes the linguistics of a pasuk. He asks – what is the simple interpretation of this pasuk? He says that the phrase "the ground upon which they are" refers to the land upon which the houses that will be inundated with wild animals stand. But he then adds that it could refer to something else entirely. He says the word "v'Gam" (which literally means 'and also') could be a form of the word Gamam. (There are certain words in Hebrew that have double letters in the second and third position of the shoresh (root) of the word. For instance, the word Balal (Beis Lamed Lamed) can also be written with the last letter dropped – as Bal

(Beis Lamed). Such words are called “kefulim” (doubled words). There is a word in the Hebrew language called Gamam (Gimel Mem Mem), which means to cut up or to dissect. He cites places in Mishnayos and in the Book of Doniel where we have such a usage.

The HaKesav v'Ha'Kabbalah explains the expression “v'Gam ha'Adamah asher ale-ha” (and also the land upon which it was), not as “and also” (v'Gam) but as Gamam – meaning these wild animals would rip up the land of Egypt to the extent that it would no longer be possible to plant there. According to this explanation, the word v'Gam is not a conjunction – and also – but rather it is a verb. V'Gam – as if to say v'Gamam es ha'Adamah asher ale-ha.

So, the HaKesav v'Ha'Kabbalah writes that part of the plague was that the wild animals would dig up and make holes in the ground to the extent that it would no longer be fit for agriculture.

#### Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

At the beginning of Parshat Va'era the Torah provides us with lists of genealogy relating to the families of the first three tribes. We're told about Reuven and his children, Shimon and his children, but when it comes to the third tribe: Levi, we're given details of both his children, his grandchildren and even some of his great grandchildren. Why is that the case?

Seforim explains that Reuven and Shimon hardly knew their grandchildren, but Levi was blessed to live to a ripe old age and as a result he played a role in the upbringing of his grandchildren. And who were they? None other than Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. So it was thanks to the influence of Levi that these three siblings, in quite extraordinary fashion, became so successful that they are role models and household names to this very day.

So what we find out from the beginning of Parshat Va'era, is that looking after our senior citizens is not only a mitzvah of care and respect – in addition, our society stands to benefit from them.

At the height of our High Holy Day prayers we call out from our hearts: “Al tashlicheinu le'et zichna ki'chlot chocheinu – al taazveinu.” – “Do not cast us aside when we are old and when our strength has failed. Do not forsake us.”

From the Coronavirus we learnt how important it is not to forsake anyone at all and most definitely not to forsake our senior citizens.

In Parshat Ha'azinu in the book of Devarim, we say, “Zekeinecha v'yomru lach.” If you want some guidance, go to the elders of the society. They'll tell you a thing or two. They will influence you. They will guide you. After

all, if it was not for Levi, we wouldn't have had a Moshe, an Aaron and a Miriam.

#### Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\*

##### Va-Era – Keeping Your Jewish Name

At the beginning of Parshat Vayigash, the Torah counts the names of those Jews who came down to Egypt (Genesis 46:8). Then, last week, at the beginning of the book of Shemot, the Torah again enumerates the names of those who came down to Egypt, the very same people (Exodus 1:1). In fact, the name of the Parsha and the entire Exodus in Hebrew is “names”. Then, AGAIN, in this week's Parsha, the Torah once more counts, in part, the names of the Jewish people – the very same names as before (Exodus 6:16). Three times – the very same names. The Torah is not taking a census, as we already know very well who the seventy individuals are. What is the Torah trying to show us by repeating the names again and again???

Where do all names come from? A name for a newborn child is usually a designation that parents may think about for a long time, or only fleetingly, before making a decision that affects the child forever. In traditional Judaism, the name of a person (or thing) has great significance. The Hebrew name of a person is used exclusively for calling a person to the Torah. Certain prayers, such as the memorial prayer or the prayer for the sick, also use only the Hebrew name (along with the Hebrew name of the person's father, or the mother in case the payer is for the sick). Legal documents, such as the *Ketuba* -- marriage contract or *get* -- divorce document, must use the person's Hebrew name.

##### The Importance of a Name in Jewish Tradition

Jewishly, names have always been far more significant than a mere designation of a person or thing. One of the very first acts recorded in the Torah is that the first man, Adam, gave names to all the animals and birds (**Genesis 2:2**). Why is this act so important that it is recorded in the Torah? The Midrash (**Midrash Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim Aleph 247**) explains that one of the aspects of wisdom that God bestowed upon the first man was that he had the ability to call each beast and bird by the name that best described each species. A later commentary (**Rabbeinu Bechaye commentary on Genesis 2:19**) understands this idea more deeply to signify that this trait was part of man's resemblance to God, showing he understood the nature of each animal so well that he could choose the names perfectly suited to each species, with the name describing the essence of each animal. Thus, in Hebrew an object's name should and often does reflect the essence of that object, animal or even person.

Sometimes, a person's name indeed describes the person's essence and he or she becomes the person designated by his or her name. For example, one person in the Torah, *Naval*

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(which means a despicable person) became a despicable person, and the Prophet says that his name described his essence (Rabbeinu Bechaye commentary on Genesis 2:19). Noah was named that way because his father wanted him to be a comfort to the world that was in pain. (The Hebrew word *Noach* signifies comfort and rest). Noah did become that person, according to Rashi, because he invented an agricultural implement that enabled a starving world to obtain food more easily (easing the curse upon Adam for his sin). Others explain that Noah brought peace, comfort, and calm to the world by his actions in saving humanity from total destruction (for their sins) through the Flood (Rabbeinu Bechaye commentary on Genesis 2:19). Later in the Torah, the man responsible for planning, building and erecting the Tabernacle knew exactly what God wanted and how to do it because his name was also his essence: Bezalel translates as “created in the image/shadow of God. (Alshich commentary to Exodus 35:30-33)” When God wanted to explain the essence of God and His message to the Jewish people in freeing them from Egyptian bondage, Moses asked God, “What is Your name? (Exodus 3:13 with Nachmanides commentary)” Not only man's essence, but even God's essence, is revealed through a name. Every day, today, when Jews refer to the holiest name of God, which is forbidden to be pronounced, God is called “Hashem-The Name”, because God's essence, too, is revealed by His holiest name.

Judaism believes that the name of a person is so crucial that it can change, and sometimes help determine a person's personality and future. In fact, the Talmud states that a person's name impacts upon his future life (Exodus 3:13 with Nachmanides commentary). Since the name often defines a person, the Midrash (Midrash Tanchuma Haazinu 7) states that parents should be careful in choosing a specific name to match the essence of the baby because the name could determine if the child will grow up to be moral or immoral. Ari Z”L says that his student Rabbi Chaim Vital stated that whenever Jewish parents name their baby, it is not their decision alone. The name is predetermined on high, and God actually helps the parents choose the name for the baby (Shaar Hagilgulim, chapter 35). In another place, he expresses the same idea (Likutim Gilgulim, *Sod Chibur Hakever*) and says that at a baby boy's *Brit Milah* -- circumcision, the soul of the baby is already named, and God causes the parents to agree and give him that name. This is one reason that it is a custom among Ashkenazim to name their children after deceased relatives who had noble character traits, in the hope that the baby will grow to emulate that namesake and take on the best of his/her character.

Jewish Names Redeemed the Jewish People -- But why did the Torah choose specifically here, in these Parshiyot, to emphasize the importance of names? After the Torah was

given, the Jews had 613 ways of acting distinctively Jewish, through the Mitzvot given at Sinai. But now in Egypt? The Jew were bereft of commandments. Even the one commandment of Circumcision was not practiced. How then could Jews remain distinctively Jewish in their 210-year journey in Egypt, and preserve their identities? What could they do in Egypt to show that they were worthy to be redeemed and become the Jewish people, the nation of God? The Midrash says (Shaar Hagilgulim, chapter 35.) that they kept using their distinctive Jewish names (as well as their distinctive Jewish language and clothing). Thus, Jewish identity was preserved, even without a Jewish lifestyle, simply by keeping and using one's Jewish name (and language and clothing). Another Midrash describes this act of using Jewish (and not Egyptian) names as an ethical characteristic of the Jewish people.

Maharal explains (Maharal, Gevurot Hashem 43) that their uniquely Jewish names kept the Jews from assimilating into Egyptian society and losing their Jewishness. Another commentary (Exodus 1:1, with Tur commentary) points out that the Hebrew name for the book of Exodus in the Torah is actually "Shemot-Names" because it was their names that made the Jewish people deserving of the Exodus. Early on in Egypt, Joseph understood this principle and put it into action. Pharaoh had given Joseph a special Egyptian name demonstrating his rank as royalty of Egypt (Genesis 41:45). Yet nowhere in the Torah do we see that Joseph ever used this non-Jewish name, and once he revealed to all that he was a Hebrew, he was called in the Torah (and apparently called himself) only Joseph, the Jewish name given to him by his mother and later taken on by so many Jewish "Josephs" throughout the millennia.

**Other Important Aspects of the Power of a Jewish Name:** Rabbi Moshe Shick lived in the 1800's, when assimilation by Jews was running rampant. He writes (Maharam Shick, Yoreh Deah 169) that it is forbidden to abandon one's Jewish name and be called by a secular name, as this will lead to abandonment of one's Judaism, and violate an aspect of the commandment to remain distinguishable from non-Jews. Almost all of those who heeded his call remained Jewish. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, who lived through most of the cultural turmoil of the Jewish people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, writes (Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:66) that giving a baby a secular name is something disgraceful, even if it is the name of a deceased relative who had only a secular name. It is preferable to choose a Jewish name of someone in Jewish history or even someone alive today who is truly a hero in the Jewish sense.

As has been mentioned, the power of a Jewish name is so strong that the Talmud states that changing one's name can alter the fate and future of a person (Rosh Hashana 16b). That is

the basis on which people often officially change or add a Jewish name when a relative is extremely ill. A person's name has unlimited power. The opposite is also true concerning people with a "bad name," says the Talmud (Yoma 38b). No one wants to remember these people or name their children after them. Therefore, a person's name will help determine the person's path in life and will help make up that person's essence. And a Jewish name will help keep a person Jewish.

A parallel between today's world and Egypt can easily be drawn. Most Jews today, unfortunately, do not keep the Mitzvot or their traditions. But even those Jews who do not keep a Jewish lifestyle have a chance to remain distinctively "Jewish" by always using their Jewish names.

**\*This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

#### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

##### Was Pharaoh Really Denied his Free Will?

**Adv. Tamar Oderberg**

Tamar Oderberg "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt" (Shemot 7, 3). These words evoke immediate astonishment, as they seem to shatter one of Judaism's most basic principles – free will. What was Pharaoh's sin if he was seemingly denied free will? If God was the one who stiffened his heart and prevented him from letting the People of Israel go?

The question at hand has been tackled by many rabbinic commentators. They offer a variety of answers. If we read the verses carefully, we will notice that despite God's outright proclamation that he will harden Pharaoh's heart, no such action was taken during the first five plagues. In fact, from the verses themselves it appears that Pharaoh's hardening-of-heart was done by his own free will: "And Pharaoh's heart was hard..."; "And he made his heart hard..."; "And Pharaoh hardened his heart...". Only from the sixth plague onward it is written explicitly: "And God hardened the heart of Pharaoh" and "Because I have made his heart hard".

R' Ovadia Sforno explains that this supposed denial of free will does not, in fact, entail taking away a person's freedom of choice; rather, the person's own choice is reinforced. In other words, Pharaoh made a very clear choice. God did not harden his heart nor prevent him from choosing an alternative; rather, he strengthened Pharaoh's heart so that he might be able to endure the suffering caused by the choice he had already made.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

R' Shmuel David Luzzatto explains that Pharaoh acted with full freedom throughout; however, his refusal to let the People of Israel go after the final plagues was so bizarre and illogical that it was attributed to God.

In his book Hilchot Teshuvah, the Rambam offers another explanation. In his opinion, every person ultimately makes his/her own decision. However, although one has complete freedom of choice at the outset, once the choice is made, it is far more difficult to change tracks. Hence, if one chooses to tread the evil path and perseveres, it will be far more difficult to suddenly choose the path of good. This does not mean there is no free will; however, there is far less room for maneuver.

As was mentioned above, the belief that a person has free will is one of the pillars of Judaism.

In his book, Life-Changing Ideas, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Z"l writes that in today's modern time, brain researchers have discovered that neural pathways connecting different parts of the brain also shape behavior patterns. These are not necessarily positive. For instance, a person might use dangerous drugs of his own free will in order to distract himself and avoid emotions such as fear or anxiety. The more times a person repeats a certain behavior, the more instinctive and immediate it becomes. Once a behavior pattern has become a habit, it becomes all the more difficult to rid oneself of it. In order to overcome fixed patterns of behavior, we must acquire new routines. But this does not suffice. We must persevere, turning the new behaviors into habits. And this is no easy feat.

Rabbi Sacks notes that studies have shown that a minimum of 66 days is required to acquire any new habit. This scientific explanation is very much in keeping with the words of the Rambam. In Va'era, it appears that Pharaoh's refusal to let the Israelites leave Egypt during the first five plagues created a fixed pattern of behavior, which became a habit almost impossible to break. The minute something becomes a fixed habit, our free will is greatly diminished, because we no longer use the primal freedom of choice we were given; rather, we are motivated by force of habit.

From all the above, we can see that our freedom is not a given, nor is it absolute. We may lose it at any moment, in much the same way Pharaoh did, and as is often the case with people who repeatedly make bad choices, and become addicted to drugs or alcohol etc.

This is something I encounter on a daily basis. I represent agunot and mesoravot get (women denied their Jewish divorce) in the Rabbinical Courts. Recalcitrant husbands who have persistently refused to give their wives a get may find their hearts hardening after a time. In the State of Israel, sanctions may be imposed against a man who refuses to give his wife a

get, the Jewish divorce document. The Rabbinical Courts use this tool both sparingly and gradually. There are husbands who set their wives free after the first set of sanctions. But there are others who will not let go of their bad habit until the most severe penalty is imposed on them. In the State of Israel there is a unique type of prisoner – recalcitrant husbands. These are the only prisoners who are in prison by choice. They are free to go the minute they utter a simple consent to divorce their wives. But their hearts are hard, and the habit they have acquired – denying their wives a divorce – has also denied them, quite ironically, of their own free will, their own freedom.

Freedom is an achievement. This week's portion teaches us that even a mighty person like Pharaoh can lose his freedom. Freedom should never be taken for granted. A person who adheres to negative patterns of behavior will ultimately turn these into fixed habits that will prevent him from being a truly free person. As a public, we try and assist those who have turned towards evil and have made it a way of life. There are rehabilitation programs for offenders and rehabilitation centers for addicts. When it comes to get-refusal and recalcitrant spouses, we must do more to mitigate this phenomenon and uproot it before it spreads, so that it does not turn into a way of life.

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#### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

**Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger**

#### **Passions, Protectiveness, and Redemption**

Addressing an age-old question in the early twentieth century, Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk pens, with his signature prescience, an insight that resonates loudly in our times.

Even our earliest commentators grappled to understand the partial listing of Moshe's family that unexpectedly finds its way into this week's parsha. The narrative is just getting under way; Hashem, our prayers, Moshe and Aharon, and even Pharaoh are all positioned for the story of the plagues to take off, all to be disrupted with Moshe and Aharon's family tree. Equally perplexing is that the family tree includes Uncle Reuven, Uncle Shimon, and their children, omitting all the other uncles and their families.

Looking to explain this listing, Rav Meir Simcha, drawing upon midrashim, portrays the families of Reuven, Shimon, and Levi as the Jewish leadership in Mitzrayim. They were not enslaved and they were not subject to the same extent of "identity theft" as their enslaved brethren. As a result, the list is not merely the lineage of Moshe and Aharon but, more accurately, it is a list of the elites, of our royalty in exile, from which Moshe and Aharon were recruited.

He further explains that it had to be this way, but not for the reasons you would expect. Last time we met Reuven, Shimon, and Levi, they

were at their father's bedside with all their brothers. Yet they were singled out for rebuke and censure. Yaakov had to instruct them and leave them with valuable life lessons, but it is hard to imagine how their insides felt to hear these last words from their father as he lavished praise and promise on all others assembled. As a result of being distanced by their father they lost their resilience to maintain their unique names, language and clothing. They were on the verge, at risk if you will, of despairing of any legacy and of any future. Would they have been enslaved, they would have been lost to our people. They would have told their "Egyptian looking" children that they did not leave, rather they were pushed.

Now Rashi's (6:14) quote from the Pesikta takes on life. He writes: why were Reuven, Shimon, and their children exclusively listed? Because, Rashi explains, it was time to totally reinstate Reuven and Shimon (and maybe Levi) who had, of our last hearing of them, been censured by Yaakov on his death bed.

Does recording their names fully reinstate them and welcome their children? Perhaps it runs even deeper. Shimon's and Levi's violence both in disposition and delivery were censured. Similarly, Reuven learns in that last encounter with Yaakov that his impetuosity cost him the rights and role of the eldest son. Yet we dare not forget that Shimon and Levi unleashed their violence in their uncompromising protection of their sister. In an not dissimilar fashion, Reuven rushed to preserve his mother's dignity and to save her from what could have been a terribly devastating moment, would she have discovered Bilha's bed where she expected her own to be placed.

Perhaps in the environs of Mitzrayim, when we are hanging on to our legacy by the Jewish sound of our names and our language, we desperately needed the passionate, uncompromising, and protective voices of Reuven, Shimon and Levi. Thus Rashi is not suggesting that simply mentioning Reuven, Shimon, and their families resolves the hurt inflicted by the stinging rebuke. Rather, Rashi is telling us that by recording the leadership of Reuven, Shimon, and Levi that nurtured Moshe and Aharon who led the redemption from Mitzrayim, the Torah has taught all generations that 1) the imperfections of one moment are the strengths of leadership in another, and 2) by forging a community that is patient with others and with themselves, and is more appreciative of the nuances of the soul, we are many steps closer to redemption.

**Weekly Parsha VAEIRA 5782****Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

Many of the Torah commentaries point out that unlike our forefathers, Moshe, in this week's opening verses to the Parsha, did not accept that God's promises of redemption for the Jewish people had not yet been fulfilled. In God's response to this, we sense a veiled criticism of our great teacher and leader Moshe.

Heaven responded to Moshe by saying that he enjoyed a higher and different relationship to the Revelation from God than those original founders of the Jewish people. Because of this state of elevated Revelation, Moshe's complaint was unnecessary. Moshe should have realized that Heaven has its own timetable, and that its promises will always be fulfilled, but not necessarily according to the time schedule established by human beings.

It is difficult to understand the attitude in Moshe's statement to Heaven that it had not yet freed the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. Moshe certainly realized through his powers of Revelation that he had experienced, and through the commitments made to him and to the Jewish people about redemption, that Heaven was aware of the promises, and that there was no need to be prompted by Moshe to fulfill its commitments.

However, Moshe, like all leaders, was subject to public pressure, complaints and hostility directed towards him by the Jewish taskmasters after the decree of the Pharaoh to withhold straw from them, while demanding the same number of bricks to be produced. These complaints by the people were deeply disturbing to Moshe. He deflects the criticism directed towards him and, instead, holds Heaven accountable for the situation.

Moshe, himself, has no doubt as to the eventual outcome and the inevitable redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Unlike Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob though, he was subject to popular opinion in the mood of the Jewish people, whom he had to convince that redemption would in fact take place.

According to the Midrash, many, if not most, of the Jewish people in Egypt did not believe Moshe's promises that they would soon be delivered from Egyptian slavery. Even after the series of plagues and punishments visited upon the Egyptians, most of the Jews still did not believe in their coming redemption. In contending with this psychological and emotional

state of mind by a large part of the Jewish people, Moshe necessarily turns to Heaven for help. He has no doubt that the redemption from Egyptian slavery will shortly take place. However, he must bring the masses of Israel along with him in this belief and faith.

Because of his great modesty and humility, Moshe does not rely upon his own powers of persuasion to accomplish this task, and he turns to Heaven in an almost provocative fashion. He implores God to hasten the process of the delivery of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. His courageous words to Heaven, which seem like a complaint, are, indeed, but an expression of the greatness of his character and the forcefulness of Moshe's leadership.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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**Freewill (Vaera)****Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

The question is ancient. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, then it was God who made Pharaoh refuse to let the Israelites go, not Pharaoh himself. How can this be just? How could it be right to punish Pharaoh and his people for a decision – a series of decisions – that were not made freely? Punishment presupposes guilt. Guilt presupposes responsibility. Responsibility presupposes freedom. We do not blame weights for falling, or the sun for shining. Natural forces are not choices made by reflecting on alternatives. Homo sapiens alone is free. Take away that freedom and you take away our humanity. How then can it say, as it does in our parsha (Ex. 7:3) that God hardened[1] Pharaoh's heart?

All the commentators are exercised by this question. Maimonides and others note a striking feature of the narrative: For the first five plagues we read that Pharaoh himself hardened his heart. Only later, during the last five plagues, do we read about God doing so. The conclusion they draw therefore is that the last five plagues were therefore a punishment for the first five refusals, freely made by Pharaoh himself.[2]

A second approach, in precisely the opposite direction, is that during the last five plagues God intervened not to harden but to strengthen Pharaoh's heart. He acted to ensure that Pharaoh kept his freedom and did not lose his resolve. Such was the impact of the plagues that in the normal course of

events a national leader would have no choice but to give in to a superior force. As Pharaoh's own advisers said before the eighth plague, "Do you not yet realise that Egypt is destroyed?" (Ex. 10:7) To give in at that point would have been action under duress, not a genuine change of heart. Such is the approach of Yosef Albo[3] and Ovadiah Sforno.[4]

A third approach calls into question the very meaning of the phrase, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." In a profound sense God, Author of history, is behind every event, every act, every gust of wind that blows, every drop of rain that falls. Normally however we do not attribute human action to God. We are what we are because that is how we have chosen to be, even if this was written long before in the Divine script for humankind. What do we attribute to an act of God? Something that is unusual, falling so far outside the norms of human behaviour that we find it hard to explain in any way other than to say, surely this happened for a purpose.

God Himself says about Pharaoh's obstinacy that it allowed Him to demonstrate to all humanity that even the greatest empire is powerless against the hand of Heaven (Ex. 7:5; 14:18). Pharaoh acted freely, but his last refusals were so strange that it was obvious to everyone that God had anticipated this. It was predictable, part of the script. God had actually disclosed this to Abraham centuries earlier when He told him in a fearful vision that his descendants would be strangers in a land not theirs (Gen. 15:13-14).

These are all interesting and plausible interpretations. It seems to me, though, that the Torah is telling a deeper story, one that never loses its relevance. Philosophers and scientists have tended to think in terms of abstractions and universals. Some have concluded that we have freewill, others that we don't. There is no conceptual space in between.

In life, however, that is not the way freedom works at all. Consider addiction: The first few times someone gambles or drinks alcohol or takes drugs, they may do so freely, knowing the risks but ignoring them. Time goes on and their dependency increases until the craving is so intense that they are almost powerless to resist it. At a certain point they may have to go into rehabilitation. They no longer have the ability to stop without external support. As the Talmud says, "A prisoner cannot release himself from prison." (Brachot 5b)

Addiction is a physical phenomenon, but there are moral equivalents. For example, suppose on one

significant occasion you tell a lie. People now believe something about you that is not true. As they question you about it, or it comes up in conversation, you find yourself having to tell more lies to support the first. "Oh what a tangled web we weave," Sir Walter Scott famously said, "when first we practise to deceive."

That is as far as individuals are concerned. When it comes to organisations, the risk is even greater. Let us say that a senior member of staff has made a costly mistake that, if exposed, threatens the entire future of the company. They will make an attempt to cover it up. To do so they must enlist the help of others, who become co-conspirators. As the circle of deception widens, it becomes part of the corporate culture, making it ever more difficult for honest people within the organisation to resist or protest. It then needs the rare courage of a whistle-blower to expose and halt the deception. There have been many such stories in recent years.[5]

Within nations, especially non-democratic ones, the risk is higher still. In commercial enterprises, losses can be quantified. Someone somewhere knows how much has been lost, how many debts have been concealed and where. In politics, there may be no such objective test. It is easy to claim that a policy is working and explain away apparent counter-indicators. A narrative emerges and becomes the received wisdom. Hans Christian Anderson's tale, The Emperor's New Clothes, is the classic parable of this phenomenon. A child sees the truth and in innocence blurts it out, breaking the conspiracy of silence on the part of the monarch's counsellors and townspeople. We lose our freedom gradually, often without noticing it. That is what the Torah has been implying almost from the beginning. The classic statement of freewill appears in the story of Cain and Abel. Seeing that Cain is angry that his offering has not found favour, God says to him: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). The maintenance of freewill, especially in a state of high emotion like anger, needs willpower. As we have noted before in these studies,[6] what Daniel Goleman calls an 'amygdala hijack' can occur in which instinctive reaction takes the place of reflective decision and we do things that are harmful to us as well as to others.[7] That is the emotional threat to freedom.

Then there is a social threat. After the Holocaust, a number of path-breaking experiments were

undertaken to judge the power of conformism and obedience to authority. Solomon Asch conducted a series of experiments in which eight people were gathered in a room and were shown a line, then asked which of three others was the same length. Unknown to the eighth person, the seven others were associates of the experimenter and were following his instructions. On a number of occasions the seven conspirators gave an answer that was clearly false, yet in 75 per cent of cases the eighth person was willing to agree with them and give an answer he knew to be false.

Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram showed that ordinary individuals were willing to inflict what appeared to be devastatingly painful electric shocks on someone in an adjacent room when instructed to do so by an authority figure, the experimenter.[8] The Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted by Philip Zimbardo, divided participants into the roles of prisoners and guards. Within days the ‘guards’ were acting cruelly and in some cases abusively toward the prisoners and the experiment, planned to last a fortnight, had to be called off after six days.[9]

The power of conformism, as these experiments showed, is immense. That, I believe, is why Abraham was told to leave his land, his birthplace and his father’s house. These are the three factors – culture, community and early childhood – that circumscribe our freedom. Jews through the ages have been in but not of society. To be a Jew means keeping a calibrated distance from the age and its idols. Freedom needs time to make reflective decisions and distance so as not to be lulled into conformity.

Most tragically, there is the moral threat. We sometimes forget, or don’t even know, that the conditions of slavery the Israelites experienced in Egypt were often enough felt by Egyptians themselves over many generations. The great pyramid of Giza, built more than a thousand years before the Exodus, before even the birth of Abraham, reduced much of Egypt to a slave labour colony for twenty years.[10] When life becomes cheap and people are seen as a means not an end, when the worst excesses are excused in the name of tradition and rulers have absolute power, then conscience is eroded and freedom lost because the culture has created insulated space in which the cry of the oppressed can no longer be heard.

That is what the Torah means when it says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Enslaving others, Pharaoh

himself became enslaved. He became a prisoner of the values he himself had espoused. Freedom in the deepest sense, the freedom to do the right and the good, is not a given. We acquire it, or lose it, gradually. In the end tyrants bring about their own destruction, whereas those with willpower, courage, and the willingness to go against the consensus, acquire a monumental freedom. That is what Judaism is: an invitation to freedom by resisting the idols and siren calls of the age.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Va’era (Exodus 6:2-9:35)**

#### **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel –“And I will bring you into the land that I promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you as a morasha (heritage): I am the Lord.” (Exodus 6:8)

It is only natural for parents to want to leave a legacy for their children and grandchildren. For those fortunate enough to be able to do so, this wish expresses itself in the form of an inheritance. But for most people, this is simply not realistic. How might they transmit a legacy to the next generation? I believe the answer can be found in the important distinction the Torah makes between the words *yerusha* (inheritance) and *morasha* (heritage).

We are all more familiar with the concept of *yerusha*, used throughout the Torah to describe the passing down of material possessions from parents to children. Far less common is the concept of *morasha*, mentioned in the Torah in reference to only two things: Torah [“Moses prescribed the Torah to us, an eternal heritage (*morasha*) for the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4)] and Land of Israel (the verse cited above at the outset).

The different contexts in which these words appear reveals a great deal about the different kinds of relationships between parents and children, and different priorities that these bequests engender, as they are handed down from generation to generation. I would like to explore three different examples in which the differences between *yerusha* and *morasha* will clarify the significance of each.

The first point of distinction is in the realm of effort. The Jerusalem Talmud [Bava Batra 8:2] speaks of *yerusha* as something that comes easily. When a person dies, leaving a *yerusha*, the heir need not do anything other than receive the gift. *Morasha*, however, requires much more.

The added letter mem in morasha, suggests the Jerusalem Talmud, is a grammatical sign of intensity, the pi'el form in Hebrew grammar. In order for an individual to come into possession of a morasha, he must work for it.

While an inheritance is what you receive from the previous generation (without your particular input), a heritage requires your active involvement and participation. A yerusha is a check your father left you; a morasha is a business that your parents may have started, into which you must put much sweat, blood and tears.

This certainly explains why morasha is used only with regard to Torah and the Land of Israel. Our sages [Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 5a] remark that there are three gifts that God gave the Jewish people that can be acquired only through commitment and suffering: "Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come." And we understand very well that neither Torah nor the Land of Israel can be easily acquired.

Pirkei Avot 2:10 specifically teaches, "Prepare yourself to study Torah, for it is not an inheritance for you." All achievement in Torah depends on an individual's own efforts. A student of Torah must be willing to suffer privation.

Similarly, the Land of Israel cannot be acquired without sacrifice and suffering. One of the tests in the life of Abraham—and the source of the Jewish claim to Jerusalem—is the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah. The message conveyed by the Torah is that we can only acquire our Holy Land if we are willing to place the lives of our children on the line. Every parent in Israel who sends his/her child to the army understands this message very well. A heritage doesn't come easily, and our national heritage is Torah and Israel.

The second distinction between the terms is not how the gift is acquired, but rather how it may be dispersed. Even the largest amount of money inherited (yerusha) can be squandered or legitimately lost. In contrast, a morasha must be given intact to the next generation. Morasha literally means "to hand over to someone else." Silver is an inheritance, and can be used in whatever way the heir desires; silver Shabbat candlesticks are a heritage, meant to be passed down from parent to child and used from generation to generation.

Finally, in the case of an inheritance, one must have the object of yerusha in one's possession. This need not be the case with regard to a morasha. Jewish

parents bequeathed the ideals of Torah and the Land of Israel to their children for countless generations, even while living in exile far from the Promised Land, and even when poverty and oppression made it near impossible for them to become Torah scholars. Values can be passed down regardless of one's physical or material station in life.

For this reason, an inheritance, regardless of its size, pales in comparison to a heritage. We all want to be able to bequeath a yerusha to our children and grandchildren, and we should do what we can to make that possible. Nevertheless, the most important legacy that we can leave them is a morasha, the eternal heritage of Torah and the Land of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom!

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The Mistaken Premise of Israel's Entry Policy

Jonathan Rosenblum - Mishpacha Magazine

<https://mishpacha.com/the-mistaken-premise-of-israels-entry-policy/>

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Parashat Shemot 5782

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Future Redemption of Am Yisrael

<https://nachmankahana.com/category/parashat/>

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Israel's Multiple Iranian Dilemmas -- Part I

Jonathan Rosenblum - Yated Neeman

<https://www.jewishmediaresources.com/2149/israel-multiple-iranian-dilemmas-part-i>

<http://www.jewishmediaresources.com/2149/israel-multiple-iranian-dilemmas-part-ii>

[Full text taken out for lack of space, though they are great articles CS]

The world's attention is currently focused on the off-again on-again negotiations in Vienna. But whatever comes out of those negotiations, it is now clear that they will not allow Israel to avoid or even delay much the decision whether to attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

As of this writing, the negotiations are off. But Iran has made clear, in any event, that it has no intention of returning to the 2015 JCPOA, and America is no longer pushing it to do so. Iran has long since exceeded the JCPOA's limitation on enrichment above 3.67%, and possesses enough or nearly enough nuclear material enriched to 60% to fashion a nuclear weapon in a short span of time.

Meanwhile, Iran is busy installing even faster centrifuges to get up to the 90% threshold necessary

for a weapon. It has denied the International Atomic Energy Agency access to the site where production of advanced centrifuges, which has no conceivable non-material use, is taking place.

As was the case leading up to the JCPOA, when American negotiators were holding a much stronger hand than at present, the Biden administration negotiators, including many veterans of the Obama era nuclear negotiations leading to the JCPOA, are behaving as the party desperate to conclude any sort of agreement. Though American officials state that Iran will not be permitted to obtain a bomb, no one, least of all the Iranians, believes that the U.S. would ever take military action to prevent Iran from doing so.

The Americans have demonstrated since 2012 that in their minds the worst possible result would be a military confrontation with Iran. And the frenzied manner in which the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan has only reinforced the impression that nothing could induce the U.S. to commit serious resources to another Middle East war.

Even if a deal were to be concluded, Iran will be allowed to retain the uranium already enriched far beyond the levels permitted under the JCPOA, as well as its advanced centrifuges. In addition, it will obtain billions of dollars in sanctions relief just for returning to the table. Indeed prior to the halt in negotiations, the Iranians had limited all discussions to the sole issue of sanctions relief.

So much for candidate Biden's promises to secure a better agreement – one which would encompass Iran's missile program and its support for terrorism. The U.S. has indicated that it will be satisfied if the Iranians just call a halt to their enrichment activities for the time being.

Meanwhile Iran continues to treat the U.S. with thoroughgoing disdain, refusing to allow the U.S. to even participate directly in the Vienna negotiations, as a punishment for President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA.

**IN BOMBING IRAQ'S OSIRAK REACTOR** in 1981, then Prime Minister Menachem Begin established what became known as the Begin Doctrine: No avowed enemy of Israel will be allowed to obtain weapons of mass destruction. In 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert acted in accord with that doctrine when he ordered the bombing of a Syrian nuclear reactor.

With respect to the first condition for invocation of the Begin doctrine, there can be no doubt of the Iranian

regime's malevolent enmity to Israel, which its Supreme Leader has repeatedly declared to be a cancer that must be excised from the world. Less than two weeks ago, the chief spokesman for Iran's armed forces, declared, "We will not back off the annihilation of Israel even one millimeter. We want to destroy Zionism in the world."

Israel's leaders have repeatedly emphasized that their red line is an enemy state, i.e., Iran, becoming a nuclear threshold state capable of producing a nuclear weapon within a short period of time. That capacity would allow Iran to provide a cover for its allies surrounding Israel – Hezbollah, Hamas, and Syria -- with various Palestinian groups in Judea and Samaria and within Israel proper providing operational support. Iran is already at that threshold stage or very close to it. And nothing that takes place at Vienna is going to affect its achievement of that status.

While Israel also has the power to inflict devastation on Iran, that does not necessarily mean that the ayatollahs are therefore permanently deterred. For one thing, deterrence in the form of mutual assured destruction (MAD) is only effective if both parties are operating within the same framework of rationality. But the theology of Iran's Shiite leaders alters that calculation. The great contemporary scholar of Islam and the Middle East Bernard Lewis frequently pointed out, the ayatollahs view history ending with the advent of the Hidden Imam, an event which will in their view be preceded by an apocalyptic confrontation. Therefore a nuclear confrontation with Israel might be for the ayatollahs "not a bug but a feature."

The ayatollahs are deeply unpopular in Iran, and the impact of severe sanctions imposed by the Trump administration only increased their unpopularity. But as Bret Stephens has pointed out, the very unpopularity of the regime makes the ayatollahs even more dangerous. Were they to feel power slipping from their grasp, they might well unleash an Iranian nuclear weapon at Israel in order to trigger the arrival of the Hidden Imam.

**SO THE QUESTION BECOMES:** Does Israel have the capacity to destroy the Iranian nuclear program and thereby remove the threat, as it did in Iraq in 1981 and Syria in 2007? Michael Makovsky, president and CEO of the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) wrote last week in the New York Post, that Israeli defense officials have told him that they believed that the JCPOA gave them ten years to draw up the plans for military action against Iran.

They did not anticipate President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and imposition of biting sanctions on Iran, which, in turn, provided Iran with a plausible excuse to openly ignore the JCPOA's provisions (something that they would have done on a smaller scale in any event.)

Former prime minister and subsequently defense minister under Netanyahu, Ehud Barak wrote recently in *Yediot Ahraonot* that Israel no longer has a viable military option for preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear threshold state, and needs the United States to develop the necessary military plans. He added that the U.S. has no interest in developing such plans nor in executing them if it did so.

Speaking at a Reichman University conference in Herzliya, Prime Minister Bennett implied that his predecessor had been mostly talk and no action with respect to Iran:

When I arrived at the Prime Minister's Office less than half a year ago, I was amazed by the gap between rhetoric and action. . . . To summarize the reality that we inherited in one sentence: Iran is further along in its nuclear program than ever before, and its enrichment machine is more advanced and broader. . . .

Iran has also been consistently successful in encircling Israel in rings of militias and rockets from every direction. . . . To the northeast, there are Shi'ite militias in Syria; to the north, Hezbollah; to the south, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. . . . [T]he Iranians have surrounded the State of Israel with missiles, while they sit safely in Tehran. They harass us, drain our energy, and wear us out. . . . They bleed us without paying a price.

That Israel does not have a clear plan of action against Iran's nuclear program and the Revolutionary Guard at present is not difficult to believe. The development of such a plan is no easy matter, as we shall discuss next week. But the idea that Binyamin Netanyahu, who was obsessed with the Iranian threat, did little to work on an Israel response to the Iranian menace strikes me as implausible.

Netanyahu likely hoped that if American sanctions under President Trump failed to bring Iran to heel that President Trump could be persuaded to use the far greater military resources at his disposal to strike directly at the Iranian nuclear program. No doubt he prayed for Donald Trump's re-election.

But it would be hard to believe that a strategist of Netanyahu's level put all of Israel's eggs in the basket

of Trump's re-election. Netanyahu knew that Trump never had an approval rating over fifty percent in his four years in office, and the likelihood of his re-election was not great.

Moreover, it's clear that Netanyahu and head of the head of the Mossad under him, Yossi Cohen, missed no opportunity to make Iran aware of Israel's capabilities and to make its leaders uneasy. Their notable recent accomplishments include the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist; collaborating with the United States to rid the world of Iran's second most powerful figure, Qasem Soleimani, head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; perhaps the greatest espionage achievement in history in removing tons of records of the Iranian nuclear program from Iran to Israel without being detected; repeated mysterious fires and explosions at Iran's nuclear facilities; and constant attacks on Iranian forces and weapons depots in Lebanon and Syria.

None of these square with the charge that Netanyahu was all talk and no action vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear program.

## **Israel's Iranian Dilemmas – Part II**

I first wrote in these pages about the possibility of a military strike on Iran's nuclear weapons program over a decade ago ("Talk of a Military Operation on Iran," August 11, 2010). Despite a fair amount of time spent pondering the intricacies of such an attack by Israel since then, I cannot make any confident predictions about whether Israel will take military action nor about whether those actions would be successful. I am not privy to any information not available to any reader with an interest in the subject.

The difficulties on an Israeli strike are obvious. First, Iran is a long way from Israel, and any Israel action by air would likely involve a complicated refueling operation in midflight. Second, any effort to destroy or substantially set back Iran's nuclear program would involve strikes on multiple targets spread out over Iran. Finally, and perhaps most important, many of the most crucial nuclear sites are deeply embedded into mountains. Israel lacks the type of bunker buster munitions capable of reaching those underground targets. Over the past decade, the Iranian air defenses have improved greatly, with the addition of advanced Russian systems. In the absence of bunker buster munitions from the United States, Israeli pilots would have to fly multiple sorties over the target and hit with pinpoint accuracy, all while under heavy missile fire.

Matters have not remained static, however, over the last decade. Israel's new friendship with a number of Gulf States, fueled in large part by their shared fears of Iran, is one such factor. It is at least conceivable that one or more of those states might grant Israeli planes access to their airfields, much closer to Iran, as their contribution to reducing the threat from Iran. (On the other hand, as long as Iran remains undeterred, they may not wish to make themselves targets of Iranian payback.)

It has also become clear that Israel has multiple means of damaging Iran's nuclear infrastructure, and many of them have been deployed in recent years. Israel's intelligence gathering about the Iranian program is excellent. The removal without detection of Iran's nuclear archives provided clear insights into Iran's strategic thinking about the nuclear option and into the nature of the program.

Israel has clearly turned a number of Iranian nuclear scientists, some of whom have been the perpetrators of sabotage aimed at various stages of the Iranian program. The July 2, 2020 explosion at the large underground site at Natanz for assembling advanced centrifuges and nuclear enrichment is one example. Israel has established important alliances as well with opposition groups in Iran opposed to the Khameini regime. Those groups have also taken part in a number of sabotage operations. The September 26 explosion and fire at the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps site for the development of the Shahab-3 medium-range missile likely to be employed in any strike on Israel is one likely example. As the focus of Israeli efforts to stymie Iranian nuclear ambitions switches from Iran's enrichment program to its efforts to weaponize its enriched uranium, those internal allies will become ever more important.

The IDF's cyber capacities are among the best in the world, and have already been used on multiple occasions to inflict serious damage on Iranian nuclear installations. The quality of Israel's cyberwarfare teams must give Iranian leaders cause to worry whether Israel could bring the country's entire modern electronic infrastructure to a standstill. Iranian ports, for instance, have been a past target. (Iran's cyberwarfare capacities are also substantial, though not equal to Israel's.)

Though Iran is close to becoming a nuclear threshold state, something Israeli leaders have said they would never allow to happen, there may, in fact, be reasons not to launch a major air attack immediately. While

Iran's program will continue to advance, it is also possible that Israel will develop a game-changer in the relatively near future. A laser-based missile defense system might be one such game-changer.

As effective as Iron Dome was against Hamas rockets in May, shooting down 1400 out of 1500 incoming rockets, Israel cannot count on the same kind of success against Hezbollah. The latter is estimated by the IDF to possess 140,000 missiles and rockets, many of them of long-range and precision guidance. Minimally, Hezbollah possesses ten times as many rockets and missiles as Hamas. It is capable of firing a volume of missiles that might well overwhelm Iron Dome, and even knock out crucial Iron Dome batteries.

Moreover, Iron Dome is very expensive to operate. Every rocket fired costs in the tens of thousands of dollars, whereas Hamas' projectiles may cost little more a few hundred dollars. A laser-based defense could overcome the latter problem, and likely the former as well. And Israel is working on such a defense.

In addition, a laser-based system would, at some point, be capable of striking a nuclear missile fired from Iran. The smaller the chances of an Iranian missile hitting Israel the smaller the chances of their attempting to launch such an attack. Israel is definitely at work on laser-based missile defense, the only question is how long it would take to develop and deploy.

THE LIKELIHOOD of a successful Israeli aerial attack on Iran's key nuclear facilities is, unfortunately, only one of the variables confronting Israeli policymakers. For an Israeli attack, whether successful or not, would not be the end of the matter. Even if successful, Iran would unleash Hezbollah on Israel, as well as other proxies. Indeed it has armed Hezbollah to the teeth primarily as insurance policy against an Israeli attack.

Hezbollah has missiles capable of hitting every part of Israel, and they would be aimed at high value targets – oil refineries, oil drilling in the Mediterranean, desalinization plants. If an oil refinery were hit, it would result in a fireball leaving a path of destruction and death. Moreover, Hezbollah would certainly attempt to overwhelm Iron Dome with the sheer volume of its rockets in order to wreak destruction on Israel's civilian population.

At the end of May fighting with Hamas, Hamas was still firing as many rockets per day as at the beginning.

Iron Dome allowed Israel to tolerate such a situation. But there would be no such room for leeway against a Hezbollah onslaught. Israel would have no choice but to basically level immediately any house in Lebanon known to be sheltering missiles – pretty much the entirety of southern Lebanon, and to use ground troops as well. Israeli military chiefs have been very publicly warning for years that the Israeli response to a full-out Hezbollah attack would be fiercer and more brutal than anything yet seen in Gaza or Lebanon, in an effort to prepare the world for such an attack.

The battle with Hezbollah would be far more complex than the periodic outbreaks of fighting with Hamas in Gaza. The Lebanese border is far longer than that between Israel and Gaza, and it is far from hermetically sealed, as the Gaza border was from the time that Hamas's underground tunnels into Israel were discovered and destroyed. At least twice this year, Hezbollah fighters have penetrated into Israel, with one squad reaching the outskirts of Metullah. Hezbollah would likely deploy its best units, battle-hardened from years of fighting in Syria, in attempts to penetrate Israel.

Another complicating factor is that the IAF would not have the unchallenged air superiority that it has in Gaza. Hezbollah has advanced air defense batteries, the destruction of which would be a high priority for the Israeli air force. But, in addition, its missiles would be aimed at Israeli air bases around the country to destroy planes on the ground and to render runways unusable.

Already in 1999, MK Yuval Steinitz wrote in Commentary an article, "When the Palestinian Army Invades the Heart of Israel," in which he outlined the ability of the Palestinians and Israeli Arabs to disrupt IDF operations in the event of war. And the events of May, in which Israeli Arabs terrorized the Jewish populations in mixed cities, such as Lod and Ramla, have only brought into clearer focus the magnitude of that threat.

Though Israel bombing in Lebanon would be responding to aggression from Hezbollah, and a matter of life and death for Israel, if we learned one thing from the May fighting with Hamas, it is how little much of the world, including important sectors of the American media and the left-wing of Democratic Party, care about who instigated the fighting. And if a Hezbollah launch of missiles at Israel was precipitated by an Israeli attack on Iran, Israel would be portrayed as the aggressor responsible

for unleashing the havoc. Enemies of Israel would redouble efforts to turn it into a pariah state.

An attack on Iran and its nuclear program might well be necessary to prevent Israelis from living under the perpetual cloud of a nuclear Iran bent on their destruction. As Hitler, ym"sh, taught us, when your enemies proclaim their intention to exterminate the Jewish people, believe them.

And no doubt, at shul Kiddush tables around America voices will be raised to proclaim the need for the immediate Israeli bombing of Iran. But those bravely telling Israeli leaders what to do would be well-advised to at least be aware of the difficulty of the task ahead and likely aftermath of even a successful attack. Better that they should raise their voices in prayer to Hashem that we find the wherewithal to destroy our mortal enemies and be spared from their evil plans for us.

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## Staining Matters

### Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: Stains

On Shabbos, must I try not to stain my clothes?

Question #2: Lipstick

May I freshen my lipstick on Shabbos?

Question #3: Bleaching

Does bleaching out color violate the melacha of dyeing?

Introduction:

One of the 39 melachos listed in the Mishnah (Shabbos 73a) is tzovei'a, dyeing. This is derived from the fact that many of the textiles and hides used in the Mishkan required dyeing; for example, the ram skins used to cover the Mishkan were dyed red (Yerushalmi, Shabbos 7:2).

Painting metal or the walls of a house are other examples that violate the Torah prohibition of tzovei'a (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 9:13; Tiferes Yisroel, Kalkelos Shabbos; Minchas Chinuch).

Non-permanent dyeing

The prohibition of tzovei'a is violated min haTorah only when the dyeing is permanent (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 9:13). Non-permanent dyeing does not violate the law min haTorah, but was prohibited by Chazal.

There are several ways that dyeing or coloring something could be non-permanent. It could be that the colorant you used is not fast – meaning it does not absorb sufficiently into the cloth to remain (Tosefta, Shabbos 12:6). It also could be that the material to

which you applied the dye will soon decompose (Tosefta, Shabbos 12:6). Yet another possibility is that the material you are dyeing is permanent, and so is the dye when used for coloring cloth, but the colorant will not set on this particular material. The Rambam picks such an example, when he rules that one does not violate *tzovei'a min haTorah* by smearing makeup onto metal, since the metal will not remain colored for very long (Hilchos Shabbos 9:13). Each of these non-permanent examples of dyeing is prohibited on Shabbos, but none involves a Torah prohibition.

The halachic authorities dispute concerning the length of time that a color must last in order to qualify as permanent. According to the Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 9:13), a dye that will remain for a day is long enough to be considered permanent -- thus, someone using a colorant that will disappear a day after use desecrates Shabbos *min haTorah* (Shaar Hatziyun 303:68; see also Chayei Odom who appears to agree with this ruling). However, other authorities contend that violating the melacha of *tzovei'a min haTorah* requires a more permanent act of coloring, defined as something that lasts for a "long time" (Tiferes Yisroel in Kalkeles Shabbos).

#### Staining your clothes

The Shulchan Aruch rules that, because of the melacha of *tzovei'a*, when eating foods like beets and cherries, you should be careful not to stain your clothes (Orach Chayim 320:20). Notwithstanding that most of us are not interested in having our clothes stained by these foods, it is still prohibited *miderabbanan* to do so deliberately; for example, to wipe one's hands on clothing after eating cherries. There are halachic authorities who rule that the laws of Shabbos do not require you to be concerned about staining your clothes, because doing so is considered dirtying your clothes, not dyeing them (Darchei Moshe 320:2, quoting Agur). However, the Shulchan Aruch rules strictly, and the consensus of later authorities accepts this opinion.

We can, therefore, now address our opening question: "On Shabbos, must I try not to stain my clothes?"

The answer is that it is forbidden to wipe my hands on my clothes if my hands have something that might be considered a dye, even though, from my perspective, I am dirtying the garment.

#### Two melachos

We see from the Gemara (see below) that a particular activity can be forbidden both because of *tzovei'a* and because of another melacha, at the same time

(Shabbos 75a). Although in our day, there is no practical halachic difference whether an activity violates one melacha or two, when the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt, speedily and in our days, there will be different halachic practices that result.

#### Lipstick on Shabbos

According to some authorities, applying lipstick is prohibited, both because of *tzovei'a* and because of *memarei'ach*, the melacha involved when one smoothes or files down a surface (Nimla Tal, *Tzovei'a*, note 31).

At this point, we can address the second of our opening questions: "May I freshen my lipstick on Shabbos?"

The answer is that applying lipstick may potentially involve two different melachos of Shabbos, *tzovei'a* and *memarei'ach*, and that both violations may be *min haTorah*. There are possibilities why the violation of *tzovei'a*, in this instance, may be only rabbinic. One reason is because the lipstick may not remain on the lips for a full day, and the second reason, because the lips are already colored. However, notwithstanding these reasons, it is still, definitely prohibited *miderabbanan* as *tzovei'a* and is probably prohibited *min haTorah* as *memarei'ach*.

#### Is squeezing dyeing?

One rishon, the Ramban (Shabbos 111a), contends that squeezing liquid out of a soaked piece of cloth violates the melacha of dyeing, because the squeezing changes the current color of the cloth. (This is how his opinion is understood by the Magen Avraham, end of chapter 302, and Shu't Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim #159:20; however, the Lechem Mishneh [Hilchos Shabbos 9:11] understands that the Ramban agrees with the other rishonim that squeezing is prohibited because of *melabein*, laundering and not because of dyeing.)

#### Creating a dye

The rishonim dispute whether creating a dye violates dyeing. According to the Rambam, blending together ingredients that, together, create a dye is a *toladah* of the melacha of *tzovei'a*, meaning that this is a sub-category of dyeing that is prohibited *min haTorah* (Hilchos Shabbos 9:14). However, the Ra'avad disagrees, contending that someone who creates a vat dye, which means that he heats raw materials intending to dye cloth by submerging it in the heated liquid, violates the melacha of "cooking" when he creates the dye. According to the Ra'avad, the melacha of dyeing is not violated until the cloth is

placed in the vat to absorb the dye, and creating a dye without use of heat is not a Torah violation at all. This is because tzovei'a is violated min haTorah only when the result is a finished product; since creating a dye is only a preliminary step, it does not constitute a Torah violation of the melacha.

It seems that this identical dispute is a contention between other early rishonim. The Mishnah explains that it is prohibited min haTorah to stir a pot of vat dye on Shabbos. The question is -- which melacha does this act violate? Tosafos (Shabbos 18b s. v. dilma) explains that this stirring violates tzovei'a, whereas Rashi (ad loc.) implies that it violates bishul, cooking. It would appear that the Ra'avad and Rashi have a similar approach, both contending that preparing a vat dye violates cooking, but not dyeing, whereas the Rambam agrees with Tosafos that manufacturing the dye violates tzovei'a.

#### Intensifying color

If a cloth or another textile already has a shade of color, but it is not dyed as deeply as you want, is it prohibited min haTorah to dye it to a deeper hue? According to most authorities, intensifying the shade of a pigment that already exists violates tzovei'a min haTorah. If the additional dyeing does not make a significant difference in the color, the violation is rabbinic, not min haTorah (Mor Uketziyah, end of 328; cf., however, see Shu't Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim #172, who contends that once the fabric has been dyed a certain color, adding to that color does not involve a Torah prohibition. This is a minority opinion.).

#### Bleaching or dyeing?

At this point, we can ask whether dyeing is defined as changing the color of an item, or adding color to an item. A difference in practical halacha between the two approaches is whether bleaching an item, which changes the color by removing pigment, violates the melacha of tzovei'a.

According to most authorities, tzovei'a means applying pigment or colorant to the surface of an item that thereby changes its color. For example, the Rambam defines a different one of the 39 melachos, melabein, to be bleaching. He seems to understand that laundering is a sub-category of melabein. The question is why bleaching is not considered the same melacha as tzovei'a, dyeing, which is also concerned with changing the color of a fiber. The answer appears to be that, whereas tzovei'a adds color to the fiber, bleach removes color from the fiber. In the Rambam's

opinion, adding color to an item constitutes tzovei'a, whereas bleaching it and removing impurities that detract from the appearance of the cloth constitute melabein.

However, a minority opinion contends that any color change, including bleaching out the color, violates tzovei'a (see Tosafos, Bava Kama 93b, s. v. ha).

#### Painting white

"If someone whitewashes his wall or paints something white, what melacha has he performed?"

The answer is that he violated the melacha of tzovei'a, dyeing, not of melabein, even though the word melabein could be translated as "he makes something white." This is true, even according to those who contend that bleaching does not qualify as tzovei'a. The reason is that bleaching removes color, whereas in these cases a white color is added to the surface of the wall or other item.

#### The Rogatchover's position

Rav Yosef Rosen -- early 20th century rav of the Chassidishe community of Dvinsk, Latvia (for much of this period, part of the Russian empire), known colloquially as "the Rogatchover," for his place of birth -- was known for his original approaches to halachic issues. Often, these approaches produced interesting strict or lenient conclusions. In one of his essays, the Rogatchover concludes that mixing a dye into a liquid does not constitute the melacha of tzovei'a. His logic is that tzovei'a requires changing an item's color. When mixing a dye base into a liquid, the liquid's color is not changed. What has happened is that two colors are blending together to appear as one consistent color.

Regarding tzovei'a, the Rogatchover will permit several instances that are prohibited by other authorities. An example is if someone diluted a dye with water to create an art display. According to the Pri Megadim and the Tiferes Yisroel, this act is prohibited on Shabbos min haTorah. However, the Rogatchover will dispute their conclusion, since the color is created by mixing and not by coating an item with color.

#### Staining your hands

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 320:20) implies that there is no halachic problem with getting your hands or face stained while eating. The Mishnah Berurah (320:58) asks: since we prohibit women from applying makeup on Shabbos because of tzovei'a, applying color to human skin violates tzovei'a. If this is true, just as staining clothes violates tzovei'a,

shouldn't someone be required not to stain his hands and face? The Mishnah Berurah answers that since men do not usually apply makeup to their faces, it is permitted for them to eat foods that might stain their faces.

### Conclusion

Shabbos is a day which is called "mei'ein olam haba" – a day that is a small taste of the World to Come; a day when we are given a neshamah yeseirah – a special Shabbosdik neshamah; a day when Hashem's Shechinah resides with us. The sefarim hakedoshim discuss these ideas and how much we need to prepare ourselves, every week, in order to properly relate to Shabbos Kodesh and to receive all of the benefit and bracha that Shabbos brings us.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (Shemos 20:10) notes that people mistakenly think that work is prohibited on Shabbos, in order to provide a day of rest. This is incorrect, he points out, because the Torah does not prohibit doing avodah, which connotes hard work, but melacha, which implies work with purpose and accomplishment. On Shabbos, we refrain from altering the world with our own creative acts and, instead, emphasize Hashem's role (Shemos 20:11). We thereby acknowledge the true Builder and Creator of the world and all that it contains, and focus on our relationship with Him.

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### Weekly Halacha

#### Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Parshas Vaera

Visiting The Graves Of Tzadikkim: How And Why?

The ancient custom of visiting and davening at graves of tzaddikim during times of tribulation has many sources in Talmudic literature.(1) Indeed, Shulchan Aruch records in several places that it is appropriate to do so on certain public fast days in general(2) and on Tishah b'Av after midday in particular.(3) Erev Rosh Hashanah, too, is a day when it has become customary to visit graves.(4) But what is the reason for this? How does it help us?(5)

The Talmud(6) gives two explanations: 1) To serve as a reminder of man's mortality so that one will repent while he still can; 2) To ask the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf. A practical difference between these two reasons, says the Talmud, is whether or not it is appropriate to visit graves of non-Jews [when there are no Jewish graves near by], since even a non-Jew's grave reminds man of his mortality. Nowadays,

however, when non-Jews mark their graves with religious symbols, it is no longer appropriate to visit non-Jewish graves even if there are no Jewish graves in the area. (7)

The second reason quoted in the Talmud – to ask the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf – demands clarification. Many people assume that this means that we are allowed to pray to the dead to ask them to help us. This is a serious mistake and strictly forbidden. One who prays with this intent transgresses the Biblical command(8) "You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence."(9) It may also be a violation of the Biblical command against "one who consults the dead."(10)

If so, what does the Talmud mean when it says that we "ask the dead to beg for mercy on our behalf"? We find two schools of thought concerning this matter:

\* Some(11) hold that it means that it is permitted to speak directly to the dead to ask them to daven to Hashem on our behalf. This is similar to the prayers that we find throughout Selichos which are addressed to the angels. Although the angels – who are merely God's messengers – do not possess the ability to do anything of their own accord, still we may ask them to "deliver" our prayers to Hashem. So, too, it is permitted to address the dead directly and ask them to intercede on our behalf at the Heavenly Throne.

\* Others(12) strongly disagree and maintain that this, too, is strictly forbidden. In their opinion, addressing a dead person is a violation of "consulting the dead." What the Talmud means by "asking the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf" is that we daven directly to Hashem that in the merit of the dead He should have mercy on us. We visit the graves only to remind Hashem of the merits of the holy tzaddikim who are interred there.

The practical halachah is as follows. Most of the classical poskim (13) rule in accordance with the second view. Mishnah Berurah(14) also clearly writes: We visit graves because a cemetery where tzaddikim are interred is a place where prayers are more readily answered. But one should not place his trust in the dead. He should just ask Hashem to have mercy on him in the merit of the tzaddikim who are interred here.

But other poskim rule that it is permitted to talk to the dead [or to angels] to intercede on our behalf. In a lengthy responsum, Minchas Elazar(15) proves from a host of sources throughout the Talmud and Zohar that not only is this permitted but it is a mitzvah to do so.

But as we said before, all opinions – without exception – agree that it is strictly forbidden to daven directly to a dead person [or to an angel] so that they should help us. The most that is permitted [according to the lenient views] is to ask them to act as our emissaries to Hashem, so that Hashem will look favorably and mercifully upon us.

#### THE VISIT: PROPER CONDUCT

Upon entering a cemetery, the blessing of *asher yatzar eschem badin* is recited.(16) The full text is found in many siddurim. This blessing is recited only once within any thirty-day period.(17)

Before visiting at a grave, one should wash his hands.(18)

Upon reaching the grave, one should place his left hand on the marker.(19) It is forbidden, though, to lean on it.(20)

One should be careful not to step on any grave.(21)

The same grave should not be visited twice in one day.(22)

Within four amos [6-8 feet] of a grave(23):

\* The tzitzis strings should be concealed.(24)

\* Levity, eating, drinking, greeting a friend or engaging in business is prohibited.(25)

\* Learning, davening or reciting a blessing is prohibited.(26) Many poskim, however, hold that it is permitted to recite *Tehillim*(27) or the burial *Kaddish*.(28)

#### LEAVING A CEMETERY

Before taking leave of a grave it is customary to put a stone or some grass on the marker.(29)

Upon leaving the cemetery, it is customary to take some soil and grass from the ground and throw it over one's shoulder.(30) There are many different reasons for this custom. On Shabbos, Yom Tov and Chol ha-Moed this may not be done.(31)

After leaving a cemetery and before entering one's home(32) or another person's home,(33) one should wash his hands three times from a vessel, alternating between the right and left hands.(34) There are different customs concerning the method of washing(35):

\* The water should drain into the ground and not collect in a puddle.

\* After washing, any water that remains in the vessel is poured out. The vessel is turned upside down and placed on the ground, not handed to the next person.(36)

\* Some let their hands air dry and do not use a towel.(37)

\* Some wash their face as well.(38)

Footnotes:

1 Yosef cried at his mother's grave before going to Egypt (*Sefer ha- Yashar*); Before being exiled, the Jewish people wept at Kever Rachel (*Rashi, Vayechi* 48:7); *Kalev* prayed at Me'oras ha-Machpeilah before confronting the spies (*Sotah* 34b). See also *Ta'anis* 23b.

2 O.C. 579:3.

3 Rama O.C. 559:10.

4 Rama O.C. 581:4. Some go on erev Yom Kippur as well (Rama O.C. 605:1) while others oppose going on that day; *Elef ha-Magen* 605:39 quoting *Yaavetz*; *Divrei Yoel* 99:4.

5 Our discussion focuses on visiting graves on fast days and at other times of strife. This is not to be confused with the custom of visiting graves of parents and other relatives (on their yahrtzeits or other occasions), whose primary purpose is to elevate the soul of the deceased and to give it "pleasure."

6 *Ta'anis* 16a.

7 *Mishnah Berurah* 579:14. See also *Kaf ha-Chayim* 559:81.

8 *Shemos* 20:3.

9 See *Sefer ha-Ikarim* (ma'amar 2), quoted in *Gesher ha-Chayim* 2:26.

10 *Devarim* 18:11. See *Eliyahu Rabbah* 581:4.

11 See *Shelah* (quoted by *Elef ha-Magen* 581:113), *Pri Megadim* O.C. 581:16 and *Maharam Shick* O.C. 293.

12 The source for this view among the Rishonim is *Teshuvos Rav Chaim Paltiel* (quoted by the *Bach* and *Shach Y.D.* 179:15) and *Maharil, Hilchos Ta'anis* (quoted by *Be'er Heitev* O.C. 581:17). See *Igros Moshe* O.C. 5:43-6 for an explanation of this view.

13 Including the *Be'er Heitev*, *Chaye Adam*, *Mateh Efrayim* and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*.

14 581:27.

15 1:68. See also *Gesher ha-Chayim* 2:26 and *Minchas Yitzchak* 8:53.

16 O.C. 224:12. This blessing is recited only in an area where there are at least two graves.

17 *Mishnah Berurah* 224:17.

18 *Mishnah Berurah* 4:42.

19 *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 128:13. See there also for the text that should be recited at that time.

20 *Shach Y.D.* 363:3.

21 *Taz Y.D.* 363:1.

22 *Mishnah Berurah* 581:27.

23 Note that according to the Ari z"l (quoted by Mishnah Berurah 559:41), one should never go within four amos of a grave [except at interment]. In Igeres ha-Gra he writes that one should never enter a cemetery at all, and especially not women. [It is commonly accepted that a woman who is a niddah does not go to a cemetery at all (Mishnah Berurah 88:7). Under extenuating circumstances a rabbi should be consulted; see Beis Baruch on Chayei Adam 3:38.]

24 Mishnah Berurah 23:3. Tefillin, too, must be concealed.

25 Y.D. 368:1; Rama Y.D. 343:2.

26 Y.D. 367:3; 368:1.

27 Birkei Yosef Y.D. 344:17.

28 Gesher ha-Chayim 1:16-4.

29 Be'er Heitev O.C. 224:8.

30 Y.D. 376:4. Some do this only after an interment.

31 O.C. 547:12.

32 Kaf ha-Chayim 4:80.

33 Mishnah Berurah 4:43. It is permitted, however, to enter a shul or another public place before washing; Harav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 58).

34 Mishnah Berurah 4:39.

35 Some of these customs do not have a halachic source; they are based on Kabbalistic writings and customs.

36 Rav Akiva Eiger (Y.D. 376:4). See Zichron Meir, pg. 450.

37 Several poskim write that this does not apply during the cold winter months when the hands will become chapped; see Kaf ha-Chayim 4:78.

38 Mishnah Berurah 4:42.

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## Drasha

### Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vaera

Proof in the Putting

This week, the Torah tells us how the Egyptian exile entered its waning moments as the dawn of redemption begins. Moshe and Aharon threatened Pharaoh with strong repercussions if Hashem's will was not fulfilled and the Jews were not redeemed from Egypt. But before they took action, Moshe and Aharon proved they were messengers from Hashem by displaying their ability to control and even change nature. The first miraculous spectacle occurred on a governmental level, in Pharaoh's palace. After those demonstration did not impress the ruler, only then did the nation feel the brunt of Hashem's punishment they were stricken with the plague of blood.

Moshe and Aharon did not enter the palace of the tyrant unaware of his arrogance. They had met him before and were mockingly rebuffed. But this time they were equipped to prove their powers and authority. They were forewarned that their adversary would doubt their authority, and he would ask them to produce celestial credentials with a sign that they were truly Divinely ordained.

Hashem tells them, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves,' you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh — it will become a snake!' " (Exodus 7:9).

The Noam Elimelech, Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk, questions the wording. What would Pharaoh mean with the words "Provide a wonder for yourselves"? He asks. The wondrous act was not for Moshe and Aharon, rather it was for Pharaoh! Shouldn't the posuk read "provide a wonder for me"? With these words did Pharaoh, the master showman whose world renowned chicanery held Moshe at bay for a year, teach us something about the nature of miraculous occurrences that prove a point to a skeptic?

P.T. Barnum was a master showman who astounded hordes of foolish curiosity seekers with displays of the bizarre and the seemingly impossible.

One of his amazing displays had a lamb grazing peacefully in a display cage, while two fierce lions strolled nonchalantly only a few feet away. He obviously felt that the exhibit would attract hundreds who would marvel at his pretended prescient fulfillment, albeit partial, of the prophet Yishayahu's (11:6) description of the Messianic era. "And the wolf shall lie with the lamb, and the leopard will lay down with the kid, and the lion shall walk with the lamb dwell peacefully."

One of Barnum's friends, who was amazed at the sight of this post Messianic mimicry, asked in wonder, "how long do you think you will be able to maintain this exhibit?"

Barnum shrugged his shoulders, smirked, and replied sardonically, "as long as my diminishing supply of lambs holds out!"

Reb Elimelech of Lizensk explains the words with which Hashem warned Moshe and Aharon, "It will be when Pharaoh will ask, 'give for yourselves a sign.'

Pharaoh the charlatan would know the difference between a true sign and a spectacular hoax. The difference is how the performer perceives it. Pharaoh's conniving magicians performed sorcery that

they themselves knew to be filled with lies. As performers, they were not impressed.

Pharaoh would ask for a sign, not only that would impress him, but would impress Moshe and Aharon as well.

The greatest accomplishment in life, and the greatest way to influence others in a meaningful and lasting way, is to be as impressed and excited about one's own actions as are others.

A parent or teacher who discusses Torah with true enthusiasm, impressed by the Heavenly genius contained within, will surely impact a child in a more meaningful way than a parent who exudes an "I heard this one already" attitude toward his audience. Pharaoh understood that, and Hashem told his Divine messengers that Pharaoh, who knew very well how to lie, would ask for the real sign — one that generated the same excitement for the messengers as well as the recipients. It was not only a sign for himself, but for Moshe and Aharon as well.

The Proof is not always in the way something is received. Sometimes the proof is in the putting! Good Shabbos ©2000 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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## Weekly Biblical Thoughts

### Ben-Tzion Spitz

Commentary based on the Chidushei HaRim

Comfortable Exile (Vaera)

The comfort zone takes our greatest aspirations and turns them into excuses for not bothering to aspire. -Peter McWilliams

The Jewish people were enslaved by the Egyptians for centuries. The Chidushei HaRim on Exodus 6:6 wonders not so much as to how the Jewish people endured, but how did they leave? He picks out an interesting nuance from the text.

God says to the Jewish nation in Egypt, "And I will take you out from under the labors of Egypt." The key word in Hebrew is "sivlot" which is commonly translated in this context as "labors." The Chidushei HaRim reads "sivlot" as bearing, as in they were bearing the pain of Egypt. The verse would then read "And I will take you out from bearing the pain of Egypt."

The Chidushei HaRim explains that the Jewish people had adjusted to their exile and their enslavement. They had learned to bear it. In a certain sense they had even become comfortable with their slavery. We see multiple indications of that later during the desert journey, when at the first whiff of trouble or challenge or hardship, the people complain and want to go back to Egypt.

God is telling them, "I'm going to make your enslavement unbearable." And indeed, He does, as Moses' involvement initially ratchets up Pharaoh's crackdown on the Jewish

people. Overnight, the Egyptians stop providing the Jews with straw for the brick production, whilst still demanding that the Jews keep the daily quotas intact. The Jewish people had thought that their enslavement was bearable and didn't want to rock the boat of their relations with the Egyptians, as we see in the Jewish taskmasters' complaint about Moses' intervention. God sets plans in motion to make the enslavement unbearable, to make the Jewish people ready to leave their previously comfortable enslavement.

The Chidushei HaRim stresses that when Jews decide that they can endure exile, if Jews decide that they are not ready to leave the comfort of their golden exile, redemption will never come.

May we always be prepared to transition from comfort to redemption.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the Hebrew word of the year — tirlul, translated as "lunacy."

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## Rav Kook Torah

### Va'era: God's Name

Why do we find different names for God in the Torah?

Different names correspond to the different ways in which God reveals Himself in the world. The Tetragrammaton, the special name composed of the four letters Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey, corresponds to a level of Divine revelation that was concealed before Moses' time.

... "I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as E-l Shaddai [God Almighty].

But I was not known to them through My name [Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh]. (Exod. 6:3)

What is the significance of these two names of God? Why did only Moses' generation merit knowledge of the Tetragrammaton?

In the same prophetic communication to Moses, God contrasted the Patriarchs' ties to the Land of Israel with that of their descendants. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were only travelers and foreigners in the Land:

"I made My covenant with them, giving them the Land of Canaan, the land of their wanderings, where they lived as foreigners." (Exod. 6:4)

Their descendants, on the other hand, were destined to settle permanently in the Land: "I will give it to you as an eternal inheritance" (Exod. 6:8).

Is there some connection between the different names for God and residence in Eretz Yisrael?

A Higher Level of Providence

Dwelling in the Land of Israel means living with a greater degree of Divine providence. It is "a land constantly under the scrutiny of the Eternal, your God; the eyes of the Eternal your God are on it at all times" (Deut. 11:12).

God gave Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people as an eternal inheritance, so that they will always benefit from this unparalleled level of Divine providence. God's providence will never leave the people of Israel; their history transcends the laws of nature.

This level of Divine guidance was only possible after they became a nation. Individuals, even the most righteous, may waver and stumble. Therefore, the Patriarchs could only be sojourners in Eretz Yisrael. They could only merit the Land's preternatural providence in a temporary, sporadic fashion.

The name Shaddai comes from the word shiddud, meaning "to intervene." This name for God implies occasional Divine intervention in the natural realm. This was the degree of providence that the Avot experienced. They lived in a world of natural forces - with occasional miracles. They were but travelers in the Land of Israel. God was thus revealed to them as El Shaddai.

With the formation of Israel as a nation, however, the special providence of the Land of Israel became the Jewish people's permanent inheritance. The generation of Moses was granted a higher revelation of God's providence, as reflected in the name Y-H-V-H. This Divine name comes from the word lehavot, "to cause to exist."

Their world was no longer a universe ruled by the forces of nature. They merited a constant, direct connection to the One Who continually creates and sustains all existence.

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## Torah Weekly Parashat Vaera

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

### PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. Hashem commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians, sending plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only Hashem could be performing these miracles.

Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

### PARSHA INSIGHTS

#### What's Your Name?

But with My Name, Hashem, I did not make Myself known to them." (6:3)

Moshe had ten names: Moshe, Yered, Chaver, Yekutiel, Avigdor, Avi Socho, Avi Zanuach, Tuvia, Shemaya

and Halevi. Of all these names, the only one that Hashem used was Moshe, the name he was given by Pharaoh's daughter, Batya.

Why, of all Moshe's names, did Hashem use the one name given to Moshe by an Egyptian princess? What was so special about this name?

The name Moshe comes from the word meaning to be drawn, for Moshe was drawn from the water by Batya. When Batya took Moshe out of the river she was flouting her father's will. Pharaoh's order was to kill all the Jewish male babies to stifle their savior. By rescuing Moshe, Batya was putting her life in grave danger. Because Batya risked her life to save Moshe, that quality was embedded in Moshe's personality and in his soul. It was this quality of self-sacrifice that typified Moshe more than all his other qualities, and for this reason Moshe was the only name that Hashem would call him.

This is what made Moshe the quintessential leader of the Jewish People, for more than any other trait, a leader of the Jewish People needs self-sacrifice to care and worry over each one of his flock.

Another question — but with the same answer:

Of all the places that Moshe's mother, Yocheved, could have chosen to hide Moshe, why did she choose the river? Why not in a tunnel? Why not hide him in a barn or any of the other numerous possible hiding places? Why did Yocheved choose to hide Moshe in the river?

Yocheved hoped that by putting Moshe into the river the astrological signs would show that the savior of the Jews had been cast into the Nile and Pharaoh would abandon the massacre of the baby boys. Yocheved was right. The Egyptian astrologers told Pharaoh the Jewish savior had been dispatched into the Nile and Pharaoh ordered the killing to cease.

It was not an easy thing for Yocheved to put her son into a wicker basket and abandon him to if I will ever see my son's chupa (marriage canopy)? Certainly there were safer places for a baby than a makeshift basket adrift in a river. However, Yocheved chose a hiding place that may not have been the safest because it meant that she could save the lives of other Jewish children.

From two sides of the same event the quality of self-sacrifice was instilled into Moshe - by his real mother when she put him into the river and by his adopted mother when she drew him out from the river, for if any quality epitomizes the essence of leadership, it is the ability to forget oneself and give up everything for the good of the people.

- Sources: Based on the Midrash of Shemot Rabbah 1:24, 1:29; Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz

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## Parshas Va'eira

**Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Leon Brickman, z"l Eliezer ben Chayim Menachem HaLevi. Sponsored by Mordechai & Rena Rosen.

### Close to You

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be your God... (6:7)

This week's parsha opens with Hashem discussing with Moshe His plans for rescuing Bnei Yisroel from Egypt. Herein we find the well-known "arba leshonos shel geula – four iterations of salvation," i.e. four different words describing the process of Hashem taking Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt. The fourth word that the Torah uses is "velokachti" – generally translated as "I will take."

Yet, both Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel translate the word "velokachti" as "ve'eskorev" from the language of "kiruv" as in "I will draw near." This is odd; in general there are two Aramaic translations for taking: "ud'var," which is used when referring to taking people (see Bereishis 12:5 when Avraham took his wife Sarah), and "u'nesiv," which is used when referring to taking inanimate objects (see Bereishis 28:18 when Yaakov takes the rock and places it under his head). So why did both Targumim deviate from the usual translation of the word "to take" in this particular instance?

We find another place where the Torah uses the word "to take" and both Targumim translate it as "ve'eskorev": When Hashem asks Moshe "to take" ("kach") Aharon and his children (Vayikra 8:2). Here too both Targumim translate the word "to take" as "karev – to draw near." In fact, when the Torah itself describes what Moshe did it says, "vayakrev Moshe es Aharon ve'es bonov – and Moshe drew near Aharon and his sons." Why does the Torah describe this "taking" in such a manner?

Moshe is asking Aharon and his children to take a position of responsibility within the Jewish people. This kind of responsibility has to be accepted as a matter of free will. The way to get someone to accept it is to draw them close and allow them to make their own decision. Ask any professional involved in "kiruv" and they'll tell you that the only effective manner of drawing someone near to Judaism is to be "mekarev – to bring them close," meaning to allow them to make their own decision to continue forward.

Chazal teach us that this fourth language of salvation ("velokachti") refers to Bnei Yisroel receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai (See Sforno and Ibn Ezra ad loc). Thus, standing at Mount Sinai Hashem draws us near, but we must choose to move forward and accept the Torah. It is quite significant that the very act of accepting the Torah has to be done as an act of free will.

Maharal, in the introduction to his work *Tiferes Yisroel*, explains that this is the meaning of the verse "and this is the Torah that Moshe placed in front of Bnei Yisroel" (Devarim 4:24). We weren't forced to take the Torah, it was placed in front of us and we chose to come and take it.

In other words, when you're trying to get someone to develop in a certain area you cannot force them to change, they need to choose to want to change and take positive steps in that direction.

Accepting the Torah as a way of life wasn't about getting Bnei Yisroel to act a certain way; it was about getting them to develop in a certain direction. This kind of "buy-in to the program" only happens if one completely accepts it of his or her own free will.

Perhaps this provides the most enduring message for both parents and educators. All too often we spend the majority of our efforts focusing on teaching our children and students how to act. This, of course, is the wrong approach to chinuch. We must focus on exposing our children and talmidim to the beauty and brilliance of the Jewish way of life. This in turn will cause them to be inspired and choose to lead a meaningful life of Torah and mitzvos. Only by guiding our children to choose properly for themselves can we ensure an enduring impact on the next generation.

### In the Presence of the King

And Moshe said to him, as soon as I am gone from the city, I will spread out my hands to Hashem... (9:29)

Towards the end of this week's parsha the Torah recounts the events surrounding the seventh plague – the plague of hail. After being bombarded with the miraculous form of hail (the Torah tells us that the hail was a deadly combination of fire and ice, see 9:24 and Rashi ad loc), Pharaoh summons Moshe and begs him to daven to Hashem to remove the plague. Moshe informs him that he will leave the city and beseech Hashem to remove the plague.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Moshe had to leave the city because it was full of idols. Presumably, this means that Moshe wasn't permitted to daven in a city so rife with idols and idol worship. Ramban wonders why Moshe chose this time to go outside the city when previously he didn't feel compelled to leave to communicate with Hashem. Ramban answers that on prior occasions Moshe davened in his house, but this time he wanted to spread his hands towards the heavens and doing that in the city would be inappropriate.

There are several issues with this understanding of why Moshe chose this particular time to leave the city. Firstly, the Torah doesn't say anything about spreading his hands towards the heavens. Secondly, the Gemara frowns strongly on someone who prays in an open area (Brachos 34b, see also Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 90:5). If Moshe could have davened quietly in the privacy of his home, why did he venture out of the city?

There are different types of davening to Hashem. There are many prayers that are, for lack of a better term, like placing a phone call to Hashem. In other words, we reach out to Hashem in many different circumstances and for a variety of reasons. Many teffilos beseech Hashem for different needs – such as asking Hashem to heal a relative – and one

can make these kinds of teffilos even while laying down in bed or while riding a bike. The same goes for all of the general things we wish to communicate with Hashem.

However, there is another kind of prayer, that of standing in Hashem's presence. This is typified by the Shemoneh Esrei. There are very specific rules about how a person must conduct himself in the presence of the King. Shemoneh Esrei isn't like a phone call to Hashem, rather it's like standing directly in front of Him.

Moshe told Pharaoh that he needed to spread his palms toward Hashem. Holding up your hands with your palms open facing someone is an indication of surrender. One can only surrender to another in their presence, thus this prayer required the presence of Hashem. This is the first time that Moshe wanted to daven in this manner. Moshe was actually bringing the presence of Hashem down, and it would have been inappropriate to have the presence of Hashem in a city filled with idols. Therefore, Moshe had to leave the city.

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### Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

#### **Remember the Shabbos: Take it Personally**

Our Rabbis (Talmud Yuma 29a) teach us that the night is darkest right before dawn. Similarly, right before the actualization of the four l'shonos ha'geula, the Egyptian servitude was at its most oppressive point. The Torah teaches that "v'lo shomu el Moshe", they could not listen to Moshe and his optimistic promise of deliverance, m'kotzer ruach, and avodah kasha - due to their shortness of breath and hard work.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l (in his *Emes L'Yaakov*) has an additional explanation. The Medresh Shemos Rabba (5:22) teaches that Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim had megillos - texts that they studied every Shabbos that helped them maintain their emunah/bitachon in their being redeemed, but we are not told what the contents of these megillos was. Rav Kaminetsky opines that they contained those pirkrei Tehillim that were composed by Moshe, as we are taught in Bava Basra (14b) that Moshe composed Teffilah L'Moshe (Tehilim 90) and the next eleven perakim, including Mizmor Shir L'Yom Ha'Shabbos. It is most intriguing to note that perek 92, a song for the Shabbos day, has no reference to Shabbos nor to the mitzvos or character of the day. However, it does contain the important answer to the question of tzadik v'ra lo - namely, why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? We are assured that while evildoers enjoy temporary success, it is only that they may be eventually destroyed forever. The psalm ends with the assurance that the righteous will flourish as a palm tree, and that Hashem is my rock, in Whom there is no wrong. It is this psalm and others that maintained Bnei Yisroel's faith.

Initially, "Yismach Moshe b'matnat chelko" - Moshe convinced Pharaoh to give the Hebrew slaves a day of rest and Moshe chose Shabbos, which gave them not only

physical rest but also a weekly spiritual injection of faith. However, as taught at the end of Parshas Shemos (5:9), when Moshe asked for the liberation of the slaves, Pharaoh intensified their servitude, which included their loss of Shabbos and thus, explains Rav Yaakov, they were losing faith and could not listen to Moshe.

Shabbos, since time immemorial, has been the bastion of our faith. Every Friday night we fulfill the biblical mitzva of kiddush, and in it there are two remembrances: a remembrance of the work of creation, and of the exodus from Egypt. The Ramban (Devarim 5:15) teaches that these are not two independent themes, but rather the Exodus proves Creation. The fact that Hashem demonstrated complete and total control over nature, providing water for the Hebrews and blood for the Egyptians, sending wild animals that could distinguish between Egyptian and Jew, etc., all showed that "Ani Hashem b'kerev ha'aretz" (Shemos 8:18), that He is not only the Creator-Boreh, but the Ruler-Manhig over all creatures.

Regarding Yetziyas Mitzrayim, the Seorno (Shemos 12:26-27) teaches a most exciting concept. He understands the question of the ben ha'rasha of "ma ha'avoda ha'zos lachem?" to be asking why is the korban Pesach a korban yachid, an individual's korban, as opposed to a communal one? His answer is that each individual has to bring their own sacrifice since the miracle of the Exodus happened to each individual, not only to the nation as a whole. It is one thing to say, for example, that the Egyptians had blood as a result of the first plague and the Jewish people had water. That would be understood as a miracle for the nation. However, we are taught that if an Egyptian and a Jew were drinking from one glass, at the very moment that the former drank blood, the Jew drank water - thus demonstrating a personal miracle for that individual. Moreover, Chazal teach (on the verse Shemos (14:30) that not only did the Jewish nation see the Egyptians dead on the seashore, but that Hashem washed onto the shore in front of each Jew the very cruel taskmaster who had tortured him. Again, a personalized miracle for each individual.

Just as Yetziyas Mitzrayim has these two components of personal and communal, so too does Shabbos. On the verse (Shemos 31:16) "V'shomru Bnei Yisrael es ha'Shabbos la'asos", the Or HaChaim teaches that the first half of the verse refers to the obligations of each individual to honor and guard the Shabbos, while the second part, "la'asos", imposes the obligation to see that the community as a whole keeps the Shabbos.

Regarding the individual obligation to observe Shabbos, I'd like to suggest that as Shabbos uplifted and strengthened the emuna of the Jews even before the Exodus, Shabbos forever adds to our religious growth and connection to Hashem. This is done by zachor, the positive actions of preparing for and observing the holiness of the day, by dressing properly and eating and studying of Torah, and

shamor, i.e. by yielding to His restrictions we consciously imbibe His being the Master of the universe.

In addition, as the Exodus clearly demonstrated His hashgacha pratis, His involvement in the life of each individual, so too on Shabbos we are to pause and reflect on this phenomenon. While we acknowledge and extend thanksgiving to Hashem thrice daily in the bracha of modim in Shemoneh Esrei for the personalized miracles that He performs for us, too often it is said in a hurried and hectic environment. The peacefulness of Shabbos provides the ambiance for a more deliberate focus on the personal relationship that we each are blessed to have with Hashem. The singing of Shalom Alechem of Friday night is universal. After that, appropriately we sing Eshes Chayil in honor of the Shabbos Queen and the queen of the household who creates the holy atmosphere that envelops the home on Shabbos. I was fortunate that every Shabbos in between these two my father z"l recited the prayer entitled "Ribon kol ha'olamim", a beautiful tefillah admiring the personal relationship we are privileged to have with Hashem. Including therein is, "I thank you, Lord my G-d, and G-d of my ancestors, for all the loving kindness that You have done and will do for me, and all the members of my household and all my fellow creatures". I strongly recommend that as part of the Shabbos meal, aside from the zemiros and divrei Torah, each of the participants

in the meal should share an experience or occurrence whereby they saw His Hashgasha Pratis in their day to day living in their past week. This will help them focus and realize His personal involvement in their life.

The Or HaChaim teaches on the verse "va'yivarech Elokim" (Bereishis 2:3) that Shabbos provides blessing and energy throughout the week. May the focus on His personal relationship with us not only enhance our individual Shabbos, but strengthen us to influence others to keep Shabbos as well. Similarly, the Ramban, in his famous commentary at the end of Parshas Bo, teaches that from the open great miracles we learn to appreciate the small daily miracles as well. The Creation and the Exodus are clearly the two greatest and overt miracles which are the bedrock of Shabbos, and hopefully will assist us in appreciating His personal involvement in our lives.

We are living in most extraordinary times. It is hard to absorb but 800,000 Americans have died from Covid. This is clearly a living implementation of "Yoshev b'seser Elyon" (Tehillim 91), where we are taught "a thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you." "Thank you, Hashem" is not only the way a Jew begins his day with Modeh ani, but is also the very adrenaline that keeps him going strong throughout the day.

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לע"נ  
שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ቢילא בת (ארה) ליבע ע"ה  
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

## PARSHAT VA'ERA -- "ANI HASHEM"

How much can (or should) God expect from a nation that had endured so many years of oppression?

Considering this suffering, shouldn't we expect for their redemption to be unconditional? Certainly, the opening lines of Parshat Va'era appear to leave us with this impression.

In the following shiur, we examine those opening psukim (i.e. Shmot 6:2-9) a bit more carefully, and will arrive at a very different, yet significant conclusion!

### INTRODUCTION

According to God's original promise to Avraham Avinu at "brit bein ha-btarim" (see Breishit 15:13-15); which foresaw both Israel's bondage in Egypt as well their redemption, one would certainly expect for that redemption to be 'unconditional', i.e. their salvation should begin as soon as the four hundred year 'time limit' had expired.

On the other hand, when one considers the primary theme of Sefer Breishit - that Bnei Yisrael are chosen in order to become God's special Nation - it would also be logical to expect at least some sort of 'spiritual readiness' on the part of Bnei Yisrael - to be worthy of their redemption.

In the following shiur, we will project these two considerations on the events that unfold in Sefer Shmot, to show how and why Israel's redemption from Egypt emerges as a reciprocal process.

### AN 'EASY' MISSION

In our study last week of Parshat Shmot, we explained how Moshe Rabeinu received a 'double mission' (when God appeared to him at the 'burning bush'). God instructed him to:

\* INFORM Bnei Yisrael that God has come to fulfill His promise to the Avot to take them to Eretz Canaan.

AND

\* ORDER Pharaoh to allow Bnei Yisrael to journey a three day distance into the desert - to worship their God.

At first glance, Moshe's mission to Pharaoh appears to be much more difficult than his mission to Bnei Yisrael. After all, Moshe must **convince** the Egyptian ruler to do something against his will; while Bnei Yisrael need only to be **told** 'good tidings'.

However, as the story continues, we will see how Moshe's mission to Bnei Yisrael becomes no less difficult. To explain why, we must first consider the setting as Parshat Va'era begins.

Recall from Parshat Shmot, how Bnei Yisrael immediately believed Moshe's tidings of their forthcoming redemption:

"...and the people believed that God had come to redeem His people..." (see 4:29-31).

However, this initial enthusiasm quickly turned into bitter disappointment when Moshe's first encounter with Pharaoh resulted in a 'double workload' (see 5:18-21). Instead of the redemption they had cried for (see 2:23-25), their plight only became worse. Understandably, the people accuse Moshe for this aggravation of their condition; whereupon Moshe turns to God in prayer, asking:

"Why have you made things worse for this people, why have you sent me! From the time I have gone to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, their situation has only gotten worse, and You have not saved Your nation!" (5:22).

It is precisely at this point when Parshat Va'era opens, i.e. as Moshe awaits God's answer for the people - to what appears to be a rather 'legitimate' complaint.

With this in mind (i.e. looking for God's answer), we must read the opening psukim of Parshat Va'era. As your review these

psukim (i.e. 6:2-9), note how God first provides Moshe with some preliminary information (see 6:2-5), and only afterwards tells Moshe what he must tell Bnei Yisrael.

[Our shiur will focus on God's answer to Bnei Yisrael (i.e. 6:6-8), while our additional shiur on Parshat Va'era will discuss why God first mentions brit Avot in 6:2-5.]

### ANI HASHEM

In God's answer to Bnei Yisrael in 6:6-8, take special note of the centrality of the phrase 'ANI HASHEM', as it forms the opening, closing, and 'central' phrase of God's message that Moshe must convey to Bnei Yisrael:

"Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael:

### ANI HASHEM

and I will take them out from their suffering in Egypt... and I will save them from their enslavement, and I shall redeem them with an outstretched arm.... and I shall take them for Me as My Nation and I will be their God... then they shall know that:

### ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM

who has taken them out of Egypt.  
And I will take them to the Land...  
and I will give it to them as an inheritance...

### ANI HASHEM."

(see 6:6-8, read carefully!)

As these psukim emphasize, God certainly wants Bnei Yisrael need to hear this statement of "Ani Hashem".

Furthermore, God's opening statement to Moshe begins with this very same phrase:

"And Elokim spoke to Moshe, and told him: **ANI HASHEM**" (see 6:2).

Even though this statement appears to be superfluous, for Moshe already know who God is, nonetheless, God emphasizes this point, as He employs it to preface His remarks.

Clearly, the primary focus of God's message to Bnei Yisrael is His repeated statement of 'ANI HASHEM'.

But how was this statement supposed to answer the people's complaint? Did God think that by simply repeating this phrase, and/or by repeating once again His promise of redemption - that Bnei Yisrael would stop complaining? It certainly didn't help, as we are told in the next pasuk:

"But they did not listen to Moshe..." (see 6:9).

To answer this question, we must take a closer look (in Hebrew) at this concluding pasuk:

"ve-lo SHAM'U el Moshe mi-kotzer ruach u-meavoda kashah" [And they did not LISTEN to Moshe, due to their crushed spirits and hard work.] (see 6:9).

In our quotation of this pasuk, we have translated the phrase of "ve-lo shamu" as they did not 'listen'. However, as we shall now explain, this translation is problematic.

### 'TO BELIEVE' OR 'TO OBEY'?

What does ve-lo SHAM'U mean?

Let's consider several possible translations, based on the various meanings of the Hebrew verb 'lishmoa':

\* They did not **HEAR** what Moshe said.

That can't be its meaning in this pasuk, as they obviously (physically) heard what Moshe said.

\* They did not **COMPREHEND** what he said.

This would also seem unlikely, for nothing in Moshe's statement seems particularly complex or intellectually demanding.

\* They did not **PAY ATTENTION** to what Moshe told them.

Based on its context, this seems to be the simplest understanding, the problem only being that this is not what the word "sham'u" means.

\* They did not **BELIEVE** (or accept) what Moshe told them. Even though this is the popular understanding of 've-lo sham'u' (in this pasuk), this translation is problematic as well, for the Torah should have used the Hebrew word 've-lo he'eminu', as it did to describe Bnei Yisrael's original belief in God's first promise of redemption - see 4:30-31.

\* They did not **OBEY** what Moshe told them. Although this is the most common translation of 've-lo sham'u' elsewhere in Chumash [see for example Devarim 28:15 & Vayikra 26:14], such a translation in our context seems entirely untenable, as Moshe's remarks contained no commandment or imperative for the people to obey! [Or maybe there was, as we will now see.]

Based on this analysis, the best translation for "ve-lo sham'u" would be - that the people did not 'obey' - but if so, it would require that we identify some sort of commandment in God's statement to the people, as recorded in 6:6-8.

To explain how and why the statement of ANI HASHEM could be understood as a commandment, we must study a parallel source in the book of Yechezkel.

#### A PROOF FROM YECHEZKEL

[Before continuing, it is recommended that you first read Yechezkel 20:1-12 and carefully compare it to Shmot 6:2-13; noting the obvious textual parallels, e.g. 20:5-6 w/ 3:6-8.]

Yechezkel chapter 20 opens in the seventh year [from the first wave of Exile from Jerusalem ("galut Yehoyachin")], as the elders of Yehuda (the leaders of the Exile in Bavel) visit Yechezkel to inquire in regard to their predicament (see 20:1).

[Based on chapter 28 in Yirmiyahu, we can assume that rumors of Bavel's imminent fall are spreading (as Egypt will come to their rescue/ see also Yirmiyahu 37:1-10), kindling [false] hope among the people that God may soon redeem the Exile and return them to Jerusalem.]

In response to their inquiry, God tells Yechezkel that the people need to hear rebuke (rather than 'good tidings' /see 2:4). [Study 20:2-8 carefully, noting how God is basically telling them "don't ask what God can do for you (i.e. for your redemption), ask rather what you can do to deserve redemption!" / This was a few thousand years before JFK.]

In that rebuke, God instructs Yechezkel to remind the people that they are not worthy of redemption, just as their forefathers in Egypt did not deserve redemption! [See 20:5-10.] Without entering a detailed study of that time period. (for the sake of our shiur), we will simply focus on how Yechezkel describes the set of events that took place at the time of the Exodus:

"And you shall say to them... on the day that I chose Israel ... [va-ivada lahem] - when I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt... and I stretched out My Hand to them saying ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM".

[Compare with Shmot 6:3 & 6:6]

"... on that same day ["nasa'ti et yadi"] I lifted out My Hand to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey" (Yechezkel 20:5-6),

[Compare with Shmot 6:8 and 3:8].

Review these psukim, noting the numerous parallels to the opening psukim of Parshat Va'era. Note especially the repetition of the phrase of ANI HASHEM as well as "ve-lo avu l'shmo'ah".

Now (i.e. in the next pasuk) we find some critical information, that (for some reason) Sefer Shmot never tells us about - that God had also made a COMMANDMENT to Bnei Yisrael at that time, one that Bnei Yisrael do not OBEY:

"And I said to them [at the time of Yetziat Mitzrayim]: - "Each man must rid himself of his detestable ways and not DEFILE himself with the fetishes of Egypt - [for] ANI

HASHEM ELOKEICHEM" (see 20:7).

"But they REBELLED against Me -'ve-lo avu liSHMOA eila' - and they did not want to listen to Me (i.e. obey) - for no one rid himself from his detestable ways, nor did anyone give up the fetishes of Egypt, and I resolved to pour out My anger upon them..." (see 20:8).

It becomes quite clear from Yechezkel, that when God told Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael ANI HASHEM (as recorded in Parshat Va'era), this included an implicit COMMAND as well - to rid themselves from Egyptian culture- a command which Bnei Yisrael DID NOT OBEY.

Much to our amazement, Sefer Yechezkel states explicitly that which Sefer Shmot only alludes to. God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent prior to the Exodus, to cleanse themselves from the 'tum'a' of their Egyptian culture in preparation for their redemption. Unfortunately, at that time Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY ["ve-lo avu liSHMOA" / see 20:8] and thus deserved to be destroyed in the land of Egypt.

Nevertheless, as Yechezkel explains in the next pasuk, the redemption process did continue, but it was only for the 'sake of His Name' (see Yechezkel 20:9-10).

[These psukim in Yechezkel support the popular Zohar that explains how Bnei Yisrael in Egypt had reached the 49th level of 'tum'a' before the redemption began. See Further Iyun section for additional sources that are based on (or quote) these psukim in Yechezkel.]

Thus, these psukim in Yechezkel can help us understand the deeper meaning of the phrase 'Ani Hashem' in Parshat Va'era. God's instruction to Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael –'Ani Hashem' - implies not only that they must accept God, but they must also reject any other gods (and/or culture). Basically, God is telling His nation that He will indeed redeem them from Egypt, as they request; but this redemption demands that they become a 'loyal partner' in this relationship.

If this understanding is indeed correct, then Bnei Yisrael's response of "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" would definitely mean that they did not OBEY!

#### A LOGICAL 'KAL VA-CHOMER'

Additional proof of this interpretation of 've-lo sham'u' can be inferred from the next three psukim that follow in Parshat Va'era:

"Then God told Moshe, go speak to Pharaoh... that he should SEND Bnei Yisrael from his land. [Clearly, a command!]

Then, Moshe retorted [employing a 'kal va-chomer'], saying:

"If even Bnei Yisrael - LO SHAM'U eilai - didn't 'listen' to me – ve-eich YISHMA'ENI Pharaoh - why should Pharaoh 'obey' me?" (see 6:10-12).

Note how the Torah uses the word 'sham'u' on each side of the 'kal va-chomer'. In the context of Pharaoh's refusal to comply with God's command - 'sham'u' definitely means to OBEY - for Moshe commands Pharaoh to grant Bnei Yisrael permission to leave Egypt (to worship their God).

However, for this 'kal va-chomer' to make sense, the verb 'sham'u' in both halves of the pasuk must carry the same meaning. Thus, if 'sham'u' in the second half of the pasuk means 'obey', then 'sham'u' in first half of the pasuk - in reference to Bnei Yisrael - must also mean to OBEY.

In other words, the 'kal va-chomer' should be translated as follows:

"Why should Pharaoh OBEY me, if Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY me!"

Once again, we find proof that the phrase 've-lo sham'u' in 6:9 should be understood as: Bnei Yisrael **do not obey**.

#### TO KNOW or TO INTERNALIZE

When we first encountered the statement of ANI HASHEM, it was understood as a 'statement of fact' - i.e. something that

needs to be known. However, based on our analysis, one could suggest that knowing 'Ani Hashem' encompasses much more than pure intellectual knowledge. This statement is not simply a fact that must be understood, it is a precept that must be INTERNALIZED. In other words, a true recognition of 'Ani Hashem' generates an immediate, inner drive to perform God's will and thus, a willingness to OBEY any command He may request.

Hence, the internalization this statement obviously requires the rejection of any other god

From this perspective, the statement of ANI HASHEM in Parshat Va'era constitutes a commandment, implicitly demanding that Bnei Yisrael prepare themselves spiritually for their redemption - to perform proper 'teshuva', and hence reject their Egyptian culture.

### THE FIRST TWO 'DIBROT'

This interpretation can help us appreciate the deeper meaning of the first two commandments that Bnei Yisrael receive at Matan Torah. Recall that when Bnei Yisrael finally arrive at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, the first commandment is simply another format of the ANI HASHEM statement

"ANOCHI HASHEM ELOKECHA asher HOTZEITICHA me-eretz Mitzrayim..." (see 20:2-3, compare w/6:6!).

Furthermore, this also explains why the next commandment:

"Lo yihiyeh lachem elohim acherim al panai..." - not to have any other gods.

In fact, this also explains why some commentators consider Anochi and Lo Yihiyeh as one commandment, for the first statement automatically implies the second (like two sides of a coin)!

Even though Bnei Yisrael did not internalize this message of ANI HASHEM before they left Egypt (as 6:9 implies), their redemption process would not be complete until that message was totally accepted. [We will soon cite several examples.]

### A DIFFICULT MISSION

From this perspective, Moshe's mission to Bnei Yisrael is no less difficult than his mission to Pharaoh. His assignment involves not only informing the people, but also EDUCATING them, teaching Bnei Yisrael how to prepare themselves for their redemption. Just as Pharaoh must be convinced to recognize God, so too Bnei Yisrael must be convinced that it is indeed God who is coming to redeem them. Accordingly, they must perform proper 'teshuva' in order to be worthy of that redemption.

In this manner, Moshe's "shlichut" to Bnei Yisrael, just like his mission to Pharaoh, is also a 'mission' in the fullest sense of the word. Not only must he INFORM Bnei Yisrael of their forthcoming redemption, he must also COMMAND and TEACH them to perform proper 'teshuva'.

This interpretation can also explain the interesting wording of God's response to Moshe's objection in 6:11-12:

"And God spoke to Moshe & Aharon, and COMMANDED them [va-yetzavem] TO Bnei Yisrael AND TO Pharaoh the king of Egypt to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt" (6:13).

God once again gives Moshe a double mission - to command Pharaoh to allow them to leave, AND to command Bnei Yisrael to 'become worthy' of that redemption.

[See Ramban's interpretation of this pasuk!]

### SOME HELP FROM SEFER VAYIKRA

So what were Bnei Yisrael doing in Egypt that was so terrible? Considering that these events took place before the Torah was given, what did they need to do 'teshuva' from?

A possible answer can be found in Parshat Acharei Mot, where we find once again an interesting textual and thematic parallel to Yechezkel chapter 20 and Shmot chapter 6.

In Vayikra chapter 18 (which just so happens to be the Torah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon, and not by chance), God bids Bnei Yisrael not to follow the corrupt lifestyle of the Egyptians. Note once again the repetition in these psukim of the phrase 'ANI

HASHEM':

"And God spoke to Moshe: speak to Bnei Yisrael and TELL them ANI HASHEM!"

Do not act as the Egyptians do... and do not follow their customs. Follow My laws instead... for ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM.

Keep My laws, for by them man lives... ANI HASHEM" (see Vayikra 18:1-5).

This short introduction is followed by a long list of forbidden marital relationships [better known as the 'arayot'], which had apparently become common in the Egyptian and Canaanite cultures (see 18:24-25!). Thus, God's call for 'teshuva' may have included a demand that Bnei Yisrael's refrain of their decadent Egyptian lifestyle, as well as their preparedness to accept whatever mitzvot God may command.

### A THEME IN SEFER SHMOT

This interpretation not only helps us understand the phrase "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" in 6:9, it also explains a whole series of events that take place up until Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai.

Recall that God had originally planned (at the 'sneh') for Bnei Yisrael to travel a three-day journey directly to Har Sinai immediately after the Exodus (see 3:12-18). Instead, they arrive at Har Sinai only some six weeks later. Why?

Based on the excerpt quoted from Sefer Yechezkel, the answer is quite simple. As the prophet explained, God saved Bnei Yisrael for the 'sake of His Name' - even though they were undeserving at that time (see 20:8-9). Hence, the redemption process could not continue, i.e. Bnei Yisrael cannot travel on to Har Sinai, until something is done to improve their spiritual readiness.

Therefore, even before Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, they must offer a special Korban [Pesach] to affirm their faithfulness. [See shiur on Parshat Bo.] Then, after their first 'three-day journey' into the desert, they must pass the test at 'Mara' (see 15:22-26), where they are given one more chance to accept what they had earlier rejected in Parshat Va'era. Note what God commands Bnei Yisrael at MARA:

"And He said - IM SHAMOA' TISHMA - If you OBEY the voice of the Lord your God, do what is upright and listen to His commandments, then the afflictions that I brought upon Egypt [which you deserved as well!] I will not bring upon you, for ANI HASHEM, your Healer" (16:26).

[This topic will be discussed in greater detail in our shiur on Parshat Beshalach.]

Finally, immediately upon their arrival at Har Sinai, God again demands as a PRE-REQUISITE for receiving the Torah a similar 'pledge of allegiance':

"And now, IM SHAMOA' TISHME'U BE-KOLI - if you agree to obey My instruction and keep My covenant..." (see 19:3-6).

Of course, this time Bnei Yisrael agree to follow God and 'listen' [obey] to whatever He may command them (see 19:7-8).

Finally, as we explained above, this explains why the very first DIBUR of the Ten Commandments is "ANOCHI [=ANI] HASHEM ELOKECHA who took you out of Egypt - LO YIHIYEH... Do not have any other gods INSTEAD of Me" (see 20:2).

As we saw in Sefer Yechezkel, these two statements - ANI HASHEM and LO YIHIYEH - act as 'two sides of the same coin' - for the statement of ANI HASHEM automatically implies that you shall have no other gods.

### ELIYAHU AT LEIL HA-SEDER

In closing, the conclusions of this week's shiur can also help us appreciate our custom to 'invite' Eliyahu ha-navi to our 'seder table'. On Pesach night, as we commemorate the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim, we conclude the SEDER with our hope for the final redemption. However, before we begin Hallel & Nirtza, we first invite Eliyahu. Most likely, this custom is based on the final pasuk of Mal'achi, which promises:

"Behold I am sending you Eliyahu the prophet, BEFORE the

great and awesome day of the Lord, and he will return the hearts of sons to their fathers, and the hearts of fathers to their sons, lest I come and smite and land instead."

In the final redemption, just as in the first redemption, our obligation to perform 'teshuva' is as important an ingredient as God's readiness to redeem us. After all, what purpose would there be in our redemption if we were not ready to fulfill our covenantal obligations?

In order for redemption to succeed, a constant recognition of ANI HASHEM must become not only a 'frame of mind', but even more so, it must become a 'way of life'.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

#### =====

#### FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. Review Shmot 2:23-25. Note how Bnei Yisrael cry to Hashem for salvation. In your opinion, does this indicate that they did teshuva, or was this simply a cry for help.

See Ibn Ezra (2:23 / aroch), Ramban (2:25), and Seforno (2:23-24) on these psukim, noting how they all relate to this question, and how they all relate to the psukim in Yechezkel 20:1-9 as well!

See also Seforno's introduction to Sefer Shmot!

2. See Amos 5:18! There he claims that it would be better for Bnei Yisrael not to desire a YOM HASHEM. Based on the context of that pasuk (considering the people's behavior during the time period of Uziyahu) and the conclusions of this week's shiur, explain Amos' warning in that pasuk

. See also Yirmiyahu 29:10-14, and relate it to the above shiur!

#### ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

##### The Forty-nine 'sha'arei tum'a'

The concept that Bnei Yisrael plummeted to the forty-ninth 'gate of impurity' appears in the Zohar Chadash, vol. 1, Parshat Yitro 52a. The Zohar there writes that while Hashem had promised Avraham Avinu only that He will redeem his offspring from bondage, He in fact did much more: He took them from the forty-nine 'gates of impurity' and raised them to the forty-nine 'gates of wisdom'. This, explains the Zohar, is why Hashem constantly reminds Bnei Yisrael, "I am Hashem your God who took you from Egypt", to emphasize that He did more than fulfill His promise to Avraham Avinu.

The Zohar adds that the forty-nine days we count between Pesach and Shavuot commemorate this elevation from the forty-nine 'gates of impurity'. This concept is developed later by the Ramchal, in Choker U-mekubal, 18.

"Ve-lo Sham'u El Moshe" (6:9)

Our explanation, that this pasuk refers to Bnei Yisrael's unwillingness to give up their idolatrous practices, appears explicitly in several Midrashim. The Mechilta, Parshat Bo - Mesechta De-pischa 5 and Shemot Rabba 6:5 explain that Bnei Yisrael could not extricate themselves from idolatry, and the Midrashim make reference to Yechezkel 20 as evidence. Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel also explains this pasuk as suggesting Bnei Yisrael's refusal to abandon idolatry, though he adds as well the element of 'kepidut rucha', anger and frustration. Perhaps this means that the intensified labor that resulted from Moshe's initial meeting with Pharaoh contributed in no small measure to the people's refusal to heed his call for teshuva.

It is worth noting that we find two different approaches in the Midrashim as to why Bnei Yisrael resorted to avoda zara: either for theological reasons, or due to circumstances they deemed out of their control. The Torah Shleima quotes a "Midrash Aggada" that Bnei Yisrael lacked faith and claimed that Hashem did not have the ability to save them. They thus resorted to avoda zara, on ideological grounds. The Midrash Hagadol, by contrast, records the following response of Bnei Yisrael to Moshe's call for their return to monotheism: "Where do you find a slave who acquires for himself two masters? We are slaves to Pharaoh;

how can we violate his decrees - we are afraid!" Their subjugation to Pharaoh precluded the possibility of their service to Hashem.

The Netziv, in his comments to Shmot 13:9, finds what he considers a clearer source in Chumash for Bnei Yisrael's involvement in avoda zara. The pasuk there instructs them with regard to the mitzva of tefillin and concludes, "for with a mighty hand Hashem took you out from Egypt". The Netziv explains this clause as a response to the anticipated question as to why Hashem must issue so many commandments to ensure Bnei Yisrael's trust and belief in Him. He answers by reminding the people that they agreed to leave Egypt only after witnessing Hashem's mighty hand. Although they happily welcomed Moshe's initial announcement of their freedom (4:31), they rejected his second proclamation because, as we noted in the shiur, it required them to accept Hashem as their God. Only after witnessing the miracles in Egypt did they agree to forsake idolatry and accept Hashem.

#### VE-LO SHAM'U EL MOSHE

By and large, the "mefarshim al derech ha-pshat" interpret "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" differently. We list here the three general directions taken by the mefarshim:

##### BELIEVE

They did not believe: We dismissed this approach in the shiur, but several prominent mefarshim adopt - either explicitly or implicitly - this interpretation. The Rashbam contrasts the nation's response here with their reaction to Moshe's initial announcement, as recorded in Parshat Shmot - 4:31. Although then, they believed Moshe ("Va-ya'amen ha-am"), having seen their hopes crushed by the decree of more intensive labor they no longer believed. In quoting this pasuk in Parshat Shmot, the Rashbam may have implicitly addressed the possible objection to this approach, as we asked in the shiur: why did the Torah not say, "Ve-lo he'eminu"? The answer may be that in that very pasuk the Torah writes, "va-yishme'u ki pakad Hashem et Benei Yisrael...". There, 'va-yishme'u' seems to parallel 'va-ya'amen', to mean 'they believed'. Other mefarshim who claim that Bnei Yisrael did not believe Moshe include the Ralbag and Seforno.

##### PAY ATTENTION

Another group of mefarshim explain 've-lo sham'u' to mean a rough equivalent of, 'they did not pay attention'. For one of several reasons, Bnei Yisrael did not or could not pay attention to Moshe as he spoke to them - either because of the pressure of their workload, their emotional distress, or because Pharaoh had already ordered them to disregard the 'words of falsehood' spoken by Moshe and Aharon (5:9).

This approach is taken (though in slightly different forms) by the Ramban, Chizkuni, Abarbanel, Netziv and Meshech Chochma in their commentaries on this pasuk. One interesting variation of this approach appears in the work of Rav Hirsch. He explains, along the same general lines as our analysis in the shiur, that in Moshe's speech he does more than inform the people of redemption; he charges them with a mission, the destiny and purpose of Am Yisrael. Due to the pressures of their work, however, Bnei Yisrael had no patience for such lofty ideas and concepts. All they could concentrate on was the immediate tasks at hand; they therefore could not pay any attention to Moshe's description of their spiritual mission as a free nation.

##### CONSOLATION

The final approach is that of Rashi: "They did not accept consolation." Unlike our explanation in the shiur, Rashi apparently understood Moshe's address as simply an attempt at consoling the people whose lives had become even more unbearable as a result of Pharaoh's new decree. Rashi expresses this interpretation of the pasuk in other writings, as well. In Sefer Hapardes (compiled by Rashi's students) and in Siddur Rashi (414), this pasuk is cited as proof that those who seek to offer consolation should do so 'me'at me'at', by expressing modest hopes for better things to come. In Rashi's words, one who does not do so: "is like one who says to a beggar, 'Tomorrow you will be a king' - he does not believe him." Here, too, Bnei Yisrael suffered from physical torment, and

Moshe consoles them with promises of a glorious life as God's nation in the land of Canaan. This offered them little consolation; they wished only for a respite from their current hardship.

The Malbim (on our pasuk) explains along these lines, as well, that Moshe here was to console Bnei Yisrael, but did not succeed.

## TESHUVAH IN EGYPT

In sharp contrast to the line taken in the shiur, Ibn Ezra in his peirush Ha-archot(2:23) says that the words "Va-yeanchu Bnei Yisrael min ha-avoda va-yiz'aku" implies that they did do teshuva and thus were worthy of being redeemed from Egypt.

'Ani Hashem'

The centrality of this phrase within this opening unit of Parshat Va'era is demonstrated by Nechama Leibowitz (*Studies, Parshat Va'era 1*). She shows that within this segment, which consists of Hashem's speech to Moshe (6:2-8), 'Ani Hashem' appears at either end (6:2&8) as well as in the middle (6:6). Clearly, the notion of 'Ani Hashem' comprises the most important message Moshe is to convey to Bnei Yisrael at this point.

In the shiur we suggest that 'Ani Hashem' involved an educational message, that Bnei Yisrael must rid themselves of Egyptian culture and prepare themselves spiritually for redemption. This approach appears in the works of two twentieth-century writers, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (*Ozneyim La-Torah*) and Rav Yoel Leib Herzog (*Imrei Yoel*). They both claim that 'Ani Hashem' was meant as an admonishment that Bnei Yisrael relinquish their attachment to idolatry. Rav Sorotzkin adds that Bnei Yisrael could not accept the fact that the same God who brought about this bitter exile would also come to their assistance and redeem them. They fell under the influence of pagan ideology and so believed in the existence of different gods with different powers. Moshe was thus to teach them the message of 'Ani Hashem', that there is only one God who governs every force in the universe. Indeed, the same God who subjected them to hardship will lead them to a life of freedom.

This interpretation of 'Ani Hashem' may shed light on the passage in the Zohar mentioned earlier. The Zohar asks, why does Hashem so often remind Bnei Yisrael that 'Ani Hashem Elokeichem asher hotzeiti etchem me-eretz Mitzrayim' (or similar)? After all, by taking them out of Egypt, Hashem simply fulfilled the promise He had made to Avraham; why does this act merit such emphasis? The Zohar answers that these proclamations stress the fact that Hashem went beyond His promise to Avraham. He had promised Avraham only to redeem his offspring from bondage, not to raise them from the quagmire of the forty-nine 'gates of impurity'. Why must Hashem emphasize this point? Is He trying to 'brag'?

In light of our discussion, the answer becomes clear. Hashem constantly reminds Bnei Yisrael of the commandment He issued to them when they were in Egypt, 'Ani Hashem' - the commandment that they failed to heed. It is as though He reminds them, "You did not internalize this message in Egypt, so I must reiterate it to you again and again!"

We list here three alternative explanations that appear in the Midrashim and mefarshim as to the meaning of 'Ani Hashem' in this context:

The Midrash Hagadol and Mechilta De-Rashbi understand 'Ani Hashem' as a disclaimer of sorts. Hashem here declares that although He knows the future, and thus foresees Bnei Yisrael's future abandonment of Hashem, He will nevertheless redeem them.

Several mefarshim interpret the phrase as a source of encouragement for Bnei Yisrael, underscoring Hashem's unlimited power that enables Him to redeem them. This approach appears in various forms in the commentaries of Rashi, Seforno and Abarbanel. The Ibn Ezra posits a slight variation of this approach, that 'Ani Hashem' emphasizes the nature of the Almighty's promise; as He is God, Bnei Yisrael may confidently trust that He will fulfill His guarantee of redemption.

The Malbim explains that Hashem here informs Bnei Yisrael that He will redeem them with the divine attribute of 'Shem

Havaya', entirely outside the bounds of the natural order. Amos Chacham, in Da'at Mikra, takes a similar approach, as does Rav Chayim Yaakov Goldvicht (*Asufat Ma'archot - Haggada Shel Pesach*, p.113).

## "Va-yetzavem El Bnei Yisrael..." (6:13)

The glaring problem in this pasuk, as noted by many commentaries, is the absence of any content to this 'command' Hashem issued to Moshe and Aharon. We claim that this refers to the spiritual preparation of Bnei Yisrael for redemption. This appears explicitly in two Midrashim - the Mechilta cited earlier, and the Midrash Lekach Tov on our pasuk. This may be the deeper meaning of two other Midrashim as well. One Midrash brought down in the Sefer Ha-mivchar (as quoted in the Torah Shleima on our pasuk) says that Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael to prepare wood for the construction of the Mishkan. This may symbolize Bnei Yisrael's preparation for hashra'at ha-Shechina - Hashem's residence within the nation. Secondly, the Yerushalmi in Masechet Rosh Hashana 3:5, based on the pasuk in Yirmiyahu 34:13, explains this command as referring to the obligation to free one's slaves. (Apparently, as Rav Menachem Kasher notes in Torah Shleima - milu'im to Parshat Va'era, 3, there were noblemen among Bnei Yisrael who, not only were excused from slave labor, they themselves owned servants.) As the Torah explicitly writes in Vayikra 25:42, the laws concerning the freeing of slaves relate to the notion that Bnei Yisrael are ultimately subservient to Hashem alone. Before realizing their freedom from bondage, Bnei Yisrael must internalize this critical lesson, that they are freed from slavery in order to become the servants of Hashem.

Three other general approaches to this pasuk appear in the mefarshim:

The Sifrei in Parshat Beha'alotcha (91), quoted by Rashi here, understands the command to Moshe and Aharon as urging them to exercise patience when dealing with Bnei Yisrael and speak respectfully when they address Pharaoh. Though Rashi views this explanation as drash, as the pasuk makes no mention of patience and respect, this approach does accommodate the context of this pasuk. Moshe had just expressed his frustration over Bnei Yisrael's refusal to listen and the likely prospect of a similar reaction on Pharaoh's part. Hashem thus urges him and Aharon to retain their composure despite the intransigence of both the people and Pharaoh. This explanation appears in the Zohar Ha-chadash (2:26) as well as in the Rambam's Mishneh Torah (*Hilchot Sanhedrin* 25:2), and in a slightly different form in the Pesikta De-rav Kahana (14). In a similar vein, the Ibn Ezra quotes a Karaite exegete, Yeshua, who explains this pasuk as a charge to Moshe and Aharon not to become angry as a result of their growing frustration. Whereas in his peirush ha-katzar the Ibn Ezra mentions this possibility without any further comment, in his peirush ha-archot he writes that 'there is no need' for this interpretation. (This approach brings to mind an interesting comment by the Ralbag on the immediately preceding pasuk. He claims that the 'kotzer ruach' which led Bnei Yisrael not to listen to Moshe refers to Moshe's - rather than Bnei Yisrael's - frustration. His growing impatience led him to speak irritably, and his words thus met upon deaf ears. If so, it would then stand to reason that Hashem must urge Moshe to exercise more patience.)

The Akeidat Yitzchak interprets 'va-yetzavem' here as referring to the conferral of a given status, rather than the issuance of a command. Citing examples from Tehillim 33:9 and Melachim I 17:4, the Akeidat Yitzchak explains that Hashem granted Moshe and Aharon prominence and respect among both Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh's court, such that their words would be heard. Other mefarshim adopting this approach include the Abarbanel (as his first suggestion), the Or Hachayim (though he adds as well the third approach that we will soon see) and the Tzror Hamor.

Several mefarshim see this pasuk's mention of Aharon as the key to its meaning. Moshe had just expressed his discouragement, compounded by his poor verbal skills (see 6:12), and so Hashem calls upon Aharon and commands both brothers

to return to Bnei Yisrael and to speak to Pharaoh. This was Hashem's answer to Moshe's complaint - that he take Aharon with him and address the nation (for a second time) and then the king. The Ibn Ezra (peirush ha-aroach), Chizkuni, Rabenu Yosef Bechor Shor and Abarbanel (as his second approach) explain along these lines. The Jerusalem Publication Society Bible also seemed to have this approach in mind when it translated this pasuk.

### **Inviting Eliyah Hanavi to the Seder**

We suggest in the shiur that Eliyahu's 'participation' in our seder reminds us that before the final redemption we must perform teshuva, and for this reason Eliyahu will come before the unfolding of the redemption. Just as Hashem called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent before leaving Egypt, so must we correct our ways in anticipation of the final redemption.

The Rema - Orach Chayim 480 - mentions the custom of opening the door at the seder and cites the explanation of the Mahari Brona that this demonstrates our belief in Pesach night as a 'leil shimurim' - a night of watching, when Hashem grants us special protection. The Maharal, in his Haggada "Divrei Negidim" rejects this explanation and claims that we open the door to publicize our belief in the coming of Eliyahu Hanavi prior to the final redemption. (See also Aruch Hashulchan.) He does not, however, relate this to the concept of teshuva, as we suggest in the shiur.

Though our explanation does not appear explicitly in earlier sources, it may relate to the approach taken by the Netziv to explain the fifth cup poured at the seder. As we know, the four cups drunk at the seder correspond to the four expressions describing Yetzi'at Mitzrayim in the beginning of Parshat Vaeyra ('ve-hotzeiti', 've-hitzalti', 've-ga'alti', 've-lakachti'). The Netziv, in his "Ha-amek Davar" commentary to 6:7, suggests that the fifth cup - which we pour but do not drink - commemorates the promise, "and you shall know that I am Hashem your God who takes you out from Egypt". According to the Netziv, this promise speaks of a level of comprehension unattainable by the masses; it refers to the unique knowledge and insight acquired by the nation's spiritual elite. Therefore, given the exclusive nature of this 'knowledge', we do not drink this fifth cup.

In contemporary times, Rabbi Eliezer Ginsburg, in his "Shirat Yehuda" commentary on the Haggada, associates the Netziv's explanation with the common reference to this fifth cup as 'kos shel Eliyahu' (see, for example, Mishna Berura 480:10). Eliyahu will come before the final redemption to teach, guide and inspire, such that we may all attain this lofty level of "you shall know that I am Hashem your God", and we thus appropriately name this fifth cup after Eliyahu Hanavi. This closely relates to our suggestion, that the inclusion of Eliyahu at the seder reminds us of the spiritual growth required before the final redemption.

## **Parasha Va'era: Making Sense Of The Plagues: The Education Of Pharaoh** By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### **INCONSISTENCIES WITHIN THE PLAGUES**

Then YHVH said to Mosheh, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. Say to him, ‘YHVH, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, “Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.” But until now you have not listened.’ Thus says YHVH, “By this you shall know that I am YHVH.” See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. (Sh'mot [Exodus] 7:14-17)

In this account of the warning of the first plague (blood), there are several details which show up again in some – but not all – of the other plagues:

Mosheh warns Pharaoh about the upcoming plague – but not every time (only before the plagues of frogs, wild beasts, pestilence, hail, locusts and the first-born).

Some of these warnings take place in the early morning by the banks of the Nile (wild beasts and hail) while others take place in Pharaoh’s palace.

A theological message (e.g. “By this you shall know that I am YHVH”) is appended to the warning – whereas other warnings are bereft of such a message.

Mosheh’s staff is used in some of the plagues – but not all (it is only used in the plagues of blood, frogs, lice, hail and locusts).

Our first simple and straightforward question is: Is there any rhyme or reason to the plagues and their attendant warnings which would explain these apparent inconsistencies?

### **II. “I WILL HARDEN PHARAOH’S HEART”**

The second question begins in the text, challenges our basic theological and philosophical assumptions – and is answered right back in the text. This question has troubled religious thinkers throughout the ages:

And YHVH said to Mosheh, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.” (Sh'mot 4:21 – see also 7:3)

Not only does God promise that He will make Pharaoh stubborn – the Torah also recounts this divine intervention several times throughout the “plague-driven negotiations” (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27)

Why did God harden Pharaoh’s heart?

There are two parts to this question:

How could Pharaoh be held responsible for his wickedness if God was “pulling the strings”?

If God made Pharaoh stubborn until something changed which would allow B’nei Yisra’el to go free – what “changed” after the smiting of the first-born that allowed our freedom – which couldn’t happen before?

Rambam (MT Hilkhot Teshuva, Chapter 6) addresses this question, as do R. Sa’adia, Albo, Ramban, Ibn Ezra and many other Rishonim. Their answers vary, including the response that the punishment for Pharaoh’s harsh enslavement of the B’nei Yisra’el was to “close off the doors of repentance” by hardening his heart.

### **III. THE S’FORNO’S APPROACH**

Rabbenu Ovadiah S’forno suggests an independent and original approach:

And I will harden his heart: Since he will be unable to tolerate the plagues, he would certainly emancipate the people – not because he accepts the sovereignty of God and to do His will – therefore He hardened his heart to be able to withstand the plagues and not to free them. (Commentary to Shemot 4:21 – see also his commentary to 7:3).

In other words, God wanted Pharaoh to let B'nei Yisra'el go – but only for the right reason. To let them go as a political move or as a visceral reaction to the onslaught of plagues was not sufficient. Pharaoh had to learn a lesson of sorts which would affect his overall attitude towards God and the B'nei Yisra'el before the process could be completed and the B'nei Yisra'el could be allowed to leave. In order to "keep Pharaoh in the game" until he could learn this lesson, God had to strengthen his will (=heart) to withstand the plagues.

Although S'foro doesn't point this out explicitly, the implication of this is that something took place in Pharaoh's consciousness – even if only for a fleeting moment – in reaction to the plague of the first-born which signified the proper attitude and the desired change. The text indeed bears this out.

In response to those plagues which caused Pharaoh to temporarily "give in" (although he always changed his mind once the plague had passed), the text tells us that the king allowed us to Go, sacrifice to your God (8:24). Pharaoh's responses in the other cases, although varying in scope (sacrifice in the land, only the men could go etc.), remained constant in style: It is your God whom you seek to worship – not mine!

In response to the final plague (12:32), Pharaoh added two key words: uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti (And bring a blessing on me too!). The Rishonim generally understand these words to mean that Pharaoh was asking the B'nei Yisra'el to either pray or to present an offering on his behalf (when they reach their worship site in the desert).

In other words, the understanding that Pharaoh achieved via the final plague was that this God – YHVH – who the B'nei Yisra'el worship, was a God Whose blessing even the Pharaoh needed. He also recognized one other facet – this Supreme Ruler had a special relationship with the B'nei Yisra'el, such that their intercession on his behalf would be more effective than his own prayer.

As I explained in last week's shiur, this turnabout was necessary not only for Pharaoh's spiritual welfare and theological enlightenment – but, most significantly, for the benefit of B'nei Yisra'el. For these people, steeped in Egyptian culture and self-subjugated to Egyptian icons, to have their own king make this sort of declaration and express this awareness would do more to bring the B'nei Yisra'el back into their own proper place in their relationship with God (and awareness of their own greatness) than any miracle.

#### **IV. THE PROCESS OF AN ATTITUDE-SHIFT**

I would like to propose that the process which culminated in Pharaoh's cry of uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti can be discerned in the structure of the plagues and of Mosheh's warnings in advance of them. For purposes of this shiur, we will focus on the first nine – and then view the tenth (the first-born) independently.

First – the facts as they are presented in the text:

#1: Dam (blood)  
Warning: YES  
Where: NILE  
When: MORNING  
Message: YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH  
Vehicle: STAFF

#2: Tz'farde'a' (frogs)  
Warning: YES  
Where: PALACE  
When: ???  
Message: (none)  
Vehicle: STAFF

#3: Kinim (lice)  
Warning: NO

Where: n/a  
When: n/a  
Message: n/a  
Vehicle: STAFF

#4: 'Arov (wild beasts)  
Warning: YES  
Where: NILE  
When: MORNING  
Message: YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH IN THE MIDST OF THE LAND  
Vehicle: (none)

#5: Dever(pestilence)  
Warning: YES  
Where: PALACE  
When: ???  
Message: (none)  
Vehicle: (none)

#6: Sh'kin (boils)  
Warning: NO  
Where: n/a  
When: n/a  
Message: n/a  
Vehicle: (none)

#7: Barad (hail)  
Warning: YES  
Where: NILE  
When: MORNING  
Message: YOU WILL KNOW THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN ALL THE LAND  
Vehicle: MOSHEH'S HANDS/STAFF

#8: Arbeh (locusts)  
Warning: YES  
Where: PALACE  
When: ???  
Message: (none)  
Vehicle: MOSHEH'S HANDS/STAFF

#9: Hoshek (darkness)  
Warning: NO  
Where: n/a  
When: n/a  
Message: n/a  
Vehicle: MOSHEH'S HANDS

Note the following:

**Wherever Mosheh encounters Pharaoh at the river in the morning, there is also a theological message attached to the warning. This is followed by a plague with a prefatory warning given inside the palace – without a theological message – which is followed by a plague given with no warning. If we can decipher this structure, we will only need to explain the role of the staff and Mosheh's hands to complete the picture. [emphasis added]**

#### **V. A FOUR-STEP EDUCATIONAL PROCESS**

As we all know, attitudes which are dramatically shifted in one shot are often just as easily shifted back. In order to permanently and effectively educate someone, we need to use slow and even steps, giving the student time to digest,

reflect and integrate the new information in such a way that a new attitude may be adopted.

God (through Mosheh) had to lead Pharaoh from I don't know YHVH (Sh'mot 5:2) to uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti (12:32). In order to clarify the steps needed for this process, we'll use an analogy from our own world of Torah education.

If a teacher would like to encourage a potential student – who is not even aware of Talmud Torah as an academic discipline at all – to take a year off to go study in Yeshivah in Israel, there are several shifts which the teacher must effect in the student:

Make the student aware of Torah as an academic discipline;  
Demonstrate the special qualities of Talmud Torah;  
Demonstrate the superiority of Talmud Torah over all other disciplines;  
Demonstrate the special and unique relationship which this future student has with Talmud Torah.

In much the same way, Pharaoh had to:

Be made aware of YHVH's existence;  
Be shown the uniqueness of YHVH;  
Be shown the ultimate superiority of YHVH;  
Admit to the special relationship that the B'nei Yisra'el – and he – have with YHVH.

If we look through the three theological messages (in context) given in the warnings (before plagues #1, 4 and 7), we can note that this progression covers the first three steps:

(1): "YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH" (God's existence) (4): "YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH IN THE MIDST OF THE LAND" (The uniqueness of God's powers) (7): "YOU WILL KNOW THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN ALL THE LAND" (The superiority of God)

The progression of Pharaoh's education is capped with his request following the plague of the first-born: uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti – indicating that a recognition of the special relationship which he has with God (he is dependent on God's blessing) and which the B'nei Yisra'el have with God (he is dependent on their intercession on his behalf).

## VI. EACH STEP: THREE "SIGNS"

Earlier in the narrative, we are introduced to the notion that three demonstrations of a truth will suffice to persuade the targeted audience. When Mosheh asks God for a sign through which he can prove the veracity of his divine agency (4:1), God gives him three signs (staff, scale-disease, blood; these signs are themselves a mystery which we hope to unravel in a future shiur). As God Himself says, the goal of these signs is:

"This," said YHVH, "is so that they may believe that YHVH, the God of their fathers -the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak and the God of Ya'akov -has appeared to you." (4:5)

Note that this "message" and goal of the three signs is given subsequent to the first sign – as if to say: Mosheh, the purpose of this entire series which has just begun is to establish your credentials as My messenger.

**In the same way, each step in Pharaoh's education took three signs/plagues to be accomplished, allowing him to move on to the next step. This explains the following pattern: [emphasis added]**

The first plague in each set (blood, wild beasts and hail) follows a pattern: Early morning warning at the river, theological message – and then the plague.

Why was the warning at the river in the morning? Ibn Ezra and Rashbam point out that the river was a spot where the king would take walks – and where the people would be present, watching him as he sojourned. I would like to suggest that since the Nile was considered a divinity in Egypt, the Pharaoh was likely involved in some form of worship at the banks of the river early in the morning. Mosheh's confrontation of Pharaoh in the middle of a worship service, in front of his priests and the people, became a public statement and challenge to the entire Egyptian culture and belief system.

This warning was the preface to all three plagues in the set – including a public declaration and the theological lesson of

these three plagues.

The second one in each set (frogs, pestilence and locusts) also has a consistent pattern: Warning in the palace with no theological message – and then the plague.

In these cases, Mosheh challenges and warns Pharaoh in his palace – there is no need for either public declaration or a theological message, as these have already been given at the beginning of the set. The warning, however, was still given to show Pharaoh that the upcoming plague was part of that same system.

The final one in each set (lice, boils and darkness) also has a pattern: No warning at all – just a plague. At this point, the message and warning are moot – Pharaoh needs to internalize the lesson of the series.

This entire structure and explanation is buttressed by R. Yehudah's acrostic of the plagues – D'Tza"kh 'Ada"sh B'acha"v:

## **VII. R. YEHUDAH'S \*SIMANIM\***

In the Sifri (Devarim #301) we first encounter R. Yehudah's famous acrostic for the ten plagues: D'Tza"kh 'Ada"sh B'acha"v (which stands for \*Dam\* – \*Tz'farde'a\* – \*Kinim\*, \*'Arov\* – \*Dever\* – \*Sh'khin\*, \*Barad\* – \*Arbeh\* – \*Hoshekh\* – \*makkat B'khorot\*) – which is incorporated into the Haggadah shel Pessach.

There are many explanations of the meaning behind this acrostic (the simplest is that it is a mnemonic device) – but it may hold the key to understanding the structure of the plagues and the educational process driving them.

**Leaving the final plague aside for a moment, let's reexamine our list, keeping R. Yehudah's acrostic in mind. Following his set-up, there are three sets of plagues. Each set carries an increasingly radical and impactful message to Pharaoh – until he is ready to be affected by the plague of the first-born and to declare uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti. [emphasis added]**

Before examining the consistent pattern within the sets, let's see if we can discover the lesson of each set. We will also be able to explain the role of the staff in the plagues.

### **SET #1: THE EXISTENCE OF YHVH**

When first approached by Mosheh, appearing in the Name of YHVH, Pharaoh's response was: "I do not know YHVH" (5:2). The first goal, therefore, was to "introduce" Pharaoh to God.

We see this in the theological message attached to the first plague – That you will know that I am YHVH. At this point, Mosheh was to make Pharaoh aware of the God of the Hebrews – if you will, as an "equally valid" God to the rest of the Egyptian pantheon. This is accomplished through blood, frogs and lice. Note that all three of them involved using the staff as the direct catalyst for starting the plague (Blood: "he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river"; Frogs: "So Aharon stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt"; Lice: "Aharon stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth") – just like the Egyptian wizards would do their magic. Note that through these three plagues the Egyptian magicians stayed in the plague-competition, finally bowing out during the third one.

In other words, this first set of plagues was designed to introduce God into the Egyptian power picture: YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH.

### **SET #2: THE SPECIAL POWERS OF YHVH**

Now that Pharaoh realizes that YHVH exists and that He has powers (at this point) akin to those of the Egyptian gods (and even surpassing them, as his wizards had already bowed out of the competition), the time had come to impress upon Pharaoh God's unique power. Unlike the gods of the Egyptians, who are distant but need a human intermediary (wizard) to trigger the plague with a vehicle (staff) – God is ...in the midst of the land. This is demonstrated by plagues which, unlike the first three, do not come out of the ground (river, earth), but from the environment. In addition, Mosheh no longer uses the staff – the message here is that God Himself is present and it isn't Mosheh's staff that triggers the plague as much as Mosheh's command/request.

Through the second set, including wild beasts, pestilence and boils, Pharaoh is finally taught that: I AM YHVH IN THE

MIDST OF THE LAND. As before, the first plague is preceded by a public warning with this message, the second is preceded by a private warning and the third has no warning attached.

### **SET #3: THE SUPERIORITY OF YHVH**

Pharaoh is ready to embrace the superiority of God over all members of the Egyptian pantheon. Significantly, God tells Mosheh to lift his hands heavenward to trigger all three of these plagues (hail – 9:22; locusts – 10:12; darkness – 10:21); however, in the case of the first two, Mosheh lifts his hands and holds the staff up – whereas in the third, he only lifts his hands to the heavens.

The staff, which did not play a role in the second set, serves a different function from the first set. In the first set the staff was the catalyst of the plague, mimicking the Egyptian wizards. In the third set, Mosheh lifted the staff as an extension of his hands, showing everyone that the same God Who brought the first three plagues was also behind these. The staff is not a catalyst, it is a sign. This explains why Mosheh did not use the staff for the third plague in this set – darkness. Once he lifted his arms, absolute darkness fell and no one (of the Egyptians) would see either his hand or the staff!

Through these final plagues, Pharaoh has been taught the penultimate lesson: THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN ALL THE LAND.

Pharaoh was now prepared for the ultimate lesson, brought through the plague of the first-born – but that will have to wait for another shiur.

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## Parshat Vaera: Rise of a Leader

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

### PARASHAT VA-ERA (not):

Last week's shiur was about the Egyptian attitude toward Bnei Yisrael and how Bnei Yisrael's lack of strong leadership contributes to their weakness and the ability of Paro to enslave and murder them. We did not develop the second major theme in Parashat Shemot: the appearance of Moshe Rabbeinu. We will begin with that theme this week (we will not actually make it into Parashat Va-Era).

### MOSHE'S BIRTH AND SALVATION:

The way the Torah tells of Moshe's birth and his adventures in the Nile (at the age of three months) brings to mind some events we looked at a long time ago:

### SHEMOT 2:3 --

The woman [i.e., Moshe's mother] conceived and bore a son. She saw ["va-teireh"] that he was good ["ki tov"], and hid him for three months. She then could no longer hide him. She took a box ["teiva"] of reeds, smeared it with sealing and tar, put the boy into it, and put it among the reeds at the edge of the river.

These two pesukim (verses) contain two kernels which hint to themes which will occupy the rest of the sefer (book). By using particular words or phrases, the Torah often hints to connections between events. Here, the parallels jump right out at us:

### PARALLEL #1:

Va-TEIREH oto KI TOV hu: "She SAW that he WAS GOOD"  
Va-YAR Elokim KI TOV: "Hashem SAW that it WAS GOOD"

The Torah uses the same phrase: ". . . saw . . . was good" with regard to both Hashem's appraisal of Creation, way back in Parashat Bereishit, and here as well, with regard to Moshe's mother's appraisal of her newborn son.

### PARALLEL #2:

The second parallel is a word, not a phrase: the word "teiva," "box" or "ark," appears both here with regard to Moshe, and, much earlier, with regard to No'ah ("No'ah's Ark").

The first parallel stands on its own: the language of the two phrases is sufficiently similar that it seems the Torah means for us to make these connections (Hazal, in fact, do connect these pesukim). But the second parallel ("teiva") needs more justification -- how do we know that the Torah truly means to connect the story of Moshe with the story of No'ah just because of this one word? One way to be more certain that a pattern is truly meaningful is to check how rare the word is. "Teiva" turns out to be pretty rare: the word appears in only two places in all of Tanakh (the Bible) -- here, referring to Moshe's little ark, and in Parashat No'ah, referring to the Ark built by No'ah for himself, his family, and a zoo's worth of animals.

Now that we have noted these linguistic parallels, we need to make sense of them: what are the thematic connections between Moshe's birth and Creation, and between Moshe's ark and Noah's? In order to understand these connections, we need to first look at these phrases in context:

- 1) "Va-yar Elokim ki tov": Creation
- 2) The teiva of No'ah: salvation from destruction.

### CREATION:

What is the parallel between "Va-yar Elokim ki tov" and "Va-teireh oto ki tov hu"? Both are stories of creation: the story of

Creation itself clearly deals with "creation"; the story of the birth of Moshe heralds creation in a more subtle way:

- 1) The birth of the nation Yisrael. Moshe is to lead his enslaved brothers out of Egypt, to the revelation at Har Sinai, and through the desert toward their future homeland. In the process, they become a nation, developing a national consciousness and identity.
- 2) The rebirth of the world: the revelation of the Torah at Har Sinai so transforms the people who witness it and the world at large that it can be understood as a spiritual recreation of the world. From this point, monotheism begins its public career, as the Jewish people spread the belief in One God all over the world. In a sense, the world is created physically during the first seven days, but spiritually and morally, it is first truly "created" with the revelation of the Torah, Hashem's instructions for how He wants to be served.

### **SALVATION:**

How does the salvation of No'ah thematically in a "teiva" parallel the salvation of Moshe in a "teiva"? Both stories share:

- 1) An environment of mass destruction (in the case of No'ah, the whole world is doomed; in the case of Moshe, all Israelite baby boys are doomed).
- 2) The mass destruction is accomplished by water (the flooding of the whole world in the time of No'ah, the drowning the babies in the Nile in the time of Moshe). (Note also that the ultimate come-uppance of the Egyptians is also through flood, as the waters of the Red Sea "un-part" and swamp the Egyptian pursuers.)
- 3) An individual who is deserving is saved from the watery destruction (the Torah tells us that No'ah is an "ish tzaddik," and that Moshe "was good").
- 4) The deserving individual is saved in a "teiva."

Why does the Torah draw this parallel? What is the Torah trying to communicate?

In our discussions of Parashat Bereshit and Parashat No'ah, we noted that at first, Hashem seems to want to establish a close relationship with all of humanity. When He creates the first human(s), He makes clear that the purpose of humanity is to achieve the status of a "tzelem Elokim" -- an image of Hashem. Humanity is supposed to attempt to emulate Hashem's (a) creativity, (b) control of the universe, and (c) morality, by being (a) creative (procreating), (b) asserting control over the world, and (c) behaving morally. But before long, humanity fails this mission, and "the earth was full of evil/violence" (Bereshit 6:11 and 6:13). Humanity may have achieved creativity and control, but morally, it has failed. Hashem decides that creating humanity was a mistake -- "I regret that I made them" (Bereshit 6:7) -- and that the "experiment" is over. Humanity must be destroyed.

But Hashem saves No'ah because he is an "ish tzaddik." This act signals Hashem's new strategy: before, the plan had been to relate closely to all of humanity. Now, Hashem will choose either individuals or a group from among humanity to carry out His mission. The selected people will be held to the high standards of morality necessary for maintaining a relationship with Hashem, and may also have the job of educating the rest of the world about morality.

The selection of No'ah to survive while the rest of humanity dies exemplifies this new strategy. Shortly after humanity is re-established after the Flood -- and begins once again to flout Hashem's wishes by building the Tower of Bavel -- Hashem acts on His new strategy and chooses an individual to found the group with which He plans to establish a close relationship. This is, of course, Avraham, who is chosen to found a special nation. In the salvation of No'ah -- a righteous individual -- is "hidden" the kernel of Hashem's plan to select a nation to call His own.

If so, then the Torah evokes the No'ah theme now, as Moshe is saved from death, in order to hint that with the salvation of Moshe, Hashem's plan of choosing that special nation is about to unfold. The saving of Moshe 1) from mass destruction 2) through drowning 3) which takes place through a "teiva," 4) because "he was good" (= "No'ah ish tzaddik"), flashes us back to Parashat No'ah and hints that the process of selecting the people to form a relationship with Hashem is about to bear fruit.

### **A ROUGH BEGINNING:**

We now watch as Moshe grows up and takes tentative steps toward his fellow Israelites. The Torah tells us three stories about Moshe prior to Hashem's revelation to him at the (non)-burning bush; we will deal with them separately:

- 1) Moshe kills an Egyptian who is beating/trying to kill a Jew.
- 2) Moshe tries to intercede in an altercation between two Jews, but when one reveals that he knows Moshe has killed an Egyptian, Moshe fears for his life and runs away.
- 3) Moshe defends the daughters of Yitro from the shepherds, and waters their sheep.

#### **DEFENDING A FELLOW JEW:**

The Torah tells us that Moshe grows up and then "went out to his brothers and saw their burdens" (2:11). This itself is somewhat surprising: Moshe identifies with Bnei Yisrael, his "brothers" ["ehav"] despite having grown up in an Egyptian household -- in fact, the household of Pharaoh. Somehow, he has maintained his identity as a Jew; he sees the lowly, enslaved Jews as his brothers despite having grown up an aristocrat in a society which looks down on the Jews as lower-class citizens, or at least slaves (and perhaps even lower-order creatures, as discussed last week). Even these slaves are his "brothers."

he gets into trouble the very next day when the most obvious witness --

The way Moshe deals with the brutal Egyptian demonstrates his powerful sense of justice. The Torah tells us that before killing the Egyptian, Moshe "looked this way and that way," but wherever he looked, "he saw that there was no one" to witness what he was about to do. Of course, there is someone right in front of him -- the very Jew whom he is saving -- but since Moshe thinks of this Jew as part of his team, "there was no one" there -- no one to be concerned about. But Moshe is wrong, and he realizes this with surprise the next day when implicitly threatened with exposure by a Jew. It seems that the very Jew he was trying to save (who else could have told the tale?) could not keep the secret, and Moshe's brave act exposes him to danger.

One lesson Moshe is taught is that a leader cannot necessarily count on others to be his or her co-conspirators. In the future, as Bnei Yisrael's leader, Moshe will face this gap again and again. As close as any leader might come to the people he leads, there will always remain a gap between the leader and the led. The leader can never depend on the led to cover for him or look out for his interests; he can never assume (without checking) that he and the led share interests. Sefer BeMidbar (Numbers) will provide us with many instances where the Jews turn on Moshe as a group, blaming him for dragging them out of wonderful Egypt into the wasteland of the desert. While Moshe is willing to tolerate this sort of relationship for a long time, he eventually becomes frustrated (in Parashat Be-ha'alotekha) and attempts to resign his post.

#### **BREAKING UP THE FIGHT:**

Now we move to the second story of Moshe's early days: the two fighting Jews. Moshe quickly identifies the one at fault and tries to put a stop to the violence: "Why do you hit your fellow?" But bringing peace turns out to be much more complicated than just taking the moral high ground. Hazal tell us that offering tokhaha (reproof) is so difficult that no one has the sensitivity to carry it off anymore. Tokhaha is a form of teaching and should also manifest concern for the spiritual welfare of the sinner (as well registering a personal protest against the commission of sin). But it can also -- and usually does -- make for an adversarial relationship between reprobate and reproved. Few people like to be told they are doing something wrong, especially in front of other people and when emotions are high -- like during a fistfight. Facing a situation like the one Moshe faces, it is not simple to decide what to do. Moshe actually does very little -- all he does is ask "Why do you hit your fellow?", but the response is furious, sarcastic, and above all, contains a threat to Moshe.

Looking back now on these two stories, it looks like there might be more than just one reason why Moshe runs to Midyan. The Torah tells us that he runs away to avoid being prosecuted (read "executed") for killing the Egyptian. But on a more subtle level, he has shown concern for his people -- twice -- and twice he has been rejected. First he saves the life of the Jew being beaten by the Egyptian, but instead of keeping Moshe's act a secret, the Jew tells his family and friends, and the secret gets out. Moshe risks his life to save this man, but the man turns around and endangers Moshe's life. Then Moshe tries to defuse conflict between two Jews, who not only reject him, but also threaten him. How eager would YOU be to maintain a relationship with this group of people?

## **PARO'S MOTIVATION:**

Meanwhile, Paro wants to kill Moshe. The simple reading is that he wants to execute him for killing the Egyptian who was beating the Jew. But since Moshe is Paro's adopted grandson, isn't there some sort of royal immunity?

Grandson or not, Moshe is a Jew to Paro, and the most dangerous thing in his mind is a Jew who shows signs of leadership and resistance (see last week's shiur). Paro allows his daughter to save the Jewish baby she finds in the Nile since he assumes that the child, raised as an Egyptian, will never become a threat. But now he sees Moshe as a potential troublemaker, perhaps even the first spark of Jewish resistance. Moshe's defense of his stricken brother, if not firmly punished by Paro, might send the message to Moshe or to others that there is hope for resistance.

## **MOSHE AND YA'AKOV:**

The Torah next reports Moshe's flight from Egypt and his arrival at Midyan. I don't want to spend too much time here, but it's worth noting an interesting pattern:

<b>YA'AKOV</b>	<b>MOSHE</b>
*****	
Runs away from home	Runs away from home
Reason: to avoid death	Reason: to avoid death
Encounters a well	Encounters a well
Woman shepherd (Rahel)	Women shepherds
Gives sheep water	Gives sheep water
Moves in with family	Moves in with family
Marries shepherdess daughter	Marries shepherdess daughter
Tends sheep for father-in-law	Tends sheep for father-in-law
Has children there	Has children there

Besides noting this parallelism and offering it for you to "unpack," one other important point is also worth mentioning: this story again shows how Moshe Rabbeinu's sense of justice and fairness impels him to take action to right wrongs. He cannot stand by while evil goes on before him. Even though his interference has already landed him in trouble with Paro, he has not concluded that the smart thing to do is to ignore injustice. He stands up for the daughters of Yitro and prevents the other shepherds from taking advantage of them.

## **HASHEM APPEARS:**

We now move on to Moshe Rabbeinu's first meeting with Hashem -- the burning bush. Hashem hears the cries of anguish of Bnei Yisrael, the Torah says; Hashem "remembers" His covenant with the Avot (forefathers), the promise to make their descendants into a great nation and to give them the Land of Cana'an. After giving us this peek into Hashem's thought process, as it were, the story continues with the flaming bush which attracts Moshe's attention.

## **SHEMOT 3:1-4 --**

Moshe was tending the sheep of Yitro, his father-in-law, priest of Midyan. He led the sheep toward the desert and came to the mountain of Hashem at Horev. An angel of Hashem APPEARED ["VA-YERA"] to him in a flaming fire from a bush. He SAW ["VA-YAR"] that the bush was flaming with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Moshe said, "Let me go over and SEE ["ER-EH"] this fantastic SIGHT ["MAREH"] -- why doesn't the bush burn up?" Hashem SAW [VA-YAR] that he had turned to LOOK ["LI-R'OT"]. Hashem called to him from the bush: "Moshe! Moshe!" He said, "Here I am."

Within just 3 pesukim, six different variants of the root "ra-ah" -- "to see" -- appear. The irony of this root's presence here becomes clear as we read on:

## **SHEMOT 3:5-6 --**

He [Hashem] said, "Do not come closer; take your shoes off of your feet, for the ground you stand on is holy ground." He said, "I am the God of your fathers, God of Avraham, God of Yitzhak, and God of Ya'akov." Moshe \*\*HID HIS FACE,\*\*

because he was afraid of LOOKING at Hashem.

After all this emphasis on "seeing," and with Moshe so eager to "see" this great "sight" which has "appeared" to him, with Hashem "seeing" that Moshe has come to "see" what it is, when he actually finds out what it is, he doesn't want to "see" it at all! He hides his face, afraid to look at Hashem. This scene foreshadows and encapsulates the entire conversation which ensues between Hashem and Moshe: Hashem announces in dramatic, formal fashion that He has heard the cries of His people (this is the first time Hashem refers to Bnei Yisrael as "Ami," "My nation"), that He remembers the covenant with the Avot, and has now "descended" to pass judgment on the foe. He will redeem the people with mighty miracles, "signs" and "wonders," and the people will then serve Him on Har Sinai. They will move from there to inherit the land promised to them. But Moshe continues to "hide his face" from Hashem, expressing self-doubt and fear and refusing to accept Hashem's mission to lead the people.

In light of Moshe's future interactions with Hashem, it is curious that Moshe is now afraid to "look" at Hashem. Much later, we find Moshe actively seeking opportunities for greater levels of revelation:

### **SHEMOT 33:18 --**

He [Moshe] said [to Hashem], "SHOW ME Your glory!"

By the time the event in the above pasuk occurs, Moshe has accepted the Torah from Hashem, discovered that the people have built an idol in his absence, and returned to the mountain for the second Tablets and to seek forgiveness for the people. Seeing that Hashem is in a favorable mood, so to speak, Moshe gains forgiveness for the people and then requests: "Show me Your glory!" Not only is Moshe not afraid to "see" Hashem's glory, he is so bold as to \*request\* this experience. Clearly, Moshe's relationship with Hashem develops over time. Earlier on, he is overcome by awe, "afraid to look at Hashem." But by the time he has served as the intermediary for the revelation of the Torah at Har Sinai, he is eager for an experience of greater divine revelation. He asks for the highest level possible. Hashem tells Moshe that he cannot truly see Him without dying in the process; He then shows Moshe His "back." We will look much more closely at this experience when we get there (Parashat Ki Tisa), but for now it is important to realize that Moshe undergoes a process of transformation and growth in his relationship with Hashem.

### **"REMOVE YOUR SHOES":**

Hashem speaks to Moshe from the bush, calling his name. Moshe responds, but he does not yet know Who is speaking to him. Only when Hashem explicitly reveals His identity does Moshe cover his face in fear of looking at Him. Hashem commands Moshe to remove his shoes before he comes any closer: the ground before him is holy.

Where else are people told to remove their shoes because they are standing on holy ground?

Just after Yehoshua brings Bnei Yisrael over the Jordan River into Cana'an, a warrior appears to him (Joshua 5). When Yehoshua asks him whether he is friend or foe, the warrior tells Yehoshua that he is actually the angel-general of Hashem's army, sent to guide Bnei Yisrael in their conquest of the Land of Cana'an. He tells Yehoshua to take off his shoes, that the ground he stands on is holy.

Moshe stands in our parasha on Har Horev (Har Sinai); Yehoshua stands somewhere outside of Yeriho (Jericho). What is so special about Har Horev and "some place near Yeriho," that Hashem commands Moshe and Yehoshua to remove their shoes?

At least in the case of Har Sinai, the answer seems obvious: this ground is holy because Hashem will deliver the Torah to Bnei Yisrael on this spot. But that only begs the next question: why indeed does Hashem choose Har Sinai in particular to deliver the Torah?

Perhaps these places -- Har Sinai and "somewhere near Yeriho" -- are holy because of \*what\* Hashem tells the prophet there, not because of any inherent quality of the places themselves. There is nothing really special about Har Sinai itself: it is a desert mountain, and not a particularly imposing one (as Hazal point out), located three days' journey from Egypt and eleven days' journey from Cana'an. It is distinguished not at all; it lies, so to speak, exactly in the middle of nowhere. The same is true of the place where Hashem's warrior-general-angel appears to Yehoshua: outside of Yeriho, somewhere near the border of the Land of Cana'an but not in a city or some other significant location.

Both of these revelations of Hashem have special characteristics, which may explain why the ground is made holy by the revelation. In both stories, Hashem entrusts the prophet with his life's mission:

- 1) Moshe's mission is to bring the Jews out of Egypt and mediate the revelation of the Torah to them at Har Sinai. His task will not extend to bringing the Bnei Yisrael into Cana'an.
- 2) Yehoshua's mission will be to bring Bnei Yisrael into Cana'an and lead the conquest of the Land. This mission is symbolized by the appearance of Hashem's chief warrior-angel.

The reason these places are considered holy is because special divine revelations take place there: two leaders of unparalleled significance in the history of Kelal Yisrael receive their missions in these revelations. The special message sanctifies the ground on which the revelation takes place.

This is also what sanctifies Har Sinai as far as the revelation of the Torah is concerned. Har Sinai is chosen because it is the quintessential "nowhere" (an idea echoed in Hazal). It is chosen because its holiness is due exclusively to the revelation which will take place there. What makes it so holy is that it is where Bnei Yisrael receive their mission -- the Torah -- just as Moshe receives his mission there and Yehoshua receives his mission outside Yeriho. It is also no accident that at the time of the revelation, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to stay away from Har Sinai because it is too holy to tread upon. Hashem warns Moshe repeatedly that anyone who steps on the mountain will die. Once again, the reason the ground is sanctified is because the revelation by Hashem of a mission of national significance is what sanctifies a place.

This would also explain why these places of revelation are holy only \*during\* the actual revelation itself, not afterward. Hashem explicitly tells Moshe that once Ma'amad Har Sinai (the revelation of the Torah) is completed, the people may ascend the mountain; only during the revelation are they prohibited to ascend. This confirms that these places are not inherently holy, and are sanctified only while the special divine presence is there. Similarly, we never hear of a place near Yeriho which has any special permanent significance; there is no warning in Tanakh about not walking there. The place of Yehoshua's revelation was holy only during the giving-over of his mission.

### **A SUDDEN DEATH THREAT:**

As we know, Moshe finally packs up his family and heads from Yitro's home in Midyan back to Egypt. Somewhere on the road, a bizarre incident occurs: an angel of Hashem appears and tries to kill a member of Moshe's family:

#### **SHEMOT 4:24-26 --**

It happened, on the way, at a rest stop, that Hashem met him and wanted to kill him. Tzippora took a knife, cut off the foreskin of her son, threw it at his feet, and said, "You are a 'hatan-damim' to me." He turned away from him, and then she said, "A 'hatan-damim' for the circumcised."

Who does Hashem want to kill? Grammatically, it is ambiguous, and may refer to either Moshe or his son. Why does Hashem want to kill anyone? Why does circumcising Eliezer (Moshe and Tzippora's son) ward off Hashem's anger? And what does this story have to do with anything?

In order to understand what is going on here, we have to move back a few pesukim:

#### **SHEMOT 4:21-23 --**

Hashem said to Moshe, "As you go to return to Egypt, see that you perform before Paro all of the wonders which I have placed in your hand; I will harden his heart, and he will not send out the nation. You shall say to Paro, 'So says Hashem: 'My FIRST-BORN SON is Israel. I have said to you, 'Send forth MY SON, so he may serve Me,' but you have refused to send him. I will [therefore] kill your FIRSTBORN SON!'''

Hashem's firstborn is Bnei Yisrael; Moshe is to threaten Paro that if Paro does not release Hashem's firstborn, Hashem will kill Paro's firstborn. Right after this, Hashem tries to kill \*Moshe's\* firstborn! But why? To answer, we must follow through on the reference to the plague of the firstborn which will strike Egypt after all the other plagues. Looking ahead to then, Hashem has decided to carry out the threat He makes here -- He decides to kill the firstborn of Egypt because Egypt refuses to release His firstborn. At that time, Moshe is commanded by Hashem to tell Bnei Yisrael that if they want their own firstborn sons not to be struck down by the plague, they must paint blood on their doorposts to identify their houses as

Jewish houses. This blood is to come from the Korban Pesah, the sacrifice that Bnei Yisrael are commanded to offer on the afternoon before they are to be redeemed from Egypt.

The same thing happens here! Just after Hashem threatens to kill the firstborn of Egypt, Hashem's angel comes and tries to kill Moshe's firstborn. Tzippora suddenly realizes that she and Moshe have done nothing to show that this child is a Jewish child. Just as the houses must be marked (with blood) to show that they are Jewish houses, this child must be marked (with blood) to show that he is a Jewish child.

Perhaps the reason why blood is necessary in both cases -- in this case, the blood of the child, and later on, the blood of the sacrifice -- is as a form of self-sacrifice. The Ramban says that one reason we offer sacrifices is because we are offering something we own to be sacrificed in place of ourselves. We are, on a certain level, offering ourselves. The same theme may be present in circumcision: shedding a few drops of blood symbolizes our total devotion to Hashem, to the degree that we are willing to be "moser nefesh" (sacrifice our lives) for His sake. In order to deserve to be saved from the destroying angel, Moshe's son, in this story, and the Jewish firstborn sons, later on, must bear a sign of their complete dedication to Hashem.

Perhaps one other level of meaning here is that in order to be saved, we must do something to "deserve" it. One reason why the Jews may be commanded to bring the Pesah sacrifice is so that Hashem can give them "credit" for their obedience. The first-born sons, who at this time serve as "kohanim," priests, are key players in the bringing of the sacrifice. Their participation in this mitzvah, and the painting of the symbol of this good deed -- the blood of the sacrifice -- on the doorposts of their houses, merits them salvation. The same is true for Moshe's son: in order to escape the fate with which Hashem has just threatened Egypt, the family must perform a mitzvah with this son. The opportunity most readily available is an act which was commanded to Avraham long ago: circumcision. Tzippora thinks quickly and saves her son by performing this mitzvah.

This structure -- that the plagues of Egypt often have a precursor in earlier events -- is a theme we will explore more fully next week.

Shabbat Shalom