

Potomac Torah Study Center

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International Holocaust Remembrance Day Observed Friday, January 27

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Bo opens with Moshe and Aharon continuing to deal with Paro's anti-Semitism, hatred, and slavery of our people. They announce and initiate the final three plagues (locusts, darkness, and killing of the first born). By including Moshe and Aharon in starting and stopping the plagues, God makes several theological statements. In addition to demonstrating that Hashem is the one and only God and that He alone controls nature, Hashem demonstrates to Paro that He represents and protects B'Nai Yisrael. Moshe and Aharon also demonstrate that Jews work with our God to recognize and publicize the power of Hashem. No previous religion had recognized Hashem's power controlling the laws of nature – and no one had ever before conceived of a God who loves and protects every person. (This evidence astonishes Yitro and leads him to convert himself and his entire household.)

While preparing B'Nai Yisrael to depart suddenly when the word comes, we have the first mitzvah that Hashem gives specifically to the Jews. *"This month (Nisan) shall be for you the beginning of the months"* (12:1). This first mitzvah specifically for B'Nai Yisrael makes some key theological statements. A new year does not start with the anniversary of the creation of the world (Rosh Hashanah, 1 Tishrei), but with the beginning of our freedom and identity as Hashem's people. Moreover, the pasook requires that there be at least two qualified witnesses to testify that they have seen the required amount of the moon. By involving trained witnesses, the mitzvah involves Jews in the process of determining the start of each month – and thus the dates for each Yom Tov. God determines Shabbat (every seventh day); we determine the holidays. The Sefat Emet observes that by working with Hashem to determine the holy days, we testify that we recognize Hashem's role in the world and specifically in our lives.

Rabbi Dan Margulies interprets an earlier pasook as actually presenting the first mitzvah to B'Nai Yisrael. Based on his reading of the Yerushalmi Talmud, Rabbi Margulies interprets 6:13 (directing Moshe and Aharon to go to Paro and B'Nai Yisrael) as requiring Jews to free their slaves (see his Dvar Torah below). While Jews presumably do not have slaves in Egypt, they do for many subsequent years. The Yerushalmi Talmud interprets this text as relating to Hillel's core ethical principle in the Torah – *"what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow."*

We always read Bo in the middle of winter, in late January or early February. We are therefore reading about Paro's anti-Semitism and Hashem's freeing our ancestors from slavery in Egypt around International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which we observe this Shabbat (Friday, January 27) on the secular calendar or 13 Shevat (next Shabbat) on the Jewish calendar. Countries that observe this event do so to mark the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz - Birkenau murder centers that the Nazis set up in occupied Poland to murder Jews. Paro was the first to try to use excessive hard labor and minimal food to kill Jews. (Thanks to Hashem's intervention, this plan did not succeed.) Hitler took Paro's innovation a step further by combining the work and starvation camps with shootings and gas chambers to make the murders more efficient. Even nearly 80 years after the fact, it is difficult to believe the photos and statements that demonstrate how vicious the Nazi campaign was. Hitler and Paro also share the history that they continued their oppression and killing of Jews rather than diverting their attention to saving their countries and winning the wars against

their enemies. As I am writing these remarks, I see a post from Israel that U.S. congresswoman Rashida Tlaib has a Palestinian flag in her office next to the Capitol and is blaming Israel for discrimination against the poor Palestinians. The Anti-Semites remain active, even on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was a child in Philadelphia during the Nazi period. The Anti-Semitism of the period affected him, and Rabbi Cahan always focused on ways to help the less fortunate in society – and especially our obligation to do our best for fellow Jews. When I was growing up in entirely Jewish neighborhoods in Los Angeles, I did not experience any Anti-Semitism. My first taste of living in a non-Jewish environment was when I was in graduate school (Berkeley, CA). In those days, however, anti-Semitism was not obvious even in Berkeley. In the decades since then, however, “progressives” have identified Jews, and especially Israel, as enemies out to destroy those less fortunate than we are. Anti-Semitism is so open and widespread now that Jewish students are afraid to wear kippot or other Jewish symbols in many universities and cities in our country or in many other countries. If Hitler and Paro were alive today, they would be happy to see that so many fellow hate mongers all over the world carry on their policies of attacking Jews.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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. 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 Shlemah for Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Bo: Back to the Future

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5773

And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, Because of this, HASHEM did for me when I went out of Egypt.” (Shemos 13:8)

Because of this: In order that I fulfill His commandments, such as these [commandments of] the Passover sacrifice, Matzah, and bitter herbs. — [Passover Haggadah](Rashi)

HASHEM did for me: [Scripture] alluded to a reply to the wicked son, to say, “HASHEM did for me,” but not for you. Had you been there, you would not have been worthy of being redeemed. — [from Mechilta] (Rashi)

This is the answer prescribed for the wicked son and his cynical attitude at the Pesach Seder. We tell him “because of this HASHEM did for when I went out of Egypt.” Here we sit thousands of years after the Exodus, talking to a non-compliant child and asking him to understand somehow that “I went out of Egypt”! How is he supposed to hear this as a relevant and credible response to his already deep skepticism?

What is “this” referring to as in “because of this”? “This” is usually pointing to something tangible and concrete before our eyes in the present. Rashi comes galloping to the rescue and answers the question about “this”. It is talking about the Mitzvos of the evening that we are fulfilling at the Seder such as Matzah, Marror, and the Pesach Offering. Great! How is this an answer to the wicked son? Does he believe and do I really believe that HASHEM took me out of Egypt? After all it’s been a long time since that event.

Again Rashi provides the information for the answer, breathing life into the dialogue. The wicked son is being told that had he been there in Egypt he would not have been one of the redeemed. Those are harsh words! Therefore HASHEM did for me and not him! How does that answer the question of the wicked one?

I once asked a group of high school students that had just finished a unit in history, “*Who’s the most important person in human history?*” and “*What is the most important moment of human history?*” After guessing Avraham, Moshe, and Dovid, I finally let them know...it is...Label Lam! They were shocked. Most of them had never heard of me. I told them I would prove it. There can be no more reliable proof than an open statement from the Sages of the Talmud. When a witness is about to give testimony in a life and death trial he is strongly reminded about the hazardous consequences of his words. They ask him, “*Why was “man” created singular?*” *He could have been created as a couple, or a gaggle, or a corporation.* The answer the witness is told is: “*A person has an obligation to say, ‘the whole world was created for me!’*”

When Adam opened his eyes, he beheld a universe of trees and breezes and rays of golden light, constructed with precision for his for his benefit. That’s not only true of Adam the first man but every individual subsequently has the same obligation to see himself as the centerpiece of human history. I told those students that if you ask your parents, “*Who’s the most important person in Jewish history?*” and then you tell’m, “Label Lam” then you didn’t understand the message. Everyone has to say himself! I am only an actor in your morality play. So what is the most important moment in Jewish history? You guessed it! THIS moment!

So too when we are seated around the Pesach Seder, we are obligated to imagine that the entire exodus from Egypt was all because of me. “*Because of this HASHEM did all this for me...*” He had me in mind at that time that I would be seated here in the 21st century munching Matzos. When HASHEM took the Jews out 3300 years ago He had me in mind then that I would be here now carrying out the Mitzvos. The wicked son is being admonished that he is actually scripting himself out of history by choosing a contrarian attitude. If he decides it’s not worth being here now, HASHEM did not have in mind back then. The Seder is really then a journey back to the future!

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5773-bo/>

Bo: Speaking is Believing

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016, 2023

The first mitzvah that the Children of Israel are given is that of sanctifying the new moon. “*HaChodesh hazeh lachem rosh chadashim,*” “*this month, the month of Nissan, shall be for you the first of the months.*” Why of all mitzvot was this one given first? What is it about this mitzvah that embodies the message of redemption and signifies what it means to be a free people?

Identifying Nissan as the first month makes a profound theological statement. From the perspective of the natural agricultural cycle, the year begins in Tishrei, the month that marks the beginning of fall and the onset of tilling and planting. It is for this reason that Rosh HaShana occurs on Tishrei and that the Torah constantly refers to Tishrei as the end and beginning of the yearly cycle. To live a life defined by the agricultural calendar, however, is to live a life dictated by the laws of nature and nothing more. It is to live a cyclical existence: people are born, reproduce, and die; the world keeps spinning; and the cycle goes round and round. “One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides forever.” Any change is non-disruptive and predictable. Such a world, then, is ultimately unchanging and static. Such a world does not progress, and such a life serves no higher purpose. In such a world, slaves are never freed

and miracles never occur.

To declare that Nissan – the month of redemption – shall be the first month is to assert that we do not live in a world governed only by nature. With the exodus comes a reordering of our time and a reorienting of our view of the world and our outlook on existence. Yes, this is a natural world with seasonal cycles, but it is also a world of history. It is a world in which radical, disruptive change can occur. It is a world where God plays a role, breaking through the natural order, wreaking plagues, creating miracles, freeing an enslaved people, and bringing them to Mount Sinai and the Promised Land. To live in such a world is to live a life of messianic promise; it is to live a life of purpose and meaning.

But this first mitzvah goes even further: according to Hazal's understanding, it not only demands that Nissan to be identified as the first of the months, but that we be partners in the process. It tasks us with establishing when the month begins on the basis of observing the new moon. *"This month is for you,"* says the verse. *"Kazeh re'eh vi'kadesh,"* explains the Talmud, *"you must see the new moon, and you must sanctify it."* This mitzvah, then, presents a world in which we as a people are masters of our own destiny.

While we cannot violate the laws of nature, we do not have to live under their tyranny. The moon waxes and wanes every month, but we decide how to relate to it. The beginning of the month is not defined by the cosmological reality of the position of the moon but by our observation and recognition of it, by the significance we give it. And if we declare the month to begin on a day other than when the new moon appears, that day will nevertheless be recognized as the first of the month.

We create the sanctity of the month and the holidays that occur in it. We see; we sanctify. Through this, we reject determinism. We declare that we are free agents. We declare that we shape our existence and define our world. This is what freedom is all about. We leave a world where others define our existence – dictating what we do, where we eat, and where we sleep – and we enter a world in which we are the masters of our time, a world in which we have the opportunity – but also the weighty responsibility – to dream and plan, to decide what we will do today, and to determine the future direction of our lives.

The exodus from Egypt came from God and through miracles, but to live a free life, our ongoing exodus must come from within. With this mitzvah God is handing the responsibility over to us. God is saying, from here on in, *kazeh re'eh vi'kadesh*, when you see the natural world you must sanctify it. It is upon you to give it significance. It is up to you to break through the repetitious sameness of existence, to give your life direction and purpose, and to make it holy. [emphasis added]

According to Sefat Emet:

For at the time of redemption it was made evident that God was the life-force of all, and ... that this is the source of the ongoing renewal of the natural order, as it is written: "God renews every day, constantly, the acts of creation." However, one who forgets this is defined by the natural order, as it is written: "There is nothing new under the sun." But one who cleaves to the inner reality, to the life-force of God, constantly experiences renewal. This is what is meant, "This month," this renewal [chodesh/chadash], is yours. For each person of Israel can stir up this power of renewal through faith, by it being clear in his heart that all is from God. (Sefat Emet, Bo, 5631)

Do we live in a world of nature, where nothing is new and God is nowhere to be found? Or do we live in a world suffused with God's presence, filled with dynamism, life-force, and possibility? The choice, says Sefat Emet, is ours. If we choose to see God in the world, we will find it filled with opportunity and possibility, and this vision will be nurtured and reinforced, becoming our reality. To truly achieve this, however, it is not just a question of how we see but also how we speak.

This parashat Bo begins and ends by stressing the importance of the stories that we tell and their role in shaping our reality. *"Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart ... so that I may perform these signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord"* (10:1-2). The miracles, at least according to these verses, serve no other purpose than for us to relate them in stories that will shape the way we look at the world and the way we see God's

presence therein.

And so it is at the end of the parasha: “*On that day tell your son, ‘I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’*” (13:8). And similarly, “*In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery’*” (13:14). Returning to Sefat Emet:

For behold, this is the power of speech that was given to the Children of Israel, and it is through this that they sanctify the months and the holidays, when the court says: mekudash haChodesh, the new month is sanctified. It was at the time of the exodus that the Children of Israel merited the covenant of speech. And this is the mitzvah of pesach: peh (a mouth) sach (that speaks). And “In order that you may tell” (10:1) ... For the power of the mouth is to bring renewal ... and this is what is meant by haChodesh hazeh lachem, this month-this making new – is yours. (Sefat Emet, Bo, 5656)

After all the miracles are done we will return to living in a world in which miracles are not evident, where what we see most obviously before our eyes is nature, not God. It will be our responsibility to look at this world, at our present and past, and see possibility, to see purpose, to see God. Kazeh re’eh vi’kadesh. Through our words we sanctify the month, and through our words and the stories we tell, we can and we must shape and sanctify our world.

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2016/01/speaking-is-believing/>

Free Will? – Thoughts for Parashat Bo

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Many years ago, a member of our community was arrested for embezzling funds. He was generally a religiously observant man and attended services each Shabbat morning faithfully.

I asked him how he got involved in illegal financial dealings, especially when he was ostensibly a religious man who knew that the Torah prohibits theft. He answered: “I thought I could get away with it. I thought my plan was so brilliant no one would ever catch on.” I responded: “Yes, but you can’t hide things from God.” He nodded his head sadly. “I wasn’t thinking about God.”

In further discussions with him, he indicated how he got deeper and deeper into the crime. First, he just cheated a bit; when he got away with it, he tried again for a larger amount. When he still went undetected, he developed a more elaborate scheme involving substantial amounts of money. Eventually, his system was so routine that he took it for granted that it would go on forever. But finally, he did get caught and his entire plan (and life!) fell apart.

At each step of his embezzlement scheme, he had the free will to stop. But his free will diminished with every new illegal act. Before making his first illegal transaction, he could have caught himself. But he didn’t. After making his first theft, he could have stopped. But he didn’t. Indeed, after each step in the process, he got deeper and deeper into the crime so that it became almost impossible for him to stop. The more entrenched he was in his scheme, the less free will he had to reverse course.

Using biblical terms, we might say that he initially “hardened his heart” to begin cheating. But as he sank deeper and deeper into the process, it was as though the Lord hardened his heart making it exceedingly difficult for him to repent.

Maimonides pointed out that one of the punishments for certain types of sins is the impossibility (or near impossibility) of repentance. The sinner is so mired in sin that he/she can’t seem to stop. The sin has become second nature; it is hardened within and not able to be dislodged. It is as though the Lord has hardened the heart so as to prevent repentance. (*Laws of Repentance* 6:1-3).

This is how Maimonides, and others, understand the Torah's statement that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh, of his own free will, kept the Israelites enslaved. Of his own free will, he oppressed them and maintained a cruel system of dehumanization. With each choice, he made it more and more difficult for himself to change course. He reached the point where his heart was so hardened that he simply could not bring himself to repent.

This lesson applies to so many aspects of life. We make a problematic choice of our own free will, but this leads to the next negative choice and then to yet another...until it becomes exceedingly difficult to repent. Free will diminishes with each negative choice.

As a mundane example, a person is told that good health requires not eating overly fattening food. One day the person walks by a bakery and sees a tempting chocolate cake in the window. He/she can choose to keep walking but instead decides to stop and look at the cake. Then a process begins: what if I just walk into the bakery to look more closely at the cake; what if I buy it but bring it home for family to eat; what if I bring it home and just take a small taste...Finally, why don't I just eat a big chunk of cake and go on a diet tomorrow? When did the person "lose" free will? It was a process, one step leading to the next, inexorably leading to eating a large slice of chocolate cake.

The Talmud teaches that the reward of a mitzvah is another mitzvah while the consequence of a sin is another sin. We set patterns for ourselves. We initially have free will to choose, and our first choice leads us to our next choice. If we set a positive pattern, we continuously improve ourselves. **If we set a negative pattern, we "harden" our own hearts so that it becomes difficult to change for the better.** [emphasis added]

Every choice has consequences. It is our free will to choose wisely.

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

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/diminished-spirit-thoughts-parashat-vaera>

A Spirituality Crisis

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

There is a feeling among many Jews, including many Orthodox Jews, that worship in the synagogue lacks adequate inspiration and spirituality. Among the complaints: the synagogue ritual is chanted by rote; the prayers are recited too quickly; the prayers are recited too slowly; the service is not understood by congregants; people talk too much in synagogue; the services do not involve everyone in a meaningful way.

Here are some of the "solutions" that have been suggested over the years, along with why they have not achieved full success:

Introduce Hassidic/Carlebach melodies — these may be more lively and inspirational than the usual synagogue music. Yes, for some people, singing such melodies is emotionally satisfying. But for many others, such music seems more like a hootenanny than a vehicle for addressing God.

Make the services more egalitarian. Yes, for some people this seems like a way of getting men and women more involved. Yet, the Reform and Conservative movements have been fully egalitarian for many years — without any perceptible improvement in the overall spiritual life of their communities. Indeed, these movements have been suffering from serious loss of membership, and from generally poor attendance at services. While newly established "partnership"

services are popping up in the Orthodox world, it remains to be seen whether this represents a passing fad, or if these types of services will fall into the same patterns that have taken hold in the non-Orthodox egalitarian services.

Make services shorter; include more readings in the vernacular. Yes, for some people this makes the synagogue experience more palatable. But it is doubtful whether it brings people to a greater feeling of the presence of God, or whether it will inspire more people to actually attend services.

Introduce meditation practices. Yes, some people may find this helpful to their spiritual experience. But many others may find these practices an outside imposition on Jewish worship and may be repelled by this mode of spirituality.

Whatever suggestions are offered, one can come up with counter-arguments. Each individual and each community has different needs and expectations.

The "crisis of the synagogue" needs to be viewed, I suggest, in a much broader context. The synagogue is only one factor — and not the major factor — in the real problem we are facing. The real problem is: moderns are losing, or have already lost, their sense of intimacy with God. God is simply not a real presence in many of our lives. Even if we observe the commandments, study Torah and say our prayers, we may still not feel the awesome, overwhelming experience of living in the light of the Eternal.

If we are losing, or have already lost, a sense of intimacy with God, making changes in the synagogue service will not restore that intimacy. Whatever gimmicks we introduce, while possibly helpful to some, will ultimately fail, because they are focusing on symptoms rather than on the malady itself.

To a religious Jew who feels God's presence in daily life, the synagogue service poses little or no problem. The synagogue is just one of many contexts in which one experiences the Divine. It is not the center of religious life, and certainly not the only place to feel God's presence. One follows the synagogue ritual out of loyalty to tradition, out of solidarity with generations of Jews who have prayed in this manner, out of a spiritual quest to be part of the community's prayers to the Almighty. But one also says private prayers any time of the day, in almost any place.

If we have personal spirituality, we can bring this into our public spirituality. If we can maintain, or regain, a living relationship with God in our daily lives, then our synagogue experience becomes much higher and much deeper.

Surely, a synagogue needs to do its best to help congregants re-establish intimacy with God; and it needs to conduct its prayer services in a manner that is conducive to spiritual experience and development. But it also needs to realize that it is an enabler of spirituality, not a substitute for spirituality. God doesn't dwell only — or even primarily — in the synagogue. God dwells everywhere. Most of our lives are not spent in the synagogue, and most of our lives are deeply in need of relationship with the Almighty. If we can develop a full spiritual personality, we will find the synagogue experience to be a meaningful and vital aspect of our lives. We need to be working on how to become more sensitive to our souls, to our personal relationships with God. We need to imbue our daily lives with Torah and mitzvoth in such a way that these activities resonate within us, and raise our spirits.

When Bil'am blessed the people of Israel, he said: "*How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your dwellings O Israel.*" The "tents" refer to our homes, the centers of our every-day lives; the "dwellings" refer to our synagogues and study halls. When we first have our "tents" in order, it is a natural extension to have our "dwellings" in order.

It is far from a simple matter for moderns to maintain, or regain, a sense of intimacy with God. Much of the time-spirit militates against genuine religious experience. Religion is not an easy way to God, and is not a short cut to spirituality. Treating symptoms without going to the root of our problem only makes the problem worse.

If we want our synagogues to be more spiritual, we have to be more spiritual ourselves. If we want our "dwellings" to be spiritually alive, then we first have to be sure that our "tents" are spiritually alive.

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

Clocks and Prayers

Blog by Howard Riell *

A young guy in shul this morning who is visiting from Israel asked me what time we would get to Borechu. I know from experience that lots of my fellow Orthodox Jews keep a sharp eye on the clock while they are davening; in fact, the amud that the baal tefillah uses in my shul has an actual listing of the various times he should be reaching the various sections of the service.

I find this notion absolutely ridiculous! I told the young man, *“I have no idea. When I’m davening I’m talking to Hashem, not looking at the clock.”*

Why on Earth are we so very obsessed with time during prayer when we should consider ourselves to be in a place beyond time and space? There is one guy in my shul who, after mincha, announces how many minutes and seconds we have until maariv. This is amazingly stupid for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that in the days of the gemara there was no such concept as seconds. They hadn’t been invented yet! And to imagine that God is standing in heaven with a stopwatch, timing us to see if we start the one precise and proper moment — and that it matters — is something that a small child should be embarrassed for thinking. When do we get smarter?

It reminds me of that pathetic joke. Someone asks a young Orthodox Jew whether he ever thinks about God. The young man responds, *“Are you kidding? I get up in the morning, say my prayers, wash and get dressed, do daf yomi, then I’m off to shacharis, then to yeshiva where I learn all day, then attend a series of shiurim, then there’s minchah and maariv, and then the rav gives a class. When am I supposed to find time to think about God?”*

* Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/clocks-and-prayers-blog-howard-riell>

Rejoicing in Redemption

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

After decades of slavery and persecution the Jewish people were finally set free to become a nation of nobility. Great tasks lay before them. In a few weeks they would be blessed with the revelation at Sinai; they would receive the Torah. There would be much preparation to get ready for that great day. But first, Hashem instructed them never to forget. Never to forget the servitude, and never to forget that Hashem responded to their prayers and redeemed them.

Never to forget is important for many reasons. For one, it is basic Hakoras Hatov (gratefulness) to remember Hashem’s kindness in redeeming us. It behooves us to rejoice and appreciate the gift of freedom and the gift of life direction which Hashem then provided. But, in some ways, even more importantly, remembering the Exodus gives us clarity regarding right and wrong. It reminds us that Hashem has the ultimate say about what is moral and what happens in this world.

For decades in Mitzrayim, the Mitzriyim enslaved and abused the Jews. The Mitzriyim felt that they were in the right. After all, “Might makes right.” If they could enslave and abuse, and they did enslave and abuse, then that is proof that they are right. The Mitzriyim suffered from what is today known as “group think.” They created a society in which persecution and abuse was the norm. Then, since that was what they were used to, it need not be questioned. In fact, when Moshe instructed Paroh in the name of Hashem to free the Jews, Paroh had a ready response. “Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him?” The Medrash explains that Paroh dramatically looked in his books of gods and announced that Hashem’s name was not present. It was as if to say, “If your Jewish G-d is not in my book, then He is irrelevant.” Truly, Paroh has his gods and goddesses. Paroh had his culture that affirmed his behavior. He even had the power, might, and wealth to enforce it.

Yet, as the Medrash tells us, Moshe responded, “Of course Hashem is not listed in your book of gods. That is not where the one Living G-d would be listed.” Thus, the process of redemption was not simply to free the Jews. The process of redemption was to mock the Mitzriyim and discredit their haughtiness. The purpose of the Makos (plagues) was to show Hashem’s mastery over creation and to illustrate that the world belongs to Hashem; He has the last word. Despite Paroh’s gods, power, culture, and his “legal” legislations against the Jews, he was still wrong. Hashem mocked him and his most powerful people rendering them powerless.

Hashem turned their god—the Nile—the source of their bounty, to blood. Hashem showed that he can turn water, the nurturer of life, into flowing blood symbolizing death. He showed how He could make fire and water cooperate in the form of hail to do the divine will. In fact, as the Medrash describes it, there was a personal aspect of mockery in that a Jew and a Mitzri drinking from the same jug would obtain two different liquids. The Jew would obtain water; the Mitzri would be stuck with blood. Unless the Mitzri would pay the Jew for the water, he had nothing to drink.

When we relive the Exodus and commemorate it each year on Pesach, each year, we have a mitzva to rejoice. We are obligated not only to recite the story but to appreciate Hashem’s description, “How I mocked the Mitzriyim.” (Shemos 10:2) Although in general, mockery is not the Jewish way (see Talmud, Megillah 25b) and sarcasm does not build in the direction that we wish to go, when the wicked regime is toppled, Hashem declares, “Note the mockery,” – note how I made a laughingstock of the Mitzriyim, we are obligated to take note. We remember how Hashem addressed the Mitzriyim’s haughty sense of righteousness and superiority. This mockery serves a purpose. It provides clarity that evil is wrong and will eventually meet its end.

Tangentially, I would like to point out that the mockery and rejoicing that is described here is very different than people who tell ethnic jokes. Ethnic jokes poke fun at people because of their origin. The Talmud forbids it by saying, “Why did Hashem create mankind to originate from one person? So that a person should not say, ‘My father is greater than your father.’” (Sanhedrin 37a) The mockery described regarding the Exodus is not about ethnicity or origin. It is about the toppling of evil.

Years ago, I was invited to a Shabbos meal where I was introduced to an immigrant who was also a guest at the meal. Despite the finest preparations of the hostess, and the most lofty spiritual aspirations of the host, the conversation was punctuated by ethnic jokes said by the immigrant about minorities other than his own. For me, it was a sad experience. Apparently, since he arrived in the United States he had been hanging out with people of crude nature, and he desperately wanted to fit in. So, comment after comment was about different ethnicities in the United States. I asked him, “We have so much good together: Tzitzis, Teffilin, Shabbos, kosher... Why do you need to make fun of others?” But unfortunately, the cruder elements of society reached this gentleman before the kiruv-outreach organizations did.

The Jewish people have no need to disparage others. We are not a see-saw people, needing to put others down so that we can be on top. On the contrary, our goal is to uplift people. Hashem instructed us, “I have placed you as a light unto the nations.” (Yeshaya 49) The joy of the Exodus is in the theme of redemption, and in the awareness that Hashem is with us in each generation.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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Bo – The Power of Trust

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

Throughout the plagues in Egypt, G-d provided clear demonstrations of His love for the Jewish people. Perhaps the clearest demonstration was during the final plague, the death of the firstborn. In one moment, every single Egyptian

household suffered a loss, some losing more than one family member. It is beyond us to imagine the sound of anguish that must have torn through the land of Egypt at that moment. Yet, in the Jewish section of Egypt, all was peaceful and there was absolute silence. As Moshe tells Pharaoh:

“And there will be a great scream in all of the land of Egypt, the likes of which there never was and the likes of which there won’t be again. And for all of the Children of Israel, no dog shall bark its tongue, from man unto animal, in order that you shall know that Hashem separates between the Egyptians and between the Jews.” (Shemos 11:6-7)

The Torah tells us that the very name of the holiday celebrating the Exodus and the sacrifice that was eaten at the Seder are called *Pesach* to highlight this moment, when G-d was *pasach* over the Jewish homes. The word, *Pesach*, is commonly translated as pass over or skip. (Hence the English name Passover.) However, Onkelos and Rash”i explain that there is another translation which highlights this point even more clearly. The word, *Pesach*, can also mean pity or mercy. The very name and essence of the holiday is the time of year when G-d showed us a special mercy, sparing us from any losses, while every Egyptian household was suffering.

This idea of G-d’s mercy for us is highlighted further by a verse we recite every year at the Seder:

“And I will pass through the land of Egypt on this night and I will smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt from man until beast and with all the gods of the Egyptians I will perform judgements, I am G-d.” (Shemos 12:12)

G-d Himself performed this plague and did not do so through any angel or emissary. Rabbeinu Bachye explains that this is a further expression of G-d’s love and concern for us. Angels are singular in their focus. When an angel is sent to carry out a plague of death, the angel views the world through the prism of strict justice. Were the Jews and Egyptians to be viewed through that prism, there would not be any clear distinction between the Jews and the Egyptians. As the Medrash tells us, during the Splitting of Sea the angels asked G-d why He was saving the Jews but drowning the Egyptians when both nations appeared to be equally immoral and sinful. However, G-d did choose to spare us and protect us from the plague, showing His special love for us. Therefore, G-d carried out the plague Himself, and did not send the angels, allowing us to be spared whether we were worthy or not.

Rabbeinu Bechaye continues and explains why we were deserving of such protection and mercy. The next verse tells us that Hashem would have mercy upon us when He saw the blood of the Pascal lamb on our doorposts. (Shemos 12:13) The lamb was one of the Egyptian gods. Although, we were no longer actively in slavery, we still viewed ourselves as slaves. As such, it was an act of extreme bravery to have every Jewish household slaughter a lamb and prepare it for a holiday feast. To make matters worse, the lamb was to be roasted whole, over an open flame, ensuring that the Egyptians were fully aware of what we were doing. We also took the blood of that lamb and smeared it over the doorposts and lintels of our homes. Our ancestors displayed a great faith and trust in G-d when they sacrificed that lamb and carried out all of its laws. It was this faith and trust which earned us G-d’s protection. As Rabbeinu Bechaye says one who acted with such faith, *“it is fitting that He should protect him from plague and destruction.”* Although, our ancestors were technically undeserving, once they displayed true faith and trust in G-d, they earned G-d’s love and His mercy.

It is this merit of trust in G-d which we highlight every year on Passover. Trusting G-d is a uniquely powerful merit which can ensure G-d’s love and protection no matter how unworthy we may otherwise be.

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The religious Zionist community has some soul-searching to do*

Blog by Rabbi Herzl Hefter **

How did it come to pass that more than 500,000 “nice and normative” religious Zionists awarded the “Religious Zionist” party with its 14 seats in the Knesset? If we are to remove this shameful stain (and I believe that coercive intolerance and racism are stains) from upon our community and indeed from upon our country, we have no choice but to cast our gaze inward and ask the difficult question: “Does the traditional religious Zionist ideology lead to the current shameful outcome?” And if it does, is that inevitable, or is there an alternative path for the religious Zionist community?

The Religious Zionist Party’s leaders have a xenophobic, hateful and anti-Zionistic ideology. I conclude this based on past declarations both before and since the elections. For example, in response to the 2015 incident in Duma in which a Palestinian family was murdered by a Jew, Betzalel Smotrich stated that the murders were not acts of terrorism and the authorities should treat it as a regular crime. In another instance, Smotrich compared the government’s evacuation of Amona to rape: “When a woman is raped, she suffers. What the government is doing to us is rape,” he said. Most outrageous of all was Smotrich’s defense of segregating Jewish and Arab mothers in maternity wards in Israel. He actually said, “My wife is not racist at all, but after she gives birth she wants to rest and doesn’t want to be bothered by the revelry of the Arab families.”

We are hearing voices from inside the list that condemn “progress” and call for despotic religious coercion and discrimination between Jews and non-Jews in the medical system (it is hard for me to imagine that most of the supporters of the Religious Zionist party endorse these views).

A final illustration of just how far the party has gone off course is the fact that a disciple of Meir Kahane, whose own racist views made him a political untouchable by the established religious Zionist leadership, featured front and center in these elections. Kahane infamously introduced racist anti-Arab legislation in the Knesset that eerily resembled the Nazi Nuremberg Laws.

To respond to the original question above, we need consider the core ideology with which the bulk of the normative religious Zionist community was indoctrinated: the triad of the People of Israel (*Am Yisrael*), in the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*) according to the Torah of Israel (*Torat Yisrael*).

When these seemingly unassailable values are signposts of individual conscience and commitment, they are innocuous enough, and may even be a source of inspiration and a call to altruistic action. However, assigning these values to a modern nation-state with aspirations to craft public and foreign policy is very dangerous, and that is what this “youth movement” ideology has unwittingly done. It betrays a total lack of understanding concerning the nature of the State of Israel as it was conceived of by its founders and indeed by the vast majority its inhabitants.

I wish to look at each of these principles separately and show how they stand in direct conflict to the Zionist project and undermine the State of Israel, but I must first establish why I, a religious Zionist myself, believing we answer to a “Higher Authority,” also believe the nature of the state should be determined by the original conception of its founders and the majority of its inhabitants, even though Israel’s secular institutions (like the Supreme Court and the Knesset) and its processes (like democracy, international law, and negotiated agreements) are all humanly legislated.

Rabbi Isaac HaLevi Herzog, the first chief rabbi of Israel, recognized clearly the nature of the state. Relating to freedom of worship and minority rights, such as the right to vote and be elected to office, he wrote,

The foundation of the state itself is a partnership of sorts. It is as if, through negotiations, we reached agreement with gentiles that they would allow us to establish a joint government which grants the Jews superiority in certain areas and that that state shall be called in our name.
(Constitution and Law in a Jewish State According to the Halacha, vol. 1, 20)

Rabbi Herzog understood that the foundation of modern Israeli sovereignty is not derived from God’s promise to Abraham or similar biblical narratives. He acknowledged that this modern state was different from the Israelite sovereignty (*Malkhut Yisrael*) in the days of David and Solomon, as well as the earlier state, when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan.

Rather, the sovereignty is legally *and halachically* based upon the outcome of the negotiations which the Zionist movement (as the recognized representatives of the Jewish people) conducted with international bodies. The status of the international agreement, Rabbi Herzog maintained, is that of treaty between the nations and Israel; a *brit* or a covenant – not that of biblical Israelite dominion.

Rabbi Yehuda Amital, the rosh yeshiva and founder of Yeshivat Har Etzion, shared this view. I often heard him invoke Maimonides' reading of the Israelite covenant with the Canaanites of Giv'on (see [Joshua 9](#)), which emphasizes the prohibition to violate covenants with gentile nations (Laws of Kings 6:5), in the context of Israel's obligation to guarantee human and civil rights to all its citizens. Rabbi Amital maintained that the guarantee protection of democratic rights to non-Jewish minorities in Israel's Declaration of Independence was halachically binding, as a covenant with the non-Jewish inhabitants of the country.

For those who prize halacha over and above international law, the upshot here is that the terms and conditions that the Zionist movement and the subsequent State of Israel agreed to, not only as obligations, but regarding the nature of the state itself, are halachically binding. That is why the intent of the founders and the outcome of the negotiations in which they engaged determine the nature of the country.

It is against this backdrop that I maintain that adherents of the “triad” ideology of the People, Torah, and Land of Israel, who see themselves as super-Zionist, actually undermine the Zionist project and the modern State of Israel.

The People of Israel

The assumption is that Israel, as a Jewish state, is the embodiment of the Jewish people, which makes Jews privileged members of that state. The sovereignty of the State of Israel is therefore “Jewish sovereignty,” and a continuation or even a reincarnation of the Kingdom of David and Solomon. But if the conflation of Israeli and Jewish sovereignty were true, then all Jews from Teaneck to Timbuctoo would automatically be Israeli citizens. The fact is that Israel, even with the Law of Return, which entitles Jews to become citizens of Israel, does not grant Jews the world over automatic citizenship. As much as the nature of the Jewishness of the State of Israel needs to be hammered out, these assumptions are simply false.

Belonging to a modern nation-state is based upon citizenship, and not on ethnic or tribal kinship. Calls to treat non-Jewish citizens of the state differently, therefore, undermines the nature of the state and paradoxically reverts back to the Diaspora reality, where Jewish peoplehood was organized around family and community. This is particularly ironic since the advocates of the “triad ideology” often condemn the ideologies that they deem insufficiently nationalistic as being “*galuti*,” – exilic, or suffering from an inferior (to their minds) Diaspora Jewry attitude.

The Land of Israel

The justification for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine was certainly based upon the historical bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel, as per the position established by the League of Nations at the 1922 San Remo Peace conference, but once the state was established, its borders were established according to the area over which it exercised sovereignty, and not historical affinity or religious/messianic aspirations.

In a sense, in 1948, the historical/religious dream called the Land of Israel was supplanted by the political reality of the State of Israel. As Jews, we certainly maintain our religious and cultural connections to the historic land of Israel but the political entity that the land might have once housed has given way to the state.

The Torah of Israel

Religious beliefs are intensely personal – between oneself, one's conscience, and God (if one believes in God). This awareness forms the basis of separation of church and state in democratic regimes to one degree or another. Government has no business legislating in that sacred space.

* * *

The fundamental misconception of the sovereignty issue has led to radically unbalanced swings in attitude towards the state, with very damaging consequences.

Its roots are in the opinion expressed by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (son of the first chief rabbi in Palestine prior to Israeli independence, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook): “*There is one primary, general thing: the state. It is all holiness and without flaw. It is a supreme heavenly manifestation of ‘He who returns the divine presence to Zion.’*” Rabbi Zvi Yehuda’s

mystical messianic fetishization of the state became the foundation of the uncompromising ideology and political agenda of Gush Emunim of the 1970s and '80s.

Yet this messianic veneration of the state — to the degree of idolization — was always destined to be smashed. The unforgiving reality of withdrawals, disengagements and compromises simply contradicted the fantasy. Rather than grapple with the challenges, however, the shards of the idol took the form of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and the paranoid “everyone is against us” mentality (this last characteristic becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy).

The Oslo Accords and the Disengagement from Gaza were perceived as retreats from the unalterable process of redemption (the late Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu proclaimed that the Disengagement would “never come to pass”) and deep despair and disappointment engendered a nativist right wing movement that is characterized by alienation from the state and hostility toward its institutions. It is not by chance that Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir enjoy greater common cause with the anti-Zionist Haredim than with secular Zionists.

An Alternative

But there is another way to think about our Jewish statehood, one that is firmly rooted in our identity as Jews. It also has the advantage of being suitable to the modern state in which we live.

Years ago, my wife and I visited the predominantly secular artist village of Ein Hod near Haifa. We were graciously invited to tea by the family of a well-known artist who owned a gallery there. I remember that we were trying to ascertain what common basis of identity we shared with our hosts. I asked them, “When I say ‘Avraham avinu,’ does that resonate for you? If I say ‘Har Habayit’ or ‘Ma’amat Har Sinai,’ does that mean anything to you?” They responded with a resounding yes. I walked away very encouraged about the fate of our common future, and I realized something important about our shared identity in the present: what made us related, part of extended family, is the shared stories we tell about ourselves. Just as when I get together with a cousin, we share the stories of our common aunts, uncles, and grandparents, so too when we gather with fellow Jews, we share common narratives.

What characterizes these narratives is their fluidity and non-coercive nature. Within different branches of the family, there are often differing versions of the same stories, and it is near impossible to determine which version is historically accurate. But, historical accuracy is not the point. Rather, at the core of the differing tales, we recognize that we are talking about the same grandparent or aunt. The significance of the stories lies not in their historical accuracy, but in how they constitute identity and a feeling of belonging.

The ground my wife and I shared with our hosts was the common narrative that constitutes shared culture and identity, and not our religious beliefs or commitment to ritual. That shared common ground shared by all Jews should be the basis of what constitutes the Jewishness of the state: identity based upon culture, not religion. Religion is intensely personal and needs to be kept far from the state’s authority. Culture, however, is profoundly constitutive of identity and is an appropriate expression of Jewishness for a modern democratic nation state.

I propose a transvaluation of “*the People of Israel in the Land of Israel according to the Torah of Israel*” into the “*Citizens of Israel, in the State of Israel, according to the sovereign laws of the state, as legislated by the democratically elected parliament of Israel.*”

Religious Zionists need to reconnect with the stories we tell about ourselves in the Bible, and the passionate ethos of the prophets. We need to remember and teach that the founding narrative of the Jewish people is that we were oppressed in Egypt so that we should possess empathic compassion for the strangers, the weak, and the downtrodden. We should feel the revulsion of the prophets in the face of corruption and decadence, and we should quake when we read their call for justice for the widow and the orphan.

If, and it is a big if, we can meet this challenge, we shall purge the stain from our community and our country and approach the aspiration of which we claim to be so worthy, to be a light unto the nations.

* Normally I avoid political topics. Rabbi Heftor requested that I reprint this blog. I am doing so as an experiment, and I invite reactions. As an American, I do not take or share my opinions on Israeli politics. As an Israeli Rabbi and Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Heftor may share his opinions regarding Israeli political positions. I am not inviting further political opinion positions here, but there are many venues open to those who wish to continue this discussion.

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Bo: Monotheistic Matzah and Protective Pesah

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

"They shall eat the meat on that night, roasted, with matzoth and bitter herbs."

The first ever lean burger is the central dish, at least verbally, at our Seder table. We all follow the Mishnaic maxim of Rabban Gamliel, which obligates us to pronounce the words מחרור נס – but there is something much deeper here. Each of the three ingredients symbolizes one aspect of the exile or the Exodus. The bitter herbs are self-explanatory, they remind us of our bitter life in Egypt, and the bitterness we have grown used to, unfortunately, in 2,000 years of exile. Things are a little more complicated with the Pesah – the pascal lamb – and the Matzah. The Mishnah explains that we eat Pesah because God skipped over the houses of the Israelites during the plague of the firstborn, and we eat Matzah because our forefathers did not have time to bake bread before leaving Egypt.

There are several problems with those two statements. Let us start with the Pesah. The traditional understanding is that the Israelites marked their doorposts with blood, to signal the Angel of Death that they were not Egyptians and therefore not included in the terrible verdict of losing their firstborn. We should wonder why was this mark necessary, when in all previous plagues similar distinctions were made without any actions taken by the Israelites [see Endnote 1]. If we turn to rabbinic literature, we will find a different problem. On one hand, the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael (Pis'ha, 11) states that the mark was necessary because:

When the destructive angel is given a license to kill, he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.

On the other hand, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Horayot, 3:1) declares that:

When the Merciful One came to redeem Israel from Egypt, he did not send a messenger or an angel, but rather did it Himself, as it is written: "and I shall pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will plague every firstborn in the land of Egypt."

If God is the one administrating the plague, as the verse indicates, why would He need the mark on the doors, and how can we explain the verse upon which the first Midrash is based (12:23)?

The Lord will pass over the door and not let the destroyer enter and smite your houses.

This verse suggests that God is traveling with a "destroyer," either an angel or the plague itself, and that when He sees the marked doorposts He will skip the house and move to the next one.

The answer to this confusion is that the root נס has another meaning in the bible, aside from "to pass over," and as we shall see, that meaning is the primary one. That meaning is "to protect," and the verb appears in this context in Isaiah 31:5; see full explanation in Endnote 2. We should read the narrative in Exodus as follows: "God commands the Israelites to designate and later sacrifice a lamb or a goat." The Israelites, who cannot shake away their "slave mentality," are afraid of Egyptian retaliation. In order to cure them of their deeply rooted submissiveness to the Egyptians, God commands them to do the Pesah sacrifice in the most defiant way possible.

They are commanded to purchase the sacrifice in advance. When they slaughter it, they are not allowed to eat the meat

raw or cooked in water, which they would have wanted to do so as not to provoke the Egyptians, but rather to roast it, thus producing a strong and distinctive aroma around their homes. They were also forbidden to break the bones of the animal. This prohibition was meant to prevent attempts of covering up the identity of the slaughtered animal. The most defiant act, however, was marking the lintel and the doorpost clearly with the blood of the sacrifice. All these actions were tantamount to placing bright neon arrows leading to the Israelite quarter, alongside signs saying *“Here lives an Israelite. I just killed and ate your idol. Come get me!”*

The Israelites were obviously terrified to do that, and God promised them that while He goes down to plague the Egyptians, He will also protect them from possible attacks by Egyptian mobs, who could have potentially blamed the Israelites, and not Pharaoh, for all their suffering. The verse cited above)12:23(should be read thus: *“God will protect your houses, and will not let the destroying Egyptians come into your houses and attack you.”*

The Pesah, then, is the symbol of the Divine protection provided to the Israelites in Egypt, but more than that, it stands for the great achievement of the enslaved people, who were finally able to take action and trust in God, overcoming their inherent fear of the Egyptians.

Now let us turn to the Matzah. In the Haggadah we read the well-known paragraph from the Haggadah which explains that the Matzah commemorates the moment of the Exodus. Our forefathers kneaded the dough, but before it had time to rise, God revealed Himself and redeemed them. This idea is supported by the biblical text: *“they baked the dough which they took out of Egypt into round Matzah because it has not risen, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, and were also unable to prepare provisions.”*

This verse, and its interpretation in the Haggadah, are very hard to understand. How could they have not been prepared? How were they taken by surprise? They were told beforehand that they will leave Egypt that night, and they were also told, in advance, that they are going to eat matzah:

“Speak to the Israelites, tell them: on the tenth of this month take a lamb... eat the meat on that night roasted, with matzah... you shall eat it with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hands... observe the [feast] of Matzoth, for I have taken your hosts out of Egypt on that very day”)12:1-3.

We learn from these verses that the reason for eating Matzah is legal and not coincidental. The Israelites knew of the exodus in advance and were even told to eat the Matzah fully dressed for a long journey. We know that they were forbidden to take bread because otherwise they would have packed enough of it for their future journey, as any good mother or boy scout would have done. Additionally, we “know” that matzah must be prepared within 18 minutes, so how is it possible that the dough taken out of Egypt did not become Hametz?

I would like to suggest, based on my research of the history of bread and of ancient Egypt, that the knowledge of bread making in antiquity was a secret, tightly kept by none others than the Egyptian priests. In normal conditions, a mixture of water and flour does not rise for almost a full day, for which most people have no time. In the past, only the priests knew that one could save some of the leavened dough and use it as starter dough to expedite the process.

That is why the messengers who came to visit Lot were treated by their host to Matzot)Gen 19:3(. It is also clear that in their previous stop, at Abraham’s tent, they ate Matzah as well, because when Abraham asks Sarah)18:6(to hurry up and make **צְבָבָה**, he is not referring to cakes but to flat, round, unleavened bread. It is the same term which the Torah will later use to describe the bread of the Exodus: **עֲמֹקֶת מַצּוֹת** – round, flat Matzah.

When a meal was served to Joseph’s brothers during their second visit in Egypt, they ate separately from the courtiers. The Torah explains)Gen. 43:32(:

the Egyptians cannot eat bread with the Hebrews because it is an abomination for Egypt.

The traditional translation of this verse is that the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, because the latter consumed meat, and such behavior was abominable to the Egyptians. But if this was the case, the Torah should have mentioned meat and not bread, or omit the type of food altogether. Rather, we should understand the word "abomination" as a euphemism, or opposite-language, for sacred. The Torah does not want to recognize the sacred status of bread in Egypt so it calls it an abomination. The verse should be translated thus: "*The Egyptians would not serve the Hebrews bread, because it was hallowed for them.*"

With this new understanding, we can return to the story of the Exodus. Both verses, the one which commands the Israelites in advance to eat Matzah, and the one which says that their doughs did not have time to rise, are correct. God told the Israelites before the Pesah that they will leave on the eve of the fifteenth and that they could only eat matzah, but that commandment referred only to the first day. They were allowed to eat leavened bread on the following days but were unable to do so, because they did not have enough time to let the doughs rise, and had to bake them on the run as flatbreads. Stocking on bread earlier was also impossible, because that meant asking the Egyptian priests for extra portions of bread. God did not command the people to ask for bread in the same manner they borrowed gold and silver, because the bread represented Egyptian priesthood and paganism.

I believe that for that reason Hametz is not allowed on the altar and in the Temple. The insistence on unleavened bread on sacred premises is meant to clearly mark the boundaries of monotheism, and to eschew elements of paganism. In conclusion, the symbolism of the three elements of Pesah is all-encompassing. The bitter herbs symbolize the suffering and hopelessness, the Pesah symbolizes hope, independence, and defiance of tyrants, and the matzah stands for the rejection of Egyptian paganism and adherence to monotheism. Together they delineate the trajectory of Jewish history, and encourage us in our constant journey towards a better world.

Shabbat Shalom

Endnotes:

1. The first three plagues, as well as the sixth and the eighth, are described as affecting only the Egyptians, and regarding the others we read clear statements: "I will set apart the region of Goshen, where my people dwell")Swarms of insects – עַרְבָּ – 8:18(; "The Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of the Egyptians")Pestilence – 9:4(; "Only in the region of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail")9:26(; "but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings")Darkness – 10:23(.
2. As hovering birds the Lord of Hosts will protect Jerusalem, He will protect and save, *נוֹז* and deliver. I left the verb *נוֹז* untranslated because it is the key for understanding the text in Isaiah and our story in Exodus. In Isaiah, there are four words which serve as synonyms for deliverance and protection, so this must be the meaning of *נוֹז* as well. All four roots have a common significance, which is to provide shelter or shade: *מִזְמָר* is to shelter with one's body, as a tree which gives shade in a garden – *מִזְמָרָה* means to cast a shadow with the body. *נוֹז* means to hop from one foot to another, so the area under the body is protected. *טַלְנָה* – is used to describe delivering a baby or a young animal, and in both cases the mother protects the newborn with her body.
3. Mishnah Pesahim 9:5

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

The First Mitzvah Given in Egypt Wasn't What You Think

By Rabbi Dan Margulies *

There is a well known and much discussed idea that the first mitzvah that Bnei Yisrael were commanded upon the Exodus from Egypt was the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh. This is based on a pasuk in this week's parsha: "This month shall be for

you the beginning of the months.”)Ex. 12:2(. The month of Nissan, the month of our freedom, would be the start of our calendrical cycle. This was popularized in the Midrash Tanchuma)Buber(Bereshit 1:11 and the first commentary by Rashi on the Chumash.

I would like to suggest and share with you a thought which runs counter to this idea, while trying to shed some light on a deep ethical problem in the Torah and to provide some manner of resolution and support for the Torah’s structure.

In last week’s parsha, Moshe and Aharon confront Pharaoh and Bnei Yisrael before the plagues of Egypt begin, which conclude this week with the tenth and final plague and Yetziat Mitzrayim: *“Hashem commands Moshe and Aharon to go to Pharaoh and to the children of Israel”*)Ex. 6:13(. In the third chapter of Masechet Rosh Hashanah in the Talmud Yerushalmi, Rabbi Shmuel ben Rav Yitzhak asks what does it mean that God commanded them to approach Pharaoh and to approach Bnei Yisrael? What were they commanded? Were they actually given a command at that moment? What was this mitzvah that Moshe and Aharon were given, the first mitzvah Bnei Yisrael were given in the beginnings of the Exodus?

According to the suggestion from the Talmud Yerushalmi, it was the mitzvah to free slaves, shiluach avadim, which appears in several places throughout the Torah: freeing a Hebrew slave after six years of labor, freeing a Hebrew slave on the Jubilee year, what support and provisions a person has to give a Hebrew slave upon their release, etc. The suggestion is that at the moment of the Exodus, at the moment of being freed from slavery, Bnei Yisrael were commanded regarding how they should treat their future slaves. Now, this should be shocking to us. How could a people who suffered in slavery ever even contemplate or entertain the notion of holding slaves themselves?

The Torah, for whatever reason, temporarily accommodated the institution of slavery even among Bnei Yisrael. But it becomes clear from this framing, as is explicated by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kasher in an essay in his encyclopedic work Torah Shleimah, that this idea from the Talmud Yerushalmi means that at its core the national destiny of the Jewish people, the mission of the Torah for our nation and for the world, is in contrast to the idea of slavery. It is to push against the institution of slavery, to help bring humanity to the point where the very idea of one person owning another is seen as an inherent contradiction; is seen as a fundamental breach of basic human ethics.

Rav Kasher develops this idea further in the aforementioned essay)which I translated recently(. Fundamentally, I think this at least helps give us a sense that our rabbis, Chazal, were aware of the ethical challenges posed by the fact that the Torah does allow slavery, even if it is very mitigated and limited compared to slavery practiced in other societies, and with legal redress for slaves as we will see]in three weeks[in parsha Mishpatim.

The message for a nation of freed slaves should be to strive for freedom in the world. Rav Kasher connects this idea to the statement of Hillel found in Massechet Shabbat: the core ethical principle of the Torah is what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow)Shab. 31a(. A person has to act with basic decency and basic ethics orienting human behavior. In the 20th century Rav Kasher lamented, and it is true even into the 21st, how terrible and painful it is that so many people continue to struggle with how to treat other people appropriately with basic decency — with a recognition and appreciation of the humanity of the other.

If this really was the first mitzvah commanded to Bnei Yisrael upon the Exodus from Egypt, then this is the touchstone, the cornerstone of the revelation of God’s law and God’s guide for humanity in the Torah. That means those underlying principles: How do we recognize the humanity of others, how do we implement that in our lives, and how do we make sure to express it in all of our actions, is something that has to be at the core of our understanding of Torah.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Assistant Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale and Co-Director of Community Learning at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah)2017(.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/01/the-first-mitzvah-given-in-egypt-wasnt-what-you-think/>

Shavuon Bo

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Great news everybody!

I just heard there's a fantastic new piece of real estate on the NZ market. It's located at 108 Greys Avenue [in Auckland], and it's a remarkable piece of architecture with high ceilings, a central circular courtyard, and a large chandelier.

It's not like the current owners dislike the building. Far from it. So many milestones, memories, and good times have been had there, and all who go in marvel at its beauty. Whatever the reason they have for leaving, it's not because the structure itself is deficient or unusable. So quickly come and get your offer in!

I wrote the above text for the general public. But now let me address the current owners, all of you at the AHC. The most important part of a community is the people. But that also means that if the people chose to come together countless times in a certain place, remodeled and decorated it, ate all kinds of meals and recited all kinds of prayers in it, that place becomes special. It's why Mount Moriah maintains its holiness even though the Beit Hamikdash does not currently stand there.

So Greys Avenue is special. I've only been here three months, and I love the building. I can't imagine how the people who have been here for decades must feel. I also can't imagine the sheer number of conversations that happened, keep happening, and will continue to happen just to make sure everyone's concerns are addressed and everything works at the new site.

If I were to imagine all the talks that have happened to get to this moment as a conversation between Moses and Pharaoh about letting Israel go, I think it would be something like this:

"It's such a beautiful building here at Greys Avenue. Do we have to leave it? Maybe just the men can go to Remuera, and the women can stay here?"

"Um. Not a chance. If we're going then everyone goes"

"Ok. But maybe all the people can go and our possessions stay just to keep a presence."

"Nope, we have to move our mountains of stuff too. It all goes"

"Unacceptable. I don't agree!"

But then two days later, the first person speaking above sends someone to knock on the door at midnight and agrees to let them go.

And that's something to remember. Even though we leave behind a beautiful building for another one, we're all going together. Men, women, children, possessions, and our pets. And if we're all together, we'll be ok wherever we are.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Auckland, New Zealand. AHC is in the process of moving from Greys Avenue in Auckland to a new location in Remuera.

Rav Kook Torah

Bo: The Exodus and Tefillin

The Torah commands us to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt by wearing tefillin (phylacteries) on the arm and head.

“These words will be for a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes, so that God’s Torah will be in your mouth; for God brought you out of Egypt with a strong arm.”)Exod. 13:9(

What is the connection between tefillin and the Exodus? How does wearing tefillin ensure that the Torah will be “in our mouths”?

An Outstretched Arm

Superficially, the redemption from Egypt was a one-time historical event, forging a potent memory in the collective consciousness of the Jewish people and all of humanity. But if we listen carefully to our inner soul, we will recognize that the Exodus is truly a continuous, ongoing act. The Divine miracles and signs that took place in Egypt launched the continual revelation of the hand of God, openly and publicly, on the stage of world history. The Exodus was an outburst of Divine light, potent and vibrant, in all realms of the universe, and its impact continues to resonate throughout the ages.

Before wrapping tefillin on the arm, we reflect that this mitzvah commemorates God’s zero'a netuya, His “outstretched arm” with which the Israelites were extracted from Egypt. What does this metaphor mean?

The word “arm”)zero'a(comes from the root zera, meaning “seed.” The Divine redemption of Israel in Egypt was a holy seed, planted at that point in time. That wondrous event initiated the dissemination of its message, unhindered and uninterrupted, over the generations. As we bind the tefillin to our arms, we are reminded of God’s “outstretched arm,” the inner Godliness that continually develops and perfects the world, until it elevates its treasures of life to the pinnacle of Divine fulfillment.

A Strong Arm

The Torah uses a second metaphor to describe the Exodus: the yad chazakah, God’s “strong arm.” This phrase indicates a second, deeper connection between the mitzvah of tefillin and the Exodus. The liberation from Egyptian bondage served to combat the debasement of life, which threatened to drown humanity in the depths of its crassness and vulgarity. Since the materialistic side of life is so compelling, it was necessary for God to reveal a “strong arm” to overcome our base nature, and allow the light of our inner holiness to shine from within.

The holy act of fastening the tefillin to the arm and head helps us transform the coarse and profane aspects of life into strength and vitality, revealing an inner life beautiful in its holiness.

To triumph over humanity’s coarseness, then at its peak in the contaminated culture of Egypt, required God’s “strong arm.” We similarly need to make a strong effort so that the Torah will remain in our minds and hearts. Tefillin are called a ‘sign’ and a ‘reminder,’ for they evoke the wondrous signs and powerful miracles of our release from Egyptian slavery. We must engrave the legacy of those miracles on all aspects of life: deed, emotion, and thought. Thus we bind these memories to our hand, heart, and mind, and transform our coarse nature to a holy one. Then the Torah will naturally be “in your mouth,” in the thoughts and reflections of the heart.

Through this powerful mitzvah, engaging both the arm)our actions(and the eye)our outlook and thoughts(, we continue the Divine process that God initiated in Egypt with a “strong arm.”

)Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 118-120. Adapted from Olat Re’iyah vol. I, pp. 26-27,39.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/BO64.htm>

The Far Horizon (Vaera 5774, 5781)

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

To gain insight into the unique leadership lesson of this week's parsha, I often ask an audience to perform a thought-experiment. Imagine you are the leader of a people that is enslaved and oppressed, that has suffered exile for more than two centuries. Now, after a series of miracles, it is about to go free. You assemble them and rise to address them. They are waiting expectantly for your words. This is a defining moment they will never forget. What will you speak about?

Most people answer: freedom. That was Abraham Lincoln's decision in the Gettysburg Address when he invoked the memory of "a new nation, conceived in liberty," and looked forward to "a new birth of freedom."]1[Some suggest that they would inspire the people by talking about the destination that lay ahead, the "land flowing with milk and honey." Yet others say they would warn the people of the dangers and challenges that they would encounter on what Nelson Mandela called "the long walk to freedom."]2[

Any of these would have been the great speech of a great leader. Guided by God, Moses did none of these things. That is what made him a unique leader. If you examine the text in parshat Bo you will see that three times he reverted to the same theme: children, education and the distant future.

And when your children ask you, "What do you mean by this rite?" you shall say,

"It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses." Ex. 12:26-27

And you shall explain to your child on that day, "It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt." Ex. 13:8

And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, "What does this mean?" you shall say to him, "It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage."
Ex. 13:14

It is one of the most counter-intuitive acts in the history of leadership. Moses did not speak about today or tomorrow. He spoke about the distant future and the duty of parents to educate their children. He even hinted – as Jewish tradition understood – that we should encourage our children to ask questions, so that the handing on of the Jewish heritage would be not a matter of rote learning but of active dialogue between parents and children.

So Jews became the only people in history to predicate their very survival on education. The most sacred duty of parents was to teach their children. Pesach itself became an ongoing seminar in the handing on of memory. Judaism became the religion whose heroes were teachers and whose passion was study and the life of the mind. The Mesopotamians built ziggurats. The Egyptians built pyramids. The Greeks built the Parthenon. The Romans built the Coliseum. Jews built schools. That is why they alone, of all the civilisations of the ancient world are still alive and strong, still continuing their ancestors' vocation, their heritage intact and undiminished.

Moses' insight was profound. He knew that you cannot change the world by externalities alone, by monumental architecture, or armies and empires, or the use of force and power. How many empires have come and gone while the human condition remains untransformed and unredeemed?

There is only one way to change the world, and that is by education. You have to teach children the importance of justice, righteousness, kindness and compassion. You have to teach them that freedom can only be sustained by the laws and habits of self-restraint. You have continually to remind them of the lessons of history, "*We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt*," because those who forget the bitterness of slavery eventually lose the commitment and courage to fight for freedom. And you have to empower children to ask, challenge and argue. You have to respect them if they are to respect the values you wish them to embrace.

This is a lesson most cultures still have not learned after more than three thousand years. Revolutions, protests and civil wars still take place, encouraging people to think that removing a tyrant or having a democratic election will end corruption, create freedom, and lead to justice and the rule of law – and still people are surprised and disappointed when it does not happen. All that happens is a change of faces in the corridors of power.

In one of the great speeches of the twentieth century, a distinguished American justice, Judge Learned Hand, said:

I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it. Learned Hand, "The Spirit of Liberty" – speech at "I Am an American Day" ceremony, Central Park, New York City)21 May 1944(.

What God taught Moses was that the real challenge does not lie in gaining freedom; it lies in sustaining it, keeping the spirit of liberty alive in the hearts of successive generations. That can only be done through a sustained process of education. Nor is this something that can be delegated away to teachers and schools. Some of it has to take place within the family, at home, and with the sacred obligation that comes from religious duty. No one ever saw this more clearly than Moses, and only because of his teachings have Jews and Judaism survived.

What makes leaders great is that they think ahead, worrying not about tomorrow but about next year, or the next decade, or the next generation. In one of his finest speeches, Robert F. Kennedy spoke of the power of leaders to transform the world when they have a clear vision of a possible future:

Some believe there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills — against misery, against ignorance, or injustice and violence. Yet many of the world's great movements, of thought and action, have flowed from the work of a single man. A young monk began the Protestant reformation, a young general extended an empire from Macedonia to the borders of the earth, and a young woman reclaimed the territory of France. It was a young Italian explorer who discovered the New World, and 32 year old Thomas Jefferson who proclaimed that all men are created equal. 'Give me a place to stand,' said Archimedes, 'and I will move the world.' These men moved the world, and so can we all. The Poynter Institute, *The Kennedys: America's Front Page Family*)Kansas City, Mo.: Andrews McMeel, 2010(, 112.

Visionary leadership forms the text and texture of Judaism. It was the book of Proverbs that said, "Without a vision *Ychazzon*[the people perish.]")Prov. 29:18(. That vision in the minds of the Prophets was always of a long-term future. God told Ezekiel that a Prophet is a watchman, one who climbs to a high vantage-point and so can see the danger in the distance, before anyone else is aware of it at ground level)Ezek. 33:1-6(. The Sages said, "Who is wise? One who sees the long-term consequences *Yha-nolad*[.]")3[Two of the greatest leaders of the twentieth century, Churchill and Ben Gurion, were also distinguished historians. Knowing the past, they could anticipate the future. They were like Chess Masters who, because they have studied thousands of games, recognise almost immediately the dangers and possibilities in any configuration of the pieces on the board. They know what will happen if you make this move or that.

If you want to be a great leader in any field, from Prime Minister to parent, it is essential to think long-term. Never choose the easy option because it is simple or fast or yields immediate satisfaction. You will pay a high price in the end.

Moses was the greatest leader because he thought further ahead than anyone else. He knew that real change in human behaviour is the work of many generations. Therefore we must place as our highest priority educating our children in our ideals so that what we begin they will continue until the world changes because we have changed. He knew that if you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for a decade, plant a tree. If you plan for posterity, educate a child.]4[Moses' lesson, thirty-three centuries old, is still compelling today.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address")Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Penn., Nov. 19, 1863(.

]2[Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*)Back Bay Books, 1995(.

]3[Tamid 32a.

]4[A statement attributed to Confucius.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How did Jewish education ensure Jewish survival?
2. Which do you think has a greater influence on children, what they learn at home or what they learn at school?
3. What are the current issues for which you believe your leaders need to begin making long-term plans?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bo/the-far-horizon/> 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.

Why the Rush to Leave Egypt?

By Yossi Goldman * © Chabad 2023

Do you know why we eat matzah on Passover? It all started back in Egypt.

“And on that very day all the legions of G d left Egypt.”¹ Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains: “*When the time of redemption arrived, G d did not delay the Exodus even for as much as the blink of an eye.*”

Indeed, they left Egypt in haste.

“They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven out of Egypt and they could not delay.”²

Why couldn’t they wait for the dough to rise?

Do you know how long it takes for dough to rise? Over the years, my wife has taught many hundreds — perhaps even thousands — of women to bake challah. Her home-baked challah is legendary in our community. So one day I asked her: How long does it take for dough to rise? About three or four hours, she said. *Jed. Note:* Without a starter with essential yeast, dough needs nearly a full day to rise — see Dvar Torah above by Rabbi Haim Ovadia.[

I don’t get it. Our ancestors had spent 210 years in Egypt. They couldn’t wait a few more hours? Why the mad rush?

Conventional thinking suggests that they needed to hurry before the Egyptians changed their minds and reneged on their offer of freedom.

Really? After suffering through 10 devastating plagues, being wiped out physically, financially, and emotionally, would the Egyptians really want still more trouble? Was that a realistic concern?

Surely they were so badly beaten that they couldn’t wait to say “good riddance” to those who had made their lives so miserable. Pharaoh himself was a broken man with no more appetite for resistance. He’d lost his own son in the final devastating plague.

So the question remains, why the rush?

The Rebbe offers a novel approach to this difficulty,³ arguing that it wasn't the Egyptians who were the problem — it was us!

G d wasn't concerned that the Egyptians might have gone back on their offer of liberation, but that the Israelites themselves might have had a change of heart.

“Better the devil you know ...” goes the old proverb. It must have been quite a leap of faith for the longtime slaves to leave the infrastructure of Egypt and head out into an unknown wilderness.

I can just imagine their thinking: Here, we have a roof over our heads. True, there are no luxuries, but we do get fed every day. What will we have in the wilderness? No food, no shelter, not even water. We'd have to be crazy to leave an established country and wander off into uncharted territory. Even with all our problems, are we not better off just staying here in Egypt?

Indeed, when they reached the Red Sea and realized they were trapped, there were many who clamored to return to Egypt. Better to be a living slave than a dead free man, they reasoned.

So, when the moment of the Exodus arrived, it was a dramatic window of opportunity. Had they not grasped it with both hands at that very moment, it's possible that these and other doubts might have crept in and delayed the whole experience. Thank G d, they did seize the opportunity.

Frankly, it can happen to all of us. We all get comfortable in our little slaveries, and daily drudgeries. They might not be ideal, but they are far less intimidating than the challenges that come with new opportunities. There's an old Yiddish proverb that expresses this idea: *“May we never get used to what we can get used to.”* With the passage of time, we become weary, worn down, and what was previously intolerable becomes all too acceptable.

We've all experienced missed opportunities at various points in our lives. The house we could have bought, the stocks we could have sold, even the man or woman we could have married. But we hesitated, and as another old proverb goes, *“He who hesitates is lost.”*

In our Jewish lives, too, we should take advantage of the many opportunities now available to us that we may not have had when we were younger. Regular Torah study, more time in the synagogue, a new mitzvah. There is so much on offer today that we easily can make up for any lost opportunities.

It takes courage to grasp the moment and embrace new visions and horizons. When opportunity knocks, let's not miss our chance.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 12:41.
2. Ibid verse 39.
3. Pastoral letter for Pesach 1963.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5778738/jewish/Why-the-Rush-to-Leave-Egypt.htm

Bo: Black Goat, White Sheep
by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Black Goat, White Sheep

Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Get or purchase for your families lambs or kids and slaughter the Passover offering.”)Ex. 12:21(

Goats are usually black, while sheep are typically white. The dark goat, therefore, evokes the imagery of a life devoid of Divine light, i.e., the former life of a penitent sinner. In contrast, the white, unassertive sheep evokes the imagery of a pure life unsullied by sin and undefiled by a skewed ego, i.e., the life of a righteous person.

The fact that both sheep or goats may be used for the Passover offering reflects the fact that this offering was required of every Jew, regardless of his or her spiritual status. Whether we are righteous or on the way to becoming righteous, we all have to internalize the message of the Exodus from Egypt and be redeemed from the limitations that prevent us from progressing in our relationship with G-d.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Story We Tell About Ourselves

Sometimes others know us better than we know ourselves. In the year 2000, a British Jewish research institute came up with a proposal that Jews in Britain be redefined as an ethnic group and not as a religious community. It was a non-Jewish journalist, Andrew Marr, who stated what should have been obvious. He said: "All this is shallow water, and the further in you wade, the shallower it gets."

It is what he wrote next that I found inspirational: "The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us. They have had their Bible, one of the great imaginative works of the human spirit. They have been victim of the worst modernity can do, a mirror for Western madness. Above all they have had the story of their cultural and genetic survival from the Roman Empire to the 2000s, weaving and thriving amid uncomprehending, hostile European tribes."^[1]

The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us. I love that testimony. And indeed, from early on, storytelling has been central to the Jewish tradition. Every culture has its stories. (The late Elie Wiesel once said, "God created man because God loves stories"). Almost certainly, the tradition goes back to the days when our ancestors were hunter-gatherers telling stories around the campfire at night. We are the storytelling animal.

But what is truly remarkable is the way in which, in this week's parsha, on the brink of the Exodus, Moses three times tells the Israelites how they are to tell the story to their children in future generations.

When your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.' (Ex. 12:26-27)

On that day tell your child, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Ex. 13:8)

"In days to come, when your child asks you, 'What does this mean?' say, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.' (Ex. 13:14)

The Israelites had not yet left Egypt, and yet already Moses was telling them how to tell the story. That is the extraordinary fact. Why so? Why this obsession with storytelling?

The simplest answer is that we are the story we tell about ourselves.^[2] There is an intrinsic, perhaps necessary, link between narrative and

identity. In the words of the thinker who did more than most to place this idea at the centre of contemporary thought, Alasdair MacIntyre, "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal."^[3] We come to know who we are by discovering of which story or stories we are a part.

Jerome Bruner has persuasively argued that narrative is central to the construction of meaning, and meaning is what makes the human condition human.^[4] No computer needs to be persuaded of its purpose in life before it does what it is supposed to do. Genes need no motivational encouragement. No virus needs a coach. We do not have to enter their mindset to understand what they do and how they do it, because they do not have a mindset to enter. But humans do. We act in the present because of things we did or that happened to us in the past, and in order to realise a sought-for future. Even minimally to explain what we are doing is already to tell a story. Take three people eating salad in a restaurant, one because he needs to lose weight, the second because she's a principled vegetarian, the third because of religious dietary laws. These are three outwardly similar acts, but they belong to different stories and they have different meanings for the people involved.

Why though storytelling and the Exodus?

One of the most powerful passages I have ever read on the nature of Jewish existence is contained in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1772). This is an unlikely place to find insight on the Jewish condition, but it is there.

Rousseau is talking about the greatest of political leaders. First of these, he says, was Moses who "formed and executed the astonishing enterprise of instituting as a national body a swarm of wretched fugitives who had no arts, no weapons, no talents, no virtues, no courage, and who, since they had not an inch of territory of their own, were a troop of strangers upon the face of the earth."

Moses, he says, "dared to make out of this wandering and servile troop a body politic, a free people, and while it wandered in the wilderness without so much as a stone on which to rest its head, gave it the lasting institution, proof against time, fortune and conquerors, which 5000 years have not been able to destroy or even to weaken." This singular nation, he says, so often subjugated and scattered, "has nevertheless maintained itself down to our days, scattered among the other nations without ever merging with them."^[5]

Moses' genius, he says, lay in the nature of the laws that kept Jews as a people apart. But that is only half the story. The other half lies in this week's parsha, in the institution of storytelling as a fundamental religious duty, recalling and re-enacting the events of the Exodus every year, and in particular, making children central to the story. Noting that in three of the four storytelling passages (three in our parsha, the fourth in *Va'etchanan*) children are referred to as asking questions, the Sages held that the narrative of Seder night should be told in response to a question asked by a child wherever possible. If we are the story we tell about ourselves, then as long as we never lose the story, we will never lose our identity.

This idea found expression some years ago in a fascinating encounter. Tibet has been governed by the Chinese since 1950. During the 1959 uprising, the Dalai Lama, his life in danger, fled to Dharamsala in India where he and many of his followers have lived ever since. Realising that their stay in exile might be prolonged, in 1992 he decided to ask Jews, whom he regarded as the world's experts in maintaining identity in exile, for advice. What, he wanted to know, was the secret? The story of that week-long encounter has been told by Roger Kamenetz in his book, *The Jew in the Lotus*.^[6] One of the things they told him was the importance of memory and storytelling in keeping a people's culture and identity alive. They spoke about Pesach and the Seder service in particular. So in 1997 Rabbis and American dignitaries held a special Seder service in Washington DC with the Dalai Lama. He wrote this to the participants:

"In our dialogue with Rabbis and Jewish scholars, the Tibetan people have learned about the secrets of Jewish spiritual survival in exile: one secret is the Passover Seder. Through it for 2000 years, even in very difficult times, Jewish people remember their liberation from slavery to freedom and this has brought you hope in times of difficulty. We are grateful to our Jewish brothers and sisters for adding to their celebration of freedom the thought of freedom for the Tibetan people."

Cultures are shaped by the range of stories to which they give rise. Some of these have a special role in shaping the self-understanding of those who tell them. We call them master-narratives. They are about large, ongoing groups of people: the tribe, the nation, the

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civilisation. They hold the group together horizontally across space and vertically across time, giving it a shared identity handed on across the generations.

None has been more powerful than the Exodus story, whose frame and context is set out in our parsha. It gave Jews the most tenacious identity ever held by a nation. In the eras of oppression, it gave hope of freedom. At times of exile, it promised return. It told two hundred generations of Jewish children who they were and of what story they were a part. It became the world's master-narrative of liberty, adopted by an astonishing variety of groups, from Puritans in the 17th century to African-Americans in the 19th and to Tibetan Buddhists today.

I believe that I am a character in our people's story, with my own chapter to write, and so are we all. To be a Jew is to see yourself as part of that story, to make it live in our time, and to do your best to hand it on to those who will come after us.

[1] Andrew Marr, *The Observer*, Sunday 14 May, 2000.

[2] See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, London, Duckworth, 1981; Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths And The Making Of The Self*, New York, Guilford Press, 1997.

[3] MacIntyre, op. cit., 201.

[4] Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Harvard University Press, 1986.

[5] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and other later political writings*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, 180.

[6] Roger Kamanetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*, HarperOne, 2007.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And it came to pass that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, to the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the cattle." (Exodus 12:29)

Why is the killing of the firstborn the final and most significant plague? True, it brought death into every household, rattling Egypt at its foundations, but certainly the plagues of hail, or fire in blocks of ice falling from the sky, or total, crippling darkness for three days and nights, were not inconsequential demonstrations of God's power. Any of these plagues could have dealt a knockout punch to the most cold-hearted of dictators. What, then, is it about the killing of the firstborn that proved most effective?

I suggest that it is because it destroyed a certain institution of ancient culture that God found objectionable: primogeniture, the primacy and veneration of the firstborn. Turning to the earliest pages of Genesis, we find the theme of the firstborn early in the Torah, when sibling rivalry between Cain and Abel is translated into the rejection and acceptance of their respective sacrifices to

God: the hypocritical gift of the firstborn Cain is rejected, while the more sincere offering of the younger Abel is accepted.

Part of Cain's vexation is due to the fact that he sees his firstborn status as having been overlooked – and indeed it was, since sincerity of devotion is ultimately more important than order of birth.

Thus, Abraham's eldest son, Ishmael, must step aside for the younger Isaac because the former is a metzahet (Genesis 21:9) – a scouter and an adulterer – which renders him unfit for the birthright.

Of Isaac's two sons, Esau must give way to Jacob, since the former scorned the birthright, first by selling it for a mess of pottage, and then by taking Hittite wives.

Jacob also has a firstborn, Reuben, but having "moved" his father's bed – either an attempt to determine with whom his father would sleep after the death of Rachel, or a euphemism for illicit relations with his father's concubine – he is deemed unfit. In his place, leadership passes to Judah and Joseph.

With the birth of the Jewish People in the book of Exodus, a revolutionary concept emerges on the world stage: the prevailing rule of the firstborn rapidly comes to an end. Indeed, the essence of the Egyptian-Hebrew confrontation boils down to the idea that if you're born an Egyptian, you have the right to enslave, and if you're born a Hebrew, you become a slave.

Slavery was not exclusive to Egypt. The Greeks and the Romans believed that anyone born into a race other than theirs was barbaric, and that they had the moral right to enslave all barbarians.

Indeed, less than 150 years ago, a bloody war was fought in the United States because nearly half the country chose secession rather than adhering to the law that condemned slavery as illegal. And less than 100 years ago, the free world was threatened by a nation that believed in the Aryan right to dominate and exterminate.

From the moment it began its ascent in the world, Judaism message has been that an individual's merits are more important than an individual's genealogy. Therefore, the killing of the firstborn of the Egyptians not only strikes terror in the heart of every household member, it also tolls the death knell for the revered institution of the firstborn.

Many generations later, following the destruction of the Second Commonwealth, and in the absence of a priesthood and monarchy, the Rabbinic Sages emerged as the leaders of the Jewish People. These scholars taught – and demonstrated – the principle of meritocracy: one becomes a leader through study and devotion, not as a result of "yichus" (ancestry).

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A prime example of this can be found in the teaching: "A mamzer [person born of adultery or incest] who is a Torah scholar takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest" (Mishna, Horayot 3:8).

The Talmud expands this concept: "You shall therefore observe My statutes, and My ordinances, which if a human [adam] does, he shall live by them..." (Leviticus 18:5). Rabbi Meir says that the Torah's choice of the word "human" [adam] means that a non-Jew who observes the Torah and mitzvot is as great as the High Priest (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 59a).

This revolutionary – and fundamentally democratic – message is one of Judaism's great lessons for humanity. This concept, so central to the idea of the Exodus, can and should empower all people, Jews and non-Jews alike, to throw off their shackles of genealogy and birth order, and attempt to attain true freedom. Ultimately, only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible.

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

"Tell Me A Story"

Since back in early autumn, when we began reading the Book of Genesis in the synagogue, we have been reading one long story. It has been a very dramatic story, extending over many centuries. It began with the creation of man, and proceeded with the narrative of the transformation of a small family into a large nation.

For the past several weeks, the plot has thickened. That nation became cruelly enslaved. In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16), the story takes a suspenseful turn. We sense that the redemption from slavery is imminent. But before redemption begins, the narrative is interrupted.

The Torah shifts gears. It is no longer a story that we hear, but a set of God given commands: "This month... shall be the first of the months of the year for you. Each member of the community shall take a lamb... Your lamb shall be without blemish... You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month and... slaughter it at twilight, eat the flesh that same night... not eat any of it raw... not leave any of it over until morning." (Exodus 12:1-10)

Whereas the novice reader of the Torah is jolted by this drastic transition from the narrative mode to a set of laws, Rashi and Ramban were not surprised by this sudden shift. They wondered why the Torah would focus at such length on storytelling and not proceed directly to this passage of ritual law.

"Is the Torah a story book?" they ask. "Is it not, rather, a set of instructions for ritual and ethical behavior?" They each answer these

questions differently, but both conclude that much of the Torah, perhaps even most of it, is one long and fascinating story.

Why does a book designed to teach the reader about proper religious belief and practice take the form of a narrative?

I think that the reason is quite simple. The Torah recognizes the power of the story to influence the minds and hearts of men. An author who wishes to profoundly impact his reader will do well to choose the narrative mode over other modes of communication. In secular terms, a good novel is more powerful than the best law book.

Taking note of this important lesson enables us to understand an otherwise puzzling phenomenon. Despite the fact that the Exodus from Egypt was, and remains, the central experience of Jewish history, there were at least two Jews who alive at the time of the Exodus who did not experience it directly. I refer to Gershom and Eliezer, the two sons of Moses. They remained behind in Midian when Moses struggled with Pharaoh. They did not witness the ten plagues. They missed the thrilling flight from Egyptian bondage. They did not personally experience the wondrous miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea. They were brought back to Moses by their maternal grandfather Yitro, so it is not at all clear whether they were even present at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given.

The early twentieth century Chassidic master, Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz, wonders about this puzzling fact. His answer is a most instructive one: God wanted Moses to tell his sons the story of the Exodus. He wanted Moses to be the storyteller par excellence, the one who would model storytelling for every subsequent father in Jewish history. Gershom and Eliezer were denied witnessing the Exodus because God wanted them to serve as the first Jewish children who would only hear its story; who would not know the real-life experience of the Exodus but only hear its narrative told to them by their father.

This, teaches the Belzer Rebbe, is the simple meaning of the verse in this week's Torah portion: "...So that you (singular in the Hebrew) may tell the story, in the ears of your son and son's son, of how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 10:2). The singular "you" at the beginning of the verse, explains the Rebbe, refers to Moses himself. He is to tell the story to each of his sons individually, because he is the only father then alive whose sons would hear the story of the Exodus second hand. In this manner, Moses set the stage for all subsequent Jewish fathers. A Jewish father must be a storyteller!

A good story's power is familiar to all of us. The secret of the Chassidic movement's

success was not its texts or teachings, but the inspiring stories it told to its early adherents. To this day, Chassidim maintain the tradition of storytelling in their melava malka, or post-Shabbat repast, every week.

Personally, I long ago became familiar with an approach to psychotherapy called narrative therapy, in which the patient uses his or her own personal narrative as the basis for curative change. My favorite mentor would emphasize that when a therapist first encounters a patient, his opening question should not be, "What's your problem," but rather, "Please tell me your story."

As I reflect upon those of my teachers who left a lasting impression upon me, I recall the fact that they all told stories. Indeed, I remember those stories better than the academic lessons they taught me.

I remember a youth group leader named Shmuli who told us stories and gave us cupcakes every Shabbat afternoon. I later learned that he obtained those stories from an early Chabad publication entitled *Talks and Tales*. Those tales left me with a taste for religion that even surpassed the taste of those delicious cupcakes.

I remember my seventh-grade teacher who read us the stories of William Saroyan at the end of each class, laying the foundation for my abiding love of literature. And, of course, there were the stories my unforgettable Talmud teacher told us about the heroes of rabbinic history, which ultimately inspired me to pursue a career in the rabbinate.

Frankly, I fear that storytelling is becoming a lost art with the rapid change of our modes of communication. Grossly abbreviated electronic messages have replaced the face-to-face encounters that are essential for storytelling. The absence of the good story will effect personal development negatively and will impede the spiritual development of our children and grandchildren.

For me, Torah is but the most outstanding of the many stories which shaped my Jewish identity. I can think of only one modality that rivals the narrative as a basis for emotional growth. That modality is music. But space limits me to describing the narrative nature of the Torah in this column. I will reserve my take on the Torah as music for another Person in the Parsha column. Watch for it.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand **The Highest Form of Divine Service Is** **Going Against Your Nature**

When Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim, the pasuk in this week's parsha says that no dogs barked at them (Shemos 11:7). The pasuk in Mishpatim says "People of holiness shall you be to Me, you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field, to the dog you shall throw it" (Shemos 22:30). Rashi comments that dogs

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were singled out to be thrown the non-kosher meat as an indication that the Almighty does not withhold reward from any deserving creature. In other words, as reward for not barking at the Jews when they left Egypt, the dogs are to be given the treife meat that could not be consumed by Jews.

The question that can be asked is as follows: In last week's parsha, Chazal say that the frogs jumped everywhere—even into the Egyptian's ovens. In this way, they sanctified the Name of G-d. Now, who is more deserving of reward, a frog for jumping into a fiery oven or a dog for not barking? Logically, we would say the frogs sacrificed their lives and were more deserving of reward than the dogs. Yet, the Torah does not say that we should give our dried worms (or anything else) to the frogs as a reward for their meritorious service in Mitzrayim.

A second observation can be made: In Perek Shirah, all the animals of the animal world sing praises to the Almighty. Chazal say that the song offered by the dogs is: "Come let us prostrate ourselves and bow, let us kneel before Hashem our Maker." (Tehillim 95:6). The Medrash notes that Rav Yeshaya the disciple of Rav Chanina ben Dosa fasted 85 separate days. He could not understand how dogs merited to sing praises (Shirah) to the Almighty. The pasuk refers to dogs as brazen souls (Azzai Nefesh) (Yeshaya 56:11). Every creature has its identifying characteristic. Dogs personify the attribute of chutzpah! So, Rav Yeshaya could not understand how dogs could say Shirah. He fasted 85 times to be given Divine insight as to how this strange idea could be understood.

The Medrash says that an Angel came to Rav Yeshaya and told him that he was sent from Heaven to inform him that the dogs merited singing Shirah to the Almighty by virtue of their meritorious behavior at the time of the Exodus, about which it is written "No dog whet its tongue" (Shemos 11:7). Not only did they merit singing Shirah, but dogs also merit that their excrement is used to tan the hide of animals in preparation for making the parchment used to write Sifrei Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzos. I saw in the contemporary sefer *Darash Mordechai* that the author asked modern day Torah Scribes whether this was still the case, and they confirmed the fact that indeed the essence of the chemicals used to prepare animal hides to make parchment for writing *Kisvei haKodesh* is still derived from dog excrement.

So, the question is now strengthened three-fold. The dogs merited having non-kosher meat thrown to them, they merited saying Shirah, and they merit that their excrement is used for preparing holy parchment – all for what reason? It is because they did not bark at the departing Jews. Again, when we contrast that with the "heroism" of the frogs during the second plague, it seems like a very minimal

sacrifice on the part of dogs that they refrained from “whetting their tongues.”

The explanation is that nothing is more precious to the Ribono shel Olam than a person or animal or creature breaking its nature. That is what Divine Service is all about. A person overcoming his natural instincts and his innate personality traits is more beloved and dearer to the Almighty than anything else.

Dogs bark! The Gemara says in Brochos that when dogs sense the Malach HaMaves (the Angel of Death) they certainly bark. It is an amazing accomplishment in the Eyes of Hashem for the dogs in Egypt to conquer their inclinations and not give in to their natural tendencies. The frogs, on the other hand, may not have even realized that they were jumping into ovens, and even if they did deserve any reward, perhaps not dying in the ovens and living to tell the tale was their reward.

Of course, whenever we hear a teaching of Chazal like this, these are all metaphors. Chazal are trying to teach us something. The message is that we all have natural inclinations. Some of us are inclined to get angrier easier than others, some people have a tendency to be cheap and stingy, while other people have a tendency to spend money loosely. People have various tendencies. Even siblings, and even twins,—who we might think have everything in common in terms of genes and background—have significant differences in their personalities. There are varying techunos haNefesh (qualities of the soul).

Man’s challenge in serving the Ribono shel Olam is to be able to control and channel his techunos haNefesh as needed to adhere to the Will of the Almighty. That was what was so great about the dogs in Egypt.

When I recently spoke in Chicago, I alluded to such an idea. Rav Ben Zion Twerski, son of Rav Michel Twerski, told me that the Baal HaTanya in the Torah Ohr mentions a similar concept as an interpretation of a particular Gemara. He subsequently e-mailed to me the source where the Torah Ohr mentioned this idea, as well as a location where the Tanya himself mentions the same idea.

This idea explains a Gemara in Maseches Avodah Zarah (18a) that has perturbed many Baalei Mussar as well as Chassidic thinkers. The Gemara writes that when Rav Yosi ben Kisma took ill, Rav Chanina ben Taradyon went to visit him. Rav Yosi ben Kisma asked Rav Chanina ben Taradyon “What on earth are you doing? Have you lost your mind?” Rav Chanina ben Taradyon was teaching Torah publicly against the edict of the Roman Government. This was a capital offense. Rav Chanina’s response was “From Heaven they will have Mercy.” Rav Yosi ben Kisma answered back: “I am telling you facts and giving you a reasonable argument and you say,

‘From Heaven they will have Mercy’? I will be astonished if the Romans don’t burn you together with your Sefer Torah in fire.”

This is exactly what happened. The Gemara continues with the famous story of how the Romans burnt Rav Chanina ben Taradyon, wrapping him in balls of wool inside a Sefer Torah to increase his pain and prolong his anguish.

However, prior to describing the tragic end of Rav Chanina ben Taradyon, the Gemara continues the story of the dialog between him and the ailing Rav Yosi ben Kisma. Rav Chanina ben Taradyon asked Rav Yosi ben Kisma: “Tell me, what will be my fate regarding the World to Come?” Rav Yosi ben Kisma then asked him, “Have you ever done anything worthwhile in your life (Klum ma’aseh bah l’yadcha)?” Rav Chanina responded that in fact there was an incident he could be proud of: “I once had money I collected on Purim for distribution to the poor. However, I put that money in my wrong pocket and it got mixed up with my own personal money. I therefore gave away all the money—the money that was designated for the poor and my personal funds—to those in need.” Rav Yosi ben Kisma was very impressed with this noble action and said “If that is the case then certainly you are destined to enter the World to Come. Not only that, but may it be G-d’s Will that my portion in Gan Eden be equivalent to your portion there.”

Everyone comments on this most perplexing Gemara. Rav Chanina ben Taradyon is becoming a martyr for teaching Torah in public. He wonders whether he is deserving entrance into the World to Come? To compound the question, the incident he mentions, which Rav Yosi ben Kisma says is his ticket to Gan Eden, appears to pale in comparison to that martyrdom! What does this Gemara mean?

Rav Shneur Zalman of Lyadi, the Baal haTanya, answers with an amazing interpretation in his sefer Torah Ohr: There are certain people who love the intellectual pleasure of learning Torah. The mere intellectual challenge that Torah analysis presents is appealing to such people. The Baal haTanya cites as proof the gentile philosophers of earlier times – they had every single pleasure of the world open to them with no restrictions placed upon them by Fear of Heaven or Divine mandates – and yet they gave up all the pleasures of life to immerse themselves in the intellectual challenges of whatever secular discipline interested them. To such “absent minded professors” – subjects such as Chemistry or Physics can be their whole life! This is because for them, the biggest pleasure in life isn’t eating or drinking or other physical indulgences. Their biggest pleasure is gaining knowledge and wisdom. They are willing to give up on everything else to achieve wisdom.

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Rav Chanina ben Taradyon said “Yes, I am teaching Torah publicly. But maybe I am not really doing it ‘for the Sake of Heaven’. Maybe I am doing it because I enjoy it, because this is my life. There is no greater pleasure to me than publicly teaching Torah.” If that would be the case, for such effort and even martyrdom, perhaps he would not receive Olam HaBah. He does it because he is addicted to Torah. Some people are addicted to alcohol or drugs or other addictive pleasures. Rav Chanina ben Taradyon realized that he was addicted to Torah. He feared that for such a personally pleasurable activity, he may not deserve Olam HaBah.

It was for that reason that Rav Yosi ben Kisma had to probe for another source of merit that Rav Chanina might have. His question was “Did you ever do something that went against your nature?” To that Rav Chanina responded affirmatively. “Yes, there was something I once did that went against my natural inclination.” The Baal HaTanya comments that people who have an affinity for intellectual pursuits tend to be cheap by nature, they don’t like to part with their money. (I have no idea why that should be the case.)

Rav Yosi ben Kisma opined that when Rav Chanina was able to cite the incident of the time he went against his inclination and voluntarily gave away his personal funds which were accidentally mixed in with Tzedaka funds, it was a sure sign that his Service to the Almighty was strictly for the Sake of Heaven and deserving of entry into the World to Come.

The Baal HaTanya explains in the same fashion the famous Talmudic dictum that one cannot compare someone who reviews his learning 100 times to someone who reviews it 101 times. The latter is called an “Oved HaShem” (a servant of Hashem). The Baal HaTanya explains that everyone learns something one hundred times. That was standard operating procedure. That is how they learned. However, someone who goes beyond the normal, beyond what is expected – that is an Oved Hashem.

This is the idea by the dogs. A dog not barking is going against its nature. A person doing the right thing against his or her nature is the highest level of Divine Service. As a result, they deserved to sing Shirah, they were rewarded with the non-kosher meat, and their by-product is used in the production of Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzos.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Were we liberated from one form of servitude, only to enter another? In Parshat Bo, the Torah describes how Hashem commanded Moshe to appear before Pharaoh, King of Egypt. There he demanded in Hashem’s name (Shemot 9:1):

“Shalach et ami vuya’avduni!” – “Let my people go so that they shall serve me!”

Thanks to the miraculous intervention of Hashem we were redeemed from servitude in Egypt and, seven weeks later at Mount Sinai, we embraced a life full of Torah and mitzvot – an existence filled with servitude to Hashem.

Some people might wonder: what kind of freedom is this? Are we so free if there is a long list of do’s and don’ts that we must comply with at all times? The Talmud (Ethics of the Fathers 6:2) puts it as follows:

“Ein lecha ben chorin eileh mi sheosek baTalmud Torah.” – “There is actually no-one who is as free as the person who studies Torah.”

How can we understand this? One of my favourite quotations, which is anonymous, goes as follows: “The slave to the compass has freedom of the seas. The rest must sail close to the shore.”

The Torah is our compass. The Torah provides us with an opportunity to lead lives of meaning and joy. There is so much room for individuality and spontaneity within the context of the 613 do’s and don’ts of the Torah. Every responsible educator and parent knows how crucially important it is to raise our children to reach their own personal potential; to be able to achieve what they can as unique personalities within the context of a loving and healthy discipline. Without such discipline, without any inspirational compass, it is possible for a person to abuse their freedom and for their lives to be filled with mayhem.

We have so much to be grateful for. Thanks to the freedom that we attained when we left Egypt we were able at Sinai to receive the Torah and thanks to the Torah, we can utilise our freedom responsibly because the Torah is our eternally true and inspirational guide and compass.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm’s

Derashot Ledorot

Of Fire and Water

The words “fire” and “water,” as we shall be using them, describe two supplementary modes of God’s relationship with the world, and our human reactions to Him. These two times, and the powerful ideas and emotions they connote, come from the writings of the illustrious Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, der alter Rebbe, founder of the intellectual or Habad school of Hasidism, and whose 150th yahrzeit world Jewry celebrates this year.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman makes his point of departure an important verse in this morning’s sidra. We read (Exodus 13:9), “lema’an tihye Torat Hashem befikha ki beyad fizaka hotziakha Hashem miMitzrayim,” “in order that the Torah of the Lord be in thy mouth, for with a strong hand did the Lord take thee out

of Egypt.” What, asks Rabbi Shneur Zalman, is the relationship between the two halves of this verse? Why should our study of Torah be the reaction to God’s taking us out of Egypt?

It is in response to this question that Rabbi Shneur Zalman develops the theme of the two kinds of love, that which is compared to fire and that likened to water.

There is one kind of love that we might term “normal.” Like the flow of water, it is regular and unceasing. Like water, it never falters or changes in intensity. The objects of this kind of love are equally and indiscriminately covered with the waters of affection, like pebbles in a brook. It is a love whose evenness and constancy are reassuring. This is the ahava that is compared to mayim, water.

But there is also a second kind of love, the ahava that is similar to eish, or fire. This fiery love lacks the consistency of the first kind. It is temperamental, flickering, shifty. Like a burning, uncertain flame, its intensity varies radically and erratically. It has the quality that mystics call “ratzo vashov,” that of alternation between love that one moment can be nothing but a dark ember, seemingly cold and lifeless, and in the next may burst out in uncontrolled passion and fiery yearning, breaking all bonds and threatening to engulf limitless horizons in its consuming fervor.

Now man’s religious feelings are a response to God’s feeling for man. The love that we feel for God is a reaction to the love God has for us – even as in our Shaharit and Ma’ariv services, we read first the Ahava Rabba (or Ahavat Olam), the declaration of divine love for us, and then we read the Shema, which is immediately followed by “ve’ahavta et Hashem Elohekha,” “thou shalt love thy God,” the love of man for God. God’s love for man evokes man’s love for God – there is a holy reciprocity between the Creator and His creatures.

When man considers God’s dealings with Israel, he finds they come in two categories. The fact that God gives us existence, that He gives us life and sustenance, that He provides for all our daily needs, both material and psychological – these are evident of God’s normal love for man. It is similar to a parent’s love for his children. It is the love that we have compared to water – regular and unerring, constant and consistent. From the moment of Creation, the world has not ceased to exist nor has it changed the rules whereby it flourishes. Here, indeed, is a token of God’s ahava similar to mayim. In response to this, the Jew must demonstrate his similar love for God. This love too must be constant and even, regular and ongoing. Like water, it must be pure and sparkling; it must flow evenly and regularly. We must be conscious of God in all our deeds and in every aspect of our lives. The performance of the mitzvot, which covers all

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of our lives, is an expression of our love for God, the love that is similar to water.

But there are times when God’s relations with the world are more than the normal, when they are extraordinary, far above the usual. There are times when but for God’s direct intervention and concern with man, the “normal” course of events would inexorably drive him to certain destruction. There are certain critical moments in history, such as Yetziat Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt, when all natural laws and historical processes seem to be suspended, as the Eternal pierces the present and the Timeless parts the curtains of time and steps onto the stage of history. It is in these unique moments when we suddenly become aware of the fact that God’s love for us is more than the love of mayim, it is the love of eish; that in addition to the constant and consistent love of God for man, that which gives man his very existence and breath and being, there is a special, fiery, passionate, ineffable kind of love that is sacred, unquenchable, and inextinguishable and in which God envelopes man and Israel.

When we consider the Almighty as the God of Creation, He who formed heaven and earth, who initiated the laws of nature, then we speak of God’s love for man as the love of water. But when we speak of “I am the Lord thy God who took thee out of the land of Egypt,” the Lord of history, He in whose hand is the destiny of man and the fate of nations, then we speak of the Almighty who loves with the love of fire. As Creator, God’s love is like water; as Redeemer His love is like fire.

And when the Jew comes to this new understanding, the appreciation of the ahava of eish that God has for him, then his only response is, in turn, a fiery and passionate reaching out for God. Then all of existence seems to be transformed to a new level of transcendence, when suddenly, climactically and dramatically, a new vision ennobles man’s soul, a new understanding grips his mind, and a powerful love elevates his heart to unprecedented heights. Then man, too, offers us a love of fire for his beloved Redeemer. At this moment the soul of the Jew strives to wrench loose from its bodily bearings, and like a leaping flame of fire which strains to tear itself away from the wick, as if reaching for some mysterious, invisible lover, man’s soul ecstatically grasps upward, yearning for the world of the infinite, for the delights of pure spirit. It is a kind of love which is ratzo vashov, alternating in intensity and depression – one moment the Jew’s spirit lies exhausted, when he fears that all his love for God and Torah is based upon a phantom, when he suspects that his religious loyalties are the result of some kind of psychological aberration, that they are mere fantasies – and the next moment, the fire of the spirit breaks into life again, as he conquers his fears, and a new sense of certainty surges up and strengthens him and he soars upward once

again in the holy love of God. Then the Jew is no longer satisfied with his regular, normal, ordinary observance of the mitzvot. For this higher kind of love, the love of eish, fire, that which beckons man on to unscaled heights, can be expressed not through the usual modes of Jewish religious behavior, but only through the study of Torah! It is here, in the seemingly dry fields of the intellect, that Jewish religious experience reaches its most fervent climax. For Torah is the word of God. The study of this Torah is, therefore, the most direct attachment to God Himself available to us. Torah is the place for contact between natural man and supernatural God.

So that, according to Rabbi Shneur Zalman, as we have interpreted him, man's normal religious behavior is a reaction to God's gift of normal life and existence – in both cases, the love compared to water. But when man is the recipient of God's special effort, of His special intervention in his destiny, as in the case of Yetziat Mitzrayim, then his response, too, must be on the level of the love of fire – and that is the study of Torah. That is why the Torah says in this morning's sidra, "lema'an tiheyeh Torat Hashem befikha, ki beyad hazaka hotziakha Hashem miMitzrayim," "in order that the Torah of the Lord be in thy mouth, for with a strong hand did the Lord take thee out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:9). Man's fiery love – the study of Torah – comes in return for God's fiery love – the Exodus from Egypt.

Such considerations are relevant not only for those who are mystically inclined, who are endowed with vast inner regions of religious ecstasy and emotion. They are decidedly germane to our contemporary condition. Most of us in this synagogue today are, to a greater or lesser degree, observant Jews. We observe what we observe, we give charity and support Jewish institutions, we may even occasionally attend a lecture or shiur – even as we have last year and the year before that and the years before that. We may feel no special mystical stirrings deep within our hearts – but the very nature of our lives bespeaks a kind of love of God. It is the love compared to water: cool, even, unchanging, and with a decided purity of intentions. It is a kind of love that, like water, has found its level – the level we are at now is the one, most likely, that we have had for a long time before and expect to maintain for a long time in the future.

But the question is, is that enough for our times? The nature of our religious loyalties, after all, must be commensurate and equivalent with what we consider God's relation to us. If we live in "normal" times, relatively speaking, then we could not demand more than a "normal" level of Jewish loyalty. But, my friends, we do not live in any so-called normal times. Our times are decidedly abnormal. Today God's relationship with Israel is not like water but like fire, ratzo vashov, alternating from seemingly almost a complete divine indifference to our fate to a decisive

intervention in our destiny; from the low point of terrible massacres to the high point of a regenerated and reconstituted Jewish nation. A flame is flickering in the heart of the Almighty, and we dare not fail to respond to it properly. These are the most decisive days mankind has ever known – there may very well be no tomorrow for anyone. Jewishly speaking, we are today at the most fateful roads in our long story – on the one hand, assimilation can suddenly take over both here and in Israel and draw the curtain on the last act of Jewish history, or, on the other hand, a little initiative by us, a little fire, a little neshama, can tilt the scales in the other direction and we can create for ourselves a future of Torah, of Yiddishkeit, a future where the word of God will be found in the land once again and where man's eyes and heart will not be blind to the vision of sanctity.

We cannot afford merely to be observant Jews as we were in the past. Not for us the love of water; from now on only the passionate love of fire. Water is water – it is there naturally and that is all there is to it. Fire is not just "there." It requires a wick. It requires fuel. It requires someone to ignite it. And that is just what is demanded of us. Our prayer must no longer be cold and correct – it must be charged with life and warmth. Our philanthropy must have neshama in it, and not remain begrudging and measured. Our performance of mitzvot must contain an element of abandon, even ecstasy. But above all, we must rededicate ourselves to more extensive and deeper study of Torah. We must ignite our fellow men with the secret flame of God that burns in our heart. We must dedicate ourselves to the tasks of Judaism with new initiative, with greater depth and intensity. "Lema'an tiheyeh Torat Hashem befikha" – the Torah of the Lord must be in our mouth, it must enter into the very cavern of our bodies and grip our insides and transform our very being.

The times we live in are great and dangerous times. Both catastrophe and opportunity commingle on the horizon. Watery loyalties are no longer sufficient. The Orthodox Jew cannot afford to react with the same superficiality and placid serenity with which he conducted his religious life a generation or two ago. What is required of us is a new level of intensity, a new "leap of action," a commitment of every fiber of our being to the great and holy enterprise of Jewish living, a new paean of praise to the Almighty in which there will participate every aspect of our being – intellectual, emotional, charitable, actional.

If once, as our Torah tells us this morning, we were commanded to study Torah because God took us out of Egypt, fire for fire, then today the order is reversed: We must first offer to God a fiery love and loyalty, expressed in terms of Torah, so that He, in turn, will bring us out of our present Egypt – the danger of world cataclysm, of Jewish ignorance, and human indifference.

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Let us raise our torch of love to the Almighty, and may He respond with a combination of divine warmth and light which will illuminate our paths in the years that lie ahead.

Excerpt from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Exodus, co-published by OU Press and Maggid Books

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Silence

In this week's Torah Portion, the Torah states that the dogs remained silent during the night when God killed the first-born Egyptians. Rashi explains that due to this silence, the dog was later "rewarded" by receiving the unkosher meat that the Jewish people could not eat (Exodus 11:5-7 with Rashi commentary). Without discussing the basic idea that a dog could control its reaction and behavior, or understand the concept of reward, the question remains why was the dog silent and why did it receive a reward? The Talmud explains (Berachot 51a, Bava Kam 40a) that it is the most natural thing for a dog to howl at night. Specifically, when there is death in the air, dogs bark much more. So, on that night of the Seder, when death was all around Egypt, we would have expected the dogs to bark even more frequently and much louder. But they didn't. They kept silent. That lack of the expected barking and the total silence that permeated the night reminded all human beings that this was not a "natural" event when dogs barked, and that God was in total control on this miraculous evening. It highlighted to the Egyptians (and Jews), that through the eerie silence during the killing of the first-born, all the events that night were indeed miraculous from the "Jewish" God. For causing this reaction, the dogs were later "rewarded."

What about human beings? What about Jews? When is it appropriate for them to remain silent, and when should they speak? Does silence have a positive value or is it merely the absence of noise of speech? Most people define silence as the absence of noise or speech. It is not something particularly positive, but an absence of something else, and can be interchanged with the ideas of muteness or quiet. Judaism rejects this notion, and defines and values silence as something positive, often a status to aspire to. Yet, despite preconceptions, everyone, even in the non-Jewish world, will agree that sometimes silence can be a very strong form of communication (For example, when Frank says "Good morning" to George, and George simply remains silent, George is speaking volumes about his attitude towards Frank).

Silence in Judaism is a Non-Audible Response When One is Expected - Like the silence of the dogs, only when a reaction is expected is the non-response called silence. There are several examples of this idea in the Torah, which

demonstrates that simply being noiseless is not a synonym for “silence.” When God told Abraham to sacrifice his most precious possession, his beloved son Isaac, Abraham had every right to object, not only because he loved his son, but also because logic was on his side. God had promised Abraham that it was through the living Isaac that the Jewish nation would be formed. If Abraham were to fulfill God’s words now, then God’s own words and promise would not be possible (Genesis 22:1-34, 21:2). Thus, we anticipate Abraham’s strong reaction and resistance to this command by God, just as Abraham strongly objected to the killing of the evil people in Sodom, people that Abraham did not know or love, and, in addition, were guilty of heinous crimes. That was Abraham’s personality – to object to any perceived unfairness. Yet here we see that Abraham did not object or protest God’s demand here, only silence by Abraham. The Torah says that Abraham got up especially early the next morning on his way to fulfill God’s will and kill his son. This is true silence, i.e., not objecting when such an objection is expected and in order.

There are many descriptions or reactions of silence that are either specifically written in the Torah, or alluded to, each of which shows the greatness of the individual who remains silent, when he or she could have (or logically should have) spoken out. Abraham’s nephew, Lot, is rescued from Sodom when everyone else was destroyed due to their sins. But the Midrash (Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 51:6) finds that Lot, indeed, did merit rescue, and not only in the merit of his uncle Abraham. When Abraham had to lie when he entered Egypt and claim that Sarah was his sister and not his wife to save his life, it was a very dangerous ploy. Lot, Abraham’s nephew, accompanied his uncle and aunt on the trip and when the lie was told, Lot also took a huge risk by remaining silent, putting his life in danger by going along with the subterfuge. It was in that merit that he was saved from the fate of Sodom.

Later on, in Genesis when Eliezer was sent to find a wife for his master, Abraham’s son, Isaac, Eliezer devised a “strategy” to determine who would be the right candidate: The woman who would offer to give Eliezer, a stranger, and his ten camels to drink, which would demonstrate the same legendary kindness of his master, Abraham. After **Rebecca** did indeed make the offer, she began to carry it out, and the verse says (Genesis 24:21) that Eliezer was “in wonderment and silent,” to see if he is plan would be successful. Why the wonderment and why the silence? It is one thing to “offer” to take the trouble to give both Eliezer and the camels to drink, but quite another matter to do it. Eliezer waited in amazement as **Rivka** went to the well time and time again to give each animal to drink. He “wondered” if she would complete this huge task before tiring. But why be silent? Seforim

(no commentary on Genesis 24:21) explains that etiquette would demand that at some point Eliezer would stop Rivka, a young girl, and say “it is not necessary to fulfill the entire mission. You have already shown your goodwill and kindness.” But since the conditions of the task were specific and set, Eliezer had to wait until she completely gave all the camels to drink, as a condition of fulfilling the “test.” [Professor] Nechama Leibowitz enlightens us further, in practical terms. Almost all well buckets hold five gallons each. A thirsty camel, after a long journey, averages between 80-100 gallons to become satiated. Simple math, then, tells us that Rivka had to make 160-200 trips to the well to completely give all the camels to drink. If each time she filled the bucket, gave the camel to drink, and then refilled it, took only five minutes each, then Rivka took between 13-16 hours to complete the task. We now understand Eliezer’s amazement more deeply! Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, understands Eliezer’s silence on a much deeper level. He says (Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Seder Tefillot al HaShana, Shaar Nefilat Apayim) that silence is the key to all understanding. The musical notes of the Torah reading of this verse mandate a (small) stop after the word “he was silent” before the word “and he understood,” indicating a compulsory break between these two actions. Thus, to acquire any knowledge, Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains that silence and contemplation must precede it. This teaches us that Eliezer’s silence allowed him to ponder **Rebecca’s** actions, his “test,” and derive the proper conclusions.

The next Torah personality who was silent when logic demanded that he speak out, is Jacob, portrayed as being silent many times through several incidents. After his daughter Dina was raped and held hostage by Shechem and Chamor, the Torah says, “Jacob was silent until his family returned from the fields (Genesis 34:1-5).” If ever there was a time when a person should scream out, react emotionally, or do something rash, it is after a parent hears that his or her daughter was raped and kidnapped. When his sons Shimon and Levi protest and ask: “should we have let our sister become a prostitute?” the paragraph ends there (Genesis 34:30-31). Yaakov chose not to answer them and remains silent here again since he understood that a continued war of words with his sons, especially at this emotional time, would not benefit anyone. He waited many years to scold them again for their actions, but only on his deathbed in Genesis 49. Then, following the story of Jacob’s family, where Jacob showed greater love for his son Joseph, the Torah records that Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him (Genesis 37:11). Rather than try to “explain” his actions or calm them down, the Torah says that Jacob “kept the matter in mind,” i.e., he remained silent. Similarly, when Reuven sinned by trying to defend his mother’s honor (Genesis 35:22), the Torah says that Yaakov “kept it in

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mind” and did not castigate his eldest son, even though he had sinned. Jacob knew that berating Reuven at this point would alienate him from Jacob and, perhaps the rest of the family. Thus, Jacob wisely kept silent.

However, the person most famous and well-known for keeping silent in the Torah is Rachel, Jacob’s wife, and true love. After they were married, the Torah says that the next morning, it was revealed that Jacob had married Leah, the older sister, and not Rachel. What happened here? Why did Jacob only realize this “the next morning”? The Rabbis (and Rashi) explain (Genesis 29:25-26 with Rashi commentary) that Jacob suspected that his father-in-law would try to substitute the elder Leah for the younger Rachel (there was no light in the tent) since the custom was to marry the elder first and Leah was less attractive. Thus, Jacob gave Rachel a set of identification codes to ensure that he was marrying Rachel. In the middle of the night, Lavan did indeed substitute Leah for Rachel. Rachel knew that if Leah would not give Jacob the pre-planned codes, then the ruse would be exposed, and Leah would be mortified. So, Rachel remained in the tent silently all night and gave the codes to her sister Leah, who gave them to Jacob. It was only the next morning that Jacob realized he had married Leah – all because Rachel remained silent when the love of her life, Jacob, was taken by her sister. This selfless act by Rachel, giving herself up in favor of her sister by remaining silent, has been praised as the ultimate act of love and selflessness. This quality of silence is demonstrated in a Midrash (Midrash Eicha Rabbah Petichata 24). After the destruction of the First Temple, God wanted His presence to disappear from the Jewish people forever. First, Abraham got up and used every argument and every merit to convince God to remain. To no avail. Then Isaac tried to plead with God to stay and use his fine actions in life as a reason. They too were unsuccessful. Then Moses tried and, he, too, failed. Only when Rachel reminded God of her sacrifice, as Jacob had worked seven years before marrying her. Then, Leah took her place and Rachel suffered in silence and gave the codes to her sister. And Rachel never got angry at or forsook Leah once for what transpired. Rachel kept it all inside - silent. Now, Rachel was asking God not to forsake His people. This silence of Rachel was the only thing that convinced God to remain with the Jewish people.

This quality of Rachel – silence, when every fiber in her being was pressuring her to speak out for herself – was a quality that she passed down to her offspring, according to the Midrash (Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 71). Benjamin witnessed his beloved older brother Joseph being taken hostage, and he remained silent. He held himself back in front of his father for years, and never revealed to him how Joseph disappeared. Another Midrash reinforces this concept (Midrash, Esther Rabba 6:12), and says that King Saul, who came from

the tribe of Benjamin, also kept silent (and gives an example). And then, later on, Queen Esther, also from the tribe of Benjamin, kept her silence, and never revealed to the king that she was Jewish. But then, when the fate of the Jewish people was at stake, Mordecai, Esther's uncle, demands that she no longer stay silent and that she speak out. Shem Mishmuel (1856-1926) explains (Shem MiShmuel, Miketz 5779 (1919)) that Mordecai was born as a combination from the tribe of Judah (the talkers) and the tribe of Benjamin (those who kept silent). The words of the Megillah, when Mordecai asks Queen Esther to break her silence and inform the King that she is Jewish and being threatened with extermination (Esther 4:13-14), now take on a deeper meaning. Mordecai is telling Esther that if you keep silent now, as is the trait of all those in your tribe, then the idea of that silence is diminished because you can never speak out. It is against your nature, and you are not to be praised for your silence. Silence is only meaningful when a person knows when to be silent and when to speak out (to be both Benjamin and Judah). Esther heeds his words, informs the king, and saves the Jewish people.

In Talking and Speaking, Less Is More - The Talmud says (Yoma 7a) that in certain situations, remaining silent shows wisdom. Maimonides is even more specific (Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 2:5). He says that the best way of achieving wisdom is through silence – silence is a safeguard for wisdom. Therefore, every person should aim for more silence, by keeping one's speech to a minimum. And, before answering someone else, every individual should stop and think carefully first. In his previous paragraph, Rambam tries to limit speech and increase silence even further (Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 2:4). He writes that a Jew should always try to maintain silence in all situations, and eliminate all speech unless it is necessary, i.e., in order live in the physical world. He references Rabbi Judah the Prince, who never uttered a single word in his life that was unnecessary to physical living or Torah learning. Even when speaking about physical needs, speech should be as curtailed as much as possible,

The Positive Value of Silence - There is an aphorism that God gave man two ears but only one mouth so that he should listen twice as much as he speaks. For Jews, in particular, some have said that they are great at speaking, but terrible at listening to one another. It turns out that normative Judaism believes the same thing. Silence while listening is far more important than speaking. King Solomon writes that there is a time to speak and a time to listen and be silent (Ecclesiastes 3:7). But in the verse, the silence precedes the speaking, indicating that it is more important. The Talmud (Megillah 18a with Rashi commentary) indeed says speech is very valuable to the Jew. But silence is double the “price” i.e., the worth of speech. While he was

dying with a burning Torah scroll wrapped around him, Rabbi Chananya's students asked him what he saw. He answered that he saw the letters flying to the heavens, separated from the scroll itself that was burning. From this passage, the Rabbis learn that both the scroll and the letters have separate but intrinsic value and that the scroll is not merely a place to put the letters. Some call the scroll “the white surround,” which is a metaphor for the context of the actual letters and laws. But this is no simple metaphor or a nice idea. According to Jewish law, the scroll, as well as the letters both, have holiness and great value. Thus, if a Jew sees a Torah scroll being burnt, Tur rules (Tur, Yoreh Deah 340 with Beit Yosef Commentary) that he or she is supposed to partially tear his or her garment (the same Mitzvah-commandment upon seeing a person dying), but to do it *twice*, once for the holy letters and once for the white parchment that surrounds the letters. The Code of Jewish law brings this as part of normative Jewish law (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 340:37).

What are the letters and the “white surround” of the scroll? If the Torah scroll is the written Torah, then the oral words are the spoken Torah. Then, the “white surround” of the spoken Torah is the silence between the words (as perceived by that unusual student). Just as the scroll has holiness between the letters, so, too, the silences between the words have holiness. Therefore, silence is not a lack of speech or pauses between speech, but contains holiness, meaning, and depth (even if not understood), just as the whole scroll does. There is a story about a student who regularly recorded, with a voice recorder, a great Rabbi's classes, just as many students sometimes do today. When the technology first came out, this student was proud to explain to his teacher that this particular tape recorder was special and better. It had a feature called “voice activation,” and eliminated in the Shiur-lesson all the pauses when the Rabbi did not speak. The Rabbi responded to his student: “Then you did not record but skipped the most important parts of the lesson.”

* 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

Seizing the Moment: Tal Noiman

In Parshat Bo we find the enthralling verses recounting the Exodus from Egypt and the ensuing redemption: “And thus shall you eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover” (Shemot 12, 11). A little later in the portion, we read thus: “And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened [not chametz]; because they were thrust out of

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Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they made for themselves any provisions for the way” (ibid., 39).

The Exodus from Egypt is described as one carried out in haste, and as such it is engraved in our collective memory until today.

Chametz, leavened food, is associated with delay and the act of waiting. One can even define chametz as something which has become bloated and heavy with the time invested to produce it. Matzah, in contrast, is a bread of haste. The Exodus and redemption from Egypt took place with a sense of urgency, with the clock ticking and with the Israelites instructed to make haste and leave in a hurry.

Let us examine these two contradicting qualities – that of chametz and that of matzah, the acts of lingering and of hastening, respectively. In so doing, perhaps we will gain insight into why God chose the quality of haste for redeeming the Israelites from Egypt.

The Talmud in the tractate of Berachot (17:1) relates a prayer uttered to the Almighty: “Thus he said: God Almighty, it is well known to You that we wish to do all You desire. However, what is it that hinders us? The yeast in the dough and our subjugation to foreign powers.

May it be Your will that you save us from the hands of both, such that we are able to fulfill all of your commandments wholeheartedly.”

Rashi explains: “Yeast in the dough refers to the yetzer hara in our heart, the inclination to do evil, which makes us bloated, and hinders us [machmitzeinu].”

The yetzer hara is associated with hachmatza – a word with the same root as chametz and which denotes procrastination ultimately resulting in a missed opportunity. When one lingers and tarries and “becomes bloated with too much time that has passed”, it is because one is unwilling to take that first step, act courageously and tackle the targets one has set for oneself.

Interestingly, our subjugation to foreign powers is also associated with hachmatza. When a person is hindered and does not hasten to move forward, but succumbs to his yetzer hara, he is, in fact, subjugated to forces that pull him downwards; he is enslaved to a life void of forward movement or vitality in the worship of God.

Notwithstanding the above, while man's ability to move forward has a magical aura about it, it also has drawbacks. People often lack the ability to dwell on the moment, engage in introspection, or contemplate life seriously. Haste and impulsiveness are often attributed to young children because these qualities have vivacious energy about them, momentum. However, they are also qualities that express a

certain immaturity, like something that is unripe. A person who only acts in haste – the “matzah trait” – is one who cannot follow through with lengthy processes, or persevere in the long term.

If this is so, how then do we find the balance between these two qualities, and what is the role of each?

In the first doctrine of his book *Tzidkat HaTzaddik*, R' Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin writes as follows: “When a person initially sets out on the path of avodat Hashem, the worship of God, he should do it with haste and a sense of urgency, as was done with the Pesach offering in Egypt which was deliberately eaten in haste (unlike the traditional Pesach sacrifice for generations, in which case haste is not an integral factor). The reason for this is that when the initial urge arises to detach oneself from worldly desires, one must seize the moment quickly before it is gone. However, following this initial undertaking, one must tread slowly, in moderation, as is the case with the Pesach offering in every generation.”

R' Tzadok divides these two life-motions or qualities in the following manner: both *chipazon*, the quality of making haste, as well as *chametz*, the quality of dwelling upon and delaying something, are necessary for the worship of God and represent different levels. The first level is the initial step one takes. When a person takes the first step towards God and enters into the service of God, it is best not to linger for too long, but to push ahead, advance with urgency and act upon the inner voice that triggered him to move forward. This is the very nature of Pesach Mitzrayim, the sacrifice offered on the night of the Exodus and redemption from Egypt.

Following this initial step, a person must tread slowly, taking one step at a time, letting his new way of life seep in, as he gradually turns new acts of service into personality traits. This is likened to Pesach dorot, the life-long offering.

The Exodus from Egypt teaches us to adopt hasty motion and internalize a sense of urgency. This means knowing how to listen to our inner voice which calls us to do great and wonderful things and fear nothing. But once this urge is acted upon, we should take small steps, advancing slowly on the long and tedious path that came into being the minute we took the first decision, and which was, in fact, the trigger for further advancement.

But there is another dimension to haste, one no less important. In addition to the energy and momentum it creates, it also offers a courageous and sincere outlook on the present, one that is also attentive to the here and now. A person who lingers and tarries is infected with “chametz” and is easily affected by all the dimensions of time: past, present and future.

He worries over the past; has no energy for the present; and is troubled by doubts about the future which prevent him from acting and moving forward.

A person characterized by haste and impulsiveness is one who reacts to the present and is triggered by it. He lives the moment and sets forth on his journey every time anew. He is able to make the best of any opportunity that comes his way by confronting each one, taking advantage of each and moving on.

Haste is a quality that doesn’t “rely” on the future to save it. It does not let us postpone things until tomorrow. In fact, as far as haste is concerned, there is no tomorrow. Only the present exists, which is why it serves as the only platform through which one can act and move forward.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov formulated this beautifully (*Likutei Moharan*, doctrine 282): “Today if you shall hark to his words” (Psalms 95) – this is an important lesson in avodat Hashem, the worship of God: one should always focus on today, whether in one’s daily business and livelihood or in one’s daily service of God. One should only have the present day before his eyes, and the present hour. Upon entering into the service of God it may seem like an unbearably heavy burden. However, if one only focuses on one day at a time, the burden becomes lighter and one no longer feels the need to postpone things from one day to the next or make excuses like: Tomorrow I will begin; tomorrow I will pray with greater fervor etc. The person who lives in the present day and in the moment will not trouble himself with tomorrow or despair because of it. ‘Today if you shall hark’ – today and only today.”

R' Nachman, much like R' Tzadok, talks about the initial moment we set out on the journey of avodat Hashem and enter into the service of God. This is probably the most challenging moment. When a person stands at the entrance, about to “step into avodat Hashem”, the load may seem so heavy that the person is unable to move and take the first step. Procrastination is a natural human tendency – “I will do it tomorrow...”

R' Nachman gives us a wonderful piece of advice: How should one enter the realm of avodat Hashem when the load seems so heavy? How can one overcome the “chametz-traits” of stagnancy and procrastination and let one’s inherent vitality burst forth? The advice given is to be fully present in the moment, and to imagine there is no tomorrow. After all, tomorrow does not yet exist in the present. What does exist in the present? The present itself and nothing else! But with the present moment one can do so much to transform one’s life!

The People of Israel had been waiting for the redemption for many years. And when it

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finally came, they could have easily missed the moment. This “lost moment” is described quite picturesquely in the Song of Songs (5): “I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with flowing myrrh, upon the handles of the bar. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had turned away, and was gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer...”

How many times in our lives do we not linger for a minute too long and fail to open the door only to miss an opportunity never to return?

The verses in this week’s portion evoke a sense of gratitude for the fact that our forefathers seized the moment and took the first step from bondage to redemption.

Let us now go back to the prayer with which we began: “May it be Your will that you save us from the hands of both, such that we are able to fulfill all your commandments wholeheartedly.”

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

A Night of Transformation

The celebration of Pesach, and particularly the Seder night as described in Parshas Bo, is marked by stark contrasts. In the days of the Beis Hamikdash, the night of Pesach centered around the eating of the korban Pesach. There are two seemingly contradictory themes that emerge from how the korban Pesach is eaten. Its meat must be roasted rather than cooked since roasted meat was a sign of wealth and royalty. Similarly, the meat must not be left over as such a practice would resemble one who can't afford fresh meat the following day. Bones of the korban Pesach may not be broken since this is something one who lacks enough meat would usually do. The Sefer Hachinuch (in mitzvos 7,8, and 16) elaborates upon how observing these intricacies of halacha creates the mindset of our state of royalty as the nation of Hashem.

Even as we celebrate our exalted status on Pesach night, we perform mitzvos that invoke a very different image of ourselves.

Accompanying the korban Pesach we partake of matza and marror. Matza is referred to as lechem oni - a poor man's bread. We highlight an existence of poverty and suffering even as we celebrate our newfound freedom. This aspect of matza is so essential that we introduce the matza at the seder by declaring "Ha lachma anya" - this is a poor man's bread. Completing the mitzvos of eating on Pesach night is the obligation to partake of marror, which is the ultimate reminder of the bitterness of our lives as slaves prior to being redeemed on this very night.

Freedom and slavery, wealth and poverty, not only permeate the mitzvos of Pesach, Matza, and Marror, but the mitzva of sippur yetzias

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Mitzrayim revolves around these very themes as well. We are taught by Chazal that the Torah commandment of telling the story of yetzias Mitzrayim at the seder must include beginning with how lowly we were, both physically and spiritually, as slaves, and culminating in the glory bestowed upon us. The actual mitzvos as well as our entire discussion on this night encompass this theme of transformation.

Such a change in our existence, from those who survived on mere matza and tasted the bitterness of slavery to becoming a royal nation, should mentally take a great deal of time; perhaps generations would have to pass before a glorious nation could emerge. Yet, Hashem performed this transformation in literally the blink of an eye.

The symbolism of a downtrodden suffering people all of a sudden celebrating as the beloved royal nation of Hashem has great meaning for us both personally and nationally. Situations that appear bleak and hopeless can turn around in a moment. Personal suffering and pain can be transformed instantaneously to joy. Over the course of generations Jews have often sat down to the Seder in the most difficult circumstances. What gave our people the strength to celebrate the first Pesach after the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed? From where did Jews get the inspiration to perform a Seder knowing that the dangers of a blood libel could be upon them at any moment? How were Jews able to find the faith to commemorate the night of redemption from Mitzrayim even as they were suffering during the horrors of the Holocaust?

It was the Seder night that kept alive the dream of nobility of the Jewish people. Just as matza and maror gave way to korban Pesach over three thousand years ago, so too Klal Yisrael will emerge from galus and once again return to the Beis Hamikdash to partake of the korban Pesach and celebrate its glorious destiny.

As we read Parshas Bo, although still several months away from Pesach, let us focus on the dream of geula that we eagerly wait for at any moment.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

A Family

Speak to the entire community of Israel, saying, “On the tenth of this month, let each one take a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for each household. (Shemos 12:3)

And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came. (Shemos 1:1)

The Mitzvah of Chanuka is: A candle for each man and his household! (Shabbos 21B)

In his Haggadah, Rav Hirsch ztl. notes that the Jewish People were organized as a household unit when they entered the exile and they were

also configured as households at the time of the exodus just as we find ourselves on Pesach ever since- not in a stadium but rather at home! On Chanukah too, we rally around the Menorah as a household. The survival of the Jewish People and all civilization, as well, is dependent on the welfare of the family!

About the importance of the home as a primary survival unit he writes: “To inherit a home and to build a home – this encompasses a Jew’s ethical vocation on earth. Is it not the sine qua non for the hopes and perfection of all nations? If only this great Magna Carta were consulted wherever education and culture, peace and salvation of men and mankind are discussed. For the fate of men, their success or failure, is decided neither in the chambers of rulers nor on the battlefield. It is not decided in business concerns, in colleges and institutions of arts and sciences or in houses of worship. It is sealed only in one place, in the parental home... There exists no substitute for the home, and if one is looking elsewhere for the source of peace and prosperity, he is searching in vain. All of a nation’s politics and diplomacy, its theories of national economy and institutions for mass education, its trade and industry, its schools and community centers – none of these will save the people from extinction if they let the parental home become a parody. Are children born for the sake of the state’s false concern instead of the warm love of parents? Does the census show ever-growing numbers of children without parents and parents without children? Does the nation’s high society make a mockery of morality and modesty? If so, then all the palaces it is building are founded on quicksand.”

Many years ago, now, my oldest son was just returning from learning in Israel. He was ripe and ready for Shiduchim and we had a stack of resumes of wonderful prospects. My wife and I kept shuffling the papers and as we did we found ourselves getting more confused. This is obviously an important life decision. Every resume, which is admittedly a woefully deficient and two-dimensional representation of a complete person, looked interesting and inviting for different reasons. We could not figure out what was really important. Head of GO, valedictorian, wealthy father, a famous family name, beauty, a good job, a brilliant academic career, which factor or combinations of factors should be attracting our attention.

We decided to call our Rebbe. At that time, he had married off 13 of his 14 children and shortly afterwards the 14th as well. He learns 60 Daf of Gemora every day for more than 50 years and we were thinking that perhaps, just perhaps he might have an extra insight or some real-life experience to help us navigate this confusing process. So, one evening we secluded ourselves in a quiet room and made the phone call. He was in Florida at the time convalescing from a shoulder injury. He picked up the phone and greeted me enthusiastically

Likutei Divrei Torah

and I told him that I am here with my wife listening and we are trying to figure out what to look for in a Shiduch. My wife sat poised with her pen ready to start writing every word he would utter.

There wasn’t a moment of hesitation and he said the following, “A family! A girl comes from a family! Look for a family!” My wife was just beginning to transcribe and then he said something very surprising. He said, “Good night!” and the call ended. I was about to ask if there is anything else or what about a family, but the call was over. My wife asked, “Did we fumble the call?” I told her, “I don’t think so! He said ‘Good night!’”

We sat there in stunned silence. All he said was, “Look for a family!” Then it dawned on us that if that’s all he mentioned, then that must be the most important factor. A girl comes from a family! A boy comes from a family! Together they will build a new family. Therefore, the most important thing must be a family!

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 28 January 2023 / 6 Shevat 5783

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Bo

Escape From Egypt

"Rise up and go from among my people" (12:31)

When I was young, there was one phone in the entrance of our house on a little table, and a chair to sit down on to 'make a call.' Now, anyone without a phone in his pocket is considered a little pretentious or a little weird. Speaking "in person" could also mean a Zoom or a Skype face-to-face. And nobody writes anymore — people just text, spelling mistakes and all.

As fast as life has become, so have its spiritual challenges. A couple of decades ago, if someone wanted to do something wrong, he'd have to travel to the seedy side of town, risk being seen by a friend or a teacher, going into a shop and confessing his low desires to the person behind the counter. Nowadays, people don't need to "prepare" to do something wrong. As soon as the negative impulse strikes — bingo, the transgression is right there at your fingertips, quite literally.

How does one fight such a battle?

It is fought by using the enemies' weapons. The media brainwashes us with the culture of consumption, of instant gratification: Olam Hazeh. We need to "dry-clean" our brains with images of deferred gratification.

The Chafetz Chaim writes in Nidchei Yisrael, Chapter 26:

"When someone overcomes the yetzer hara (negative drive) for arayot, for immorality, his head becomes encircled with a light from Heaven — a halo. We can't see it but in the time of Chazal that aura was visible. The Chafetz Chaim continues, "Someone who overcomes his yetzer, especially today, merits that not only that he, but all his descendants until the end of time, will be blessed with the virtue of his courageousness and his strength of character, and their nature will lead them to do what is hatov v'hayasha — "what is good and just."

Think about that! Burn that image into your consciousness.

Please remember, if you ever have an impulse to do something improper, that standing behind you are your children, who you want to become righteous members of the Jewish People. Remember what the Chafetz Chaim promises: One moment can save your children. And that's not all.

Standing behind your children are their children, and behind them as far as your eye can see are the exponentially increasing number of your descendants. There are hundreds and thousands of them, all watching you, holding their breath while waiting to see what you will do. To see whether you will succumb or if you will elevate those thousands of lives and your name for all eternity — through a moment's self-control.

The Exodus from Egypt was not just a physical escape, but a spiritual escape for all of time. Burned into our genes was the dormant greatness to rise above the moment and achieve spiritual greatness for ourselves and all of our progeny for all of time.

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Rabbi YY Jacobson

Depressing Time, Productive Time, and Redemptive Time

Is Time a Storm in Which We Are All Lost?

Always Late

Sarah was always late to work no matter how much she tried to be on time, or how many times her boss scolded her. She just could not wake up on time. Her boss said she would fire her if it did not stop. Sarah decided to seek the advice of her doctor. He prescribed her some medication and told her to take one pill before going to sleep, so she can fall asleep immediately and rise early. She did just that and she woke up before dawn and headed into work feeling well-rested. Sarah told her boss about the doctor's prescription and how well it worked.

Her boss said, "That is great, Sarah, but where were you yesterday?"

Choosing the World & the Jews

It is a strange Midrash, found in this week's Torah portion, Bo. At the surface, it seems baffling, but upon deeper reflection, it contains an extraordinary meditation on how we live our lives and manage our time. The Jewish calendar has twelve lunar months. The first day of each month is known as Rosh Chodesh (the head of the month); the first day of the year (the first day of the first month of the year) is known as Rosh Hashanah (the head of the year).

Says the Midrash:[1]

שנות רבה טו, יא: קבר אפר, סחיש סעה לנט. ברא הוא זקנין (זהלים, יב) אפר רגוי אפר ה' אלקיו, משבחר פקוז ברוך הוא בעולמו, קבב בו ראש חנימים ובעינם, גוששבר בזילב ובגוי קבב בו ראש חנימים של אללה.

When G-d chose His world, He established 'heads of months' and 'heads of years.' When G-d chose Jacob and his children, the Jewish people, He established the 'head of the month of redemption' (the first day of the month of Nissan, the month of the Exodus).

What does this Midrash mean? What does it mean "when G-d chose His world?" Why does the Midrash not say, "when G-d created His world?" And what does choosing a world have to do with the establishment of the head of a month and the heads of a year? And what does the Midrash mean when it says that "when G-d chose Jacob and his children, He established the Head of the month of redemption?"

Delineating time into months and years is based on the astronomical lunar and solar orbits. The moon completes its orbit after one month. The sun completes its orbit after a year. What does any of this have to do with G-d "choosing His world," or "choosing Jacob and his children?"

An Address to High School Girls

On January 16, 1964 (2 Shevat, 5724), the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) addressed a group of teenage girls, the graduating class of a New York Jewish girls' high school, Beth Rivkah.[2] He offered them a most marvelous insight into this Midrash. This profound perspective can teach us volumes about how to view a one-liner in Midrash, and how to speak to the hearts of teenage girls.

(This coming Shabbos marks the 70th anniversary of the leadership of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who succeeded his father-in-law as the leader of Chabad 70 years ago, on the 10th of Shevat 1951. The following insight is characteristic of the profundity and richness of his Torah teachings and perspectives.)

Three Types of Time

Aristotle said that time was the greatest teacher who killed all his students. There is no "teacher" like time. What we learn through time and aging is unparalleled by any class or teacher. The experience of life is the greatest teacher. The saying goes: When a man with money meets a man with experience, the man with experience ends up with the money; the man with the money ends up with an experience.

And yet the clock stops for nobody. "Suspect each moment, for it is a thief, tiptoeing away with more than it brings," John Updike said. You may be sleeping, sipping a coffee, surfing the web, or getting angry at your boss or your spouse, the clock is ticking away. How do we deal with the merciless reality of time?

There are three ways, suggests the Midrash. There are three experiences of time: depressing time, meaningful time, and redemptive time. You choose in which time-zone you will breathe.

Depressing Time

For some, time is just an endless flow, a shapeless blob, a random stream that never ceases. A day comes and a day goes, and then another day comes and goes. Each day is the same as the day before, and they all add up to nothing.

Sometimes you watch people who allow their days and years to pass without goals. Every day is an invitation to squander yet another 24 hours until it too will bite the dust. If the boredom gets to you, you find ways to escape and dull the void.

This is an empty time: time devoid of any theme. Time as it is on its own, without human initiative and creativity. Shapeless and formless. One set of 24 hours is indistinguishable from another set of 24 hours.

Productive Time

Comes the Midrash and says, “When G-d chose His world, He established ‘heads of months’ and ‘heads of years.’” For the world to become a chosen place, a desirable habitat, a place worth living in, a place that G-d not only created but chose, we must grant the endless flow of time the dignity of purpose. Every day ought to have a productive objective, every month—a meaningful goal, every year—a dynamic rhythm. The world G-d chose and desired was one in which humanity learns to confer meaning on time, to utilize it for constructive and beneficial endeavors. A meaningful life is a life in which every day is filled with meaningful choices and experiences, utilized to promote goodness, righteousness, and justice.

This is what it means to choose your world and choose your life, to appreciate that G-d chose this world. There is meaning and purpose in each moment. You can view life as random and valueless, or you can see life as a gift, and view time as priceless, something I ought to cultivate in the fullest way. I choose to invest all my energy, creativity, and passion into each moment; and for me, each day is an invitation to deeper growth and awareness.

So “When G-d chose His world, He established ‘heads of months’ and ‘heads of years.’” For time to be utilized purposefully, every month must have a “head,” which gives the month its tone and direction. Every year must have a “head,” Rosh Hashanah, the time to put into focus the year that passed and the year ahead. For time to be used productively, it must be delineated. I must take note of sunrise and sunset, of a new month and a new year. Each presents me with a specific energy, calling, and opportunity.

Redemptive Time

You can live a productive life, mark your days with worthy objectives. Your life has rhythm. You have a morning, a night, a lunch break, a weekend, and a vacation.

But you are still confined within the realm of a mortal, finite and frail universe. As one wise man said, Men talk of killing time, while time quietly kills them. Or: Time is a storm in which we are all lost; time is free, but it’s priceless; you can’t own it, but you can use it. You can’t keep it, but you can spend it. Once you’ve lost it you can never get it back.

Within the restricted structure of our bodies, life span, and circumstances, we can use our time productively. Yet, we can’t free ourselves from the prison of mortality. Even when I work hard and use my time well, it is still cruel to me. It ages me. At any moment something can happen which will shake up and destroy my entire structure and rhythm.

Here is where the Midrash opens us up to another dimension of time, and this is where the Jewish story is introduced into history. “When G-d chose Jacob and his children He established the head of the month of Redemption.” G-d gave us the ability to liberate and redeem ourselves from the natural, mortal, and finite reality. He allowed us to align our posture with Divine infinity; not just to be productive with our time, but to confer upon each moment transcendence, to grant it the resonance of eternity, to liberate it and ourselves from the shackles of mortality.

You can be productive with your time. You can use it to shovel the snow, mow the lawn, fix the garage, read a good book, shop in Costco, enhance your computer speed, sell a building, cook a gourmet meal, and help society. This is worthwhile. But you are capable of more: You can make each moment Divine, elevating it to the realm of the sacred, where each moment, hour, day, week, month, and year become infused with G-dliness and are thus transformed into eternity. You can allow your time to become a conduit for the timeless.

“When G-d chose Jacob and his children He established the head of the month of Redemption.” This is the month of Nissan, the month when we were set free of Egyptian bondage and were empowered to free ourselves from every form of bondage. Torah and Mitzvos make our time not only productive but Divine.

When you align your time rhythm with the Divine, realizing that every moment of time is an opportunity to connect with the infinite light

vibrating through your body and the cosmos; when you use your time to study G-d’s Torah, to connect to G-d, to perform a mitzvah, and to live in the Divine consciousness of oneness, your time is not only productive, but it is redemptive, uninhibited by the shackles of nature finitude. You redeem and transform your time—by aligning it with the divine blueprint for life.

The Choice

When the sun rises, and I declare “Shema Yisroel” to align my posture with Divine oneness—the moment of sunrise is now etched in eternity. When the sun of Friday is about to set and I kindle the Shabbos lights, it is a moment transformed into transcendent peacefulness. When I take a moment to do a favor for another person, for tuning into the love of the universe, for studying Torah or praying, I elevate the moment into transcendence.

In the words of the Tanya (ch. 25), “In the higher reality, this union (between the soul and G-d when we perform a mitzvah) is eternal, for G-d and His will transcend time... Only here below is the union within the limits of time.”

Each of us must choose in which “time zone” we will live. Do I live in a “depressing time,” letting my days and nights pass without meaning? Do I elevate my days into worthwhile experiences? Or, in my ultimate calling, do I turn each day into a redemptive experience, into a conduit for infinity?

How We Study Science and Physics

The Rebbe said one more thing to these girls about their academic studies. Some of us study the sciences and see them merely as interesting data, raw facts. However, much of humanity has come to appreciate that when we study biology, physics, history, or math it must be with a productive and meaningful purpose—to make the world a better place, to enhance life on our planet, and to promote justice and compassion.

Yet, our ultimate calling is to see all of our studies, all branches of wisdom, as an instrument to transform our world and our lives into an abode for the Divine infinite reality, to infuse all aspects of our lives with true and timeless meaning, with everlasting love and holiness, by revealing that ultimately, we are all one, and everything is part of that oneness.

[1] Shemos Rabba 15:11.

[2] The talk is published in Likutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1263-1267. (The Rebbe bases his explanation on Or Hatorah Parshas Bo p. 264. This Sicha is an extraordinary example of how to “translate” a maamar into relevant language. The maamar in Or Hatorah is abstract and the Rebbe applied it in the most practical and relevant way.)

Weekly Parsha BO

Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

As the drama of the Exodus from Egypt draws nearer its climax in this week’s Torah reading, one cannot help but be struck by the stubbornness of Pharaoh in the face of all of the plagues visited upon him and his nation. His advisers had long before told him that all was lost and that he should cut his losses quickly by freeing the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. This seemingly wise and rational counsel was rejected by Pharaoh out of hand.

Pharaoh sees himself as a godlike figure, omniscient, supremely brilliant and all knowing. He is trapped in a propaganda web of his own making – he can never admit to being wrong or to having made an error of judgment or policy. In the course of human history this has often been the fatal error made by dictators who were always supremely confident in their arrogance and who never acknowledged their mistakes.

Just recall the mass murderers and dictators of our past century – Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Arafat, etc. None of them ever admitted to error and all of them led their people to disaster and untold suffering. This was the arrogance of power overwhelming rational thought and nullifying good strategic planning. There is also an arrogance of intellect. The intellectuals amongst us, who always know what is best for everyone else, are never reticent about rendering opinions on all issues and policies. Again, the fact that they have been wrong – dead

wrong – so many times in the past causes them no inhibition in advancing their current viewpoints.

The Torah seems to attribute Pharaoh's continuing folly of unreasonable stubbornness, to God, so to speak, 'hardening his heart.' This implies that somehow Pharaoh's freedom of choice was diminished and he could not have capitulated to the demands of Moshe even if he had wished to do so. This philosophic and theological difficulty has been dealt with by the great commentators of Israel over the ages, with varying theories offered and advanced.

It seems from many of their opinions that at a certain point in human decision-making, a tipping point is achieved when the leader can no longer admit to error and remain the leader. 'Hardening' the leader's heart means there is an unwillingness to give up one's position of power. Very few leaders in the history of humanity have willingly surrendered power.

Simply rising to a position of leadership, let alone absolute and dictatorial power, almost automatically 'hardens one's heart' and limits one's choices and policy options. The Torah blesses a generation that is privileged to have a leader that is capable of admitting sin and error and can offer a public sacrifice in the Temple in atonement.

The greatness of King David lies not only in his heroic spiritual and physical accomplishments as king of Israel but in his ability to admit to personal failings and errors of judgment. Pharaoh is incapable of such self-scrutiny and realistic humility. His lust for power has 'hardened his heart' beyond the power of recall. He has doomed himself as have so many of his ilk over the centuries.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

chiefrabbi.org

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Bo: It's not just the thought that counts!

25 January 2023

What is the relevance of tefillin in our times?

In Parshat Bo, the Torah states (Shemot 13:16),

"Vehaya le'ot al yadecha uletotafot bein einecha." – "And they shall be a sign upon your arm and frontlets between your eyes."

Here there is a reference to the tefillin shel yad which we wear on the arm and the tefillin shel rosh which we wear on our heads. But notice, with regard to the tefillin of the arm, that what the Torah says is in the singular: *vehaya le'ot* – it shall be a sign, whereas with regard to the tefillin shel rosh, it is *totafot*, in the plural. An explanation of this can be derived from the Aramaic translation of Onkelos, who translates *totafot* as *tefillin*, in the plural as well.

So from here we learn that while we only have on the 'shel yad' (the tefillin of the arm) which we start with, that is only in the singular – it's not the whole thing. It's only once we have the 'shel rosh' on (the tefillin of the head) together with the 'shel yad' of the arm that it is tefillin – we have the entire set.

'Shel yad' and 'shel rosh' are actually separate mitzvot. However the impact of them comes when both are there together.

There are two very powerful messages here for us. First of all, the 'shel yad' (tefillin of the arm) represents action, because the arm is the busiest, most active part of the body, whereas the tefillin 'shel rosh' (of the head) represents thought and intention. The message is that it's not good enough just to think, to have intentions. We need to implement our intentions so that they can be realised through our actions.

Secondly, the tefillin shel yad faces the heart which is the seat of emotion whereas the tefillin shel rosh is upon our heads which is the seat of logic. The message here is that we shouldn't only be cerebral beings; we need to be feeling beings. We need to connect emotionally with others with love and affection, and also we need to recognise that we can't allow our emotions to run away with themselves. We need to apply logic and reason and sometimes our minds need to put the brakes on our hearts.

So on a daily basis, therefore, tefillin are so relevant for us. They remind us to always translate our good intentions into meaningful action, and

also to guarantee that we have the highest quality of mind power and also emotional capacity in everything that we do.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Parshas Bo

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is sponsored in memory of Frummit bas Yosef. War: What is it Good for?

And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I have amused Myself with Egypt [...] (10:2).

In Parshas Eikev, when Bnei Yisroel are on the threshold of entering Eretz Yisroel, Moshe Rabbeinu attempts to calm their fears: "Perhaps you will say in your heart, 'These nations are more numerous than I, how will I be able to drive them out? Do not fear them! Remember what Hashem your God did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt [...]" (Devarim 7:17-18). Moshe is reminding Bnei Yisroel of the incredible miracles that Hashem performed to utterly decimate the Egyptians and free them from slavery so that upon entering Eretz Yisroel they would not be apprehensive, but rather confident of victory.

However, Moshe's strategy to calm Bnei Yisroel is difficult to understand: Moshe is speaking to Bnei Yisroel after years of wandering in the desert – the story of the Exodus and all of the incredible miracles that Hashem performed happened almost forty years prior. In fact, almost every man who had experienced the Exodus was already dead, condemned to die in the desert. Those men who were children when Bnei Yisroel left Egypt would only have vague recollections of what happened four decades earlier.

Moreover, just three months prior Bnei Yisroel had incredible victories against both Sichon and Og – whom the Torah labels the "arms of the world" (Devarim 33:26) (i.e. pillars holding up the world – see Rashi ad loc). Instead of recalling events that had taken place 40 years ago, why wouldn't Moshe just refer to these incredible victories over Sichon and Og that were so fresh in their minds?

When the spies wanted to convince Bnei Yisroel that entering Eretz Yisroel was not going to be a cakewalk, they warned, "The Amalekites live in the land of the Negev" (Bamidbar 13:29), meaning that, assuming they would enter Eretz Yisroel from the south, the first people they would come across would be Amalek. Rashi (ad loc) points out that since they had already been attacked by the Amalekites, knowing that they would meet them again would surely drive fear into their hearts.

But this too is difficult to understand. While it's true that Bnei Yisroel had been victims of a sneaky and brutal attack by Amalek, under the leadership of Yehoshua and Moshe, Bnei Yisroel utterly destroyed them. What kind of strategy was this of the spies to try to instill fear and dread by threatening them with an opponent they had already soundly defeated?

The answer is that in war even when you win, you lose. Even victors suffer heavy damage. Before the Six Day War 50,000 graves were dug in Tel Aviv because that was the anticipated losses and they wanted to be prepared. The United States soundly defeated the Japanese in WWII, yet there were many disastrous battles like Pearl Harbor and Iwo Jima. The strategy of the spies was to instill the anxiety of entering a war knowing that even when you win many people die and never come back home. This is why Moshe didn't bring up Sichon and Og; even though they won, it was a hard fought war.

The possuk in our parsha lays out exactly what the battle with Egyptians were to Hashem. Rashi (10:2) explains that Hashem amused himself with the Egyptians, it was like a game and He made a sport of it. This is similar to watching a cat toy with a mouse; there is never the possibility that the cat is going to lose or get hurt. It's only a matter of how long the cat wishes to amuse himself. This is what Moshe is trying to impress on Bnei Yisroel – if you're worthy Hashem will take you into Eretz Yisroel with no stress of losing battles or suffering casualties. Just as Hashem took them out of Egypt and the battle was merely an amusement, He is more than capable of bringing you into Eretz Yisroel in the same manner.

Out of Control

Moshe said, "With our youngsters and with our elders we will go, with our sons and daughters, with our flock and with our cattle shall we go [...]” He (Pharaoh) responded – “Not so! Let the men go now and serve Hashem for that is your request” (10:9-11).

This week's parsha opens with Moshe threatening to once again visit upon the Egyptians a horrific plague (locusts). At the urging of his advisors, Pharaoh initially relents to let Bnei Yisroel go and serve Hashem. Pharaoh recalls Moshe and Aharon to the palace and asks them, “Go and worship Hashem your God, who exactly is going?” (10:8). Once Pharaoh hears that Moshe intends that everyone as well as all the cattle will be going on this spiritual pilgrimage, Pharaoh responds, “Not so! Let the men go now and serve Hashem for that is your request.” When Moshe holds fast to his request Pharaoh angrily chases them out of the palace.

This same scene repeats after the plague of darkness. Pharaoh summons Moshe and informs him that he will permit all the people to go and serve Hashem; only the cattle is to remain behind. Moshe responds by telling Pharaoh that not only will all of the cattle be going as well, but that Pharaoh himself will provide animals as offerings to Hashem. Needless to say, this comment does not sit well with Pharaoh and he responds by once again throwing him out of the palace along with the threat that if he ever comes back he will be put to death.

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 182:2) gives the following parable: A lion and a variety of animals, including a fox, were on a ship. The ship comes to a toll where a donkey was the dock master in charge of collecting the tolls from all the vessels. The donkey demands that the lion's ship pay the toll as well. The fox protests, “What impudence! Do you not see that the king of all the animals is among us! How dare you ask us to pay the toll?” The donkey retorts, “I am only collecting the toll to bring it to the king's treasury!” At this point, the lion asks that the ship be brought closer to the dock. He thereupon leaps from the ship and kills the donkey. The Midrash concludes that Pharaoh is the donkey, and this is what he gets for demanding a tribute from Hashem.

This Midrash is difficult to understand. The Gemara (Sukkah 30a) relates that a king once came to a toll and proceeded to pay the toll. His servants asked him, why are you paying the toll when the proceeds from tolls belong to you anyway? The king responded that if someone sees him not paying the toll then others might learn from him that it is acceptable not to pay it. Therefore, he wanted to pay it. In essence, it seems necessary that the king pay the toll. Why then did the lion kill the donkey for his impertinence?

Most disputes are about control. This is particularly true in family relationships and disharmony in marriage. The circumstances that created the problem are rarely the essence of the issue. The real point of contention is invariably control.

The Gemara is saying that, of course, the king can decide if he wants to pay the toll. If he has a valid reason to pay the tax he is entitled to do so because he can do whatever he wants. However, the Midrash faults the donkey for trying to control the interaction with the king of the animals. He is trying to exert his own control by saying that he has to collect the tax in order to give it back to the king. The fact that he has the impudence to demand the tax from the king means that he doesn't really submit to the fact that the king is the one to decide whether or not he wants to pay the tax. For that, he deserves to be put to death.

The same is true for Pharaoh. Even though he somewhat acknowledges that he has to submit to the will of Hashem, he constantly tries to limit Hashem's will by placing conditions on how Bnei Yisroel are to serve Him. Of course, trying to exert his own influence means that he isn't really submitting to the will of Hashem. Just as the donkey who tries to exert control by forcing the king to remit his own taxes pays for his impudence with his life, so too Pharaoh brought destruction upon himself and his country.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz
Parashat Vaera 5783 :: Who Can't?

This week's parsha, Vaera, tells us about a series of meetings between Moses and his brother Aaron – as G-d's emissaries to take the children of Israel out of Egypt – with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Before one of the first meetings, G-d instructed Moses and Aaron as follows:

“When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Provide a sign for yourselves, you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff, [and] cast [it] before Pharaoh; it will become a serpent.’ ” (Exodus 7, 9)

And indeed, when Moses and Aaron came to the meeting with Pharaoh, Aaron cast his staff down and it became a serpent. According to most commentators, it was some kind of snake. The Torah tells us that Pharaoh then called to the Egyptian sorcerers, the professional magicians of Egypt, and instructed them to perform for Moses and Aaron. The sorcerers managed through illusion to make their staffs turn into serpents, but Aaron's staff swallowed theirs.

A careful reading of Pharaoh's words to Moses and Aaron shows an interesting linguistic oddity. Pharaoh told them “Provide a sign for yourselves,” when the sign was meant for Pharaoh, not for Moses and Aaron. Had it been for them, it would have made sense for Pharaoh to say “Provide a sign for yourselves.” Pharaoh's idolatrous perceptions led him to believe that whoever could do the best magic was right. If he wanted the sign in order to be convinced that Moses and Aaron had actually come to him as part of a divine mission, why did he say “Provide a sign for yourselves”?

Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin (1887 – 1933; president of “Agudat Yisrael” in Poland, the head of the Chachmei Lublin yeshiva, and the initiator of the concept of “daf yomi”) offered a profound interpretation of Pharaoh's words. When Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and demanded he let the Jewish nation leave for the desert to worship G-d, Pharaoh thought their request was surreal since he considered them slaves unable to worship any god. He saw them as tools in the service of the kingdom; slaves devoid of personalities. The demand brought by Moses and Aaron seemed to him completely illogical.

So, Pharaoh said ‘Provide a sign for yourselves.’ Pharaoh did not tell them to perform just any magic, but to prove that their demand was possible, and that the Hebrew slaves could rise to the level of G-d worshippers. The sign was needed to prove that the words of Moses and Aaron were not surreal.

And indeed, the sign was the staff becoming a serpent and then going back to being a staff. Moses and Aaron proved with this sign that when there is “siyata d'shmaya,” help from Heaven, there is nothing that isn't possible. If G-d wants to take the Jewish nation out of Egypt and give them the Torah on Mount Sinai, then it is as possible as the staff becoming a serpent and then reverting back to being a staff.

The redemption of the Jewish nation from Egyptian slavery and their becoming a nation who received the Torah involved an extensive and comprehensive change in consciousness. From slaves devoid of choice, they became the nation that stands for free choice; from people whose rights were trampled, they became “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” whose mission is to lead all of humanity toward a life of justice and morality. Could such a change even be possible?

The staff that became a serpent and went back to being a staff came to prove to Moses and Aaron, and to the entire Jewish nation, that this was a possible change. And it came to also teach us, learners of Torah thousands of years later, that we are not expected to do the impossible. What is expected of us is possible, because human effort that goes along with “siyata d'shmaya,” help from Heaven, can surprise even the most optimistic person and bring about accomplishments that seem hard to attain.

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Rav Kook Torah
Bo: Donkey-Holiness
Rabbi Chanan Morrison

Immediately before leaving Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to commemorate the final plague of makkat bechorot, the death of the firstborn, by consecrating their firstborn, saying:

“When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us leave, God killed all the firstborns in Egypt, both man and beast. I therefore offer to God all male firstling animals, and redeem all the firstborns of my sons.” (Exod. 13:15)

This mitzvah applies not only to firstborn babies, but also to kosher animals, and — surprisingly — to firstborn donkeys: “Every firstling donkey must be redeemed with a sheep” (Exod. 13:13).

Why are firstborn donkeys also included in this mitzvah?

This is even more surprising when we consider that some non-kosher animals, such as camels and pigs, have only one sign of impurity. Donkeys, however, exhibit both signs of impurity — they are not ruminants, nor do they have cloven hooves. The Zohar teaches that the donkey is *avi avot ha-tumah*, the ultimate source of impurity.

In addition, the Maharal of Prague noted that the Hebrew word for ‘donkey’ (*chamor*) shares the same root as the word for ‘material’ (*chomer*). The donkey, he explained, is a symbol of materialism and crassness.

So why did God bestow the special holiness of *bechor* on this ignoble creature?

Hidden Holiness

One explanation proposed by the Sages in *Bechorot* 5b is that donkeys helped facilitate the Exodus, as they hauled the treasures of Egyptian gold and silver for the Hebrew slaves. Yet the Israelites could have used some other pack animal. It would appear that there is something special about the donkey, that it symbolizes an inner truth about the redemption of the Jewish people, both in Egypt and in the future national rebirth of the Messianic Era.

The Israelites in Egypt had sunk to the lowest levels of idolatry and impurity. Outwardly, they were indistinguishable from their Egyptian neighbors. According to the Midrash, even the angels were unable to distinguish between the two nations. They questioned God’s decision to rescue the Israelites at the Red Sea, protesting, ‘Both the Egyptians and the Israelites worship idols!’

But as with the donkey, the impurity of the Jewish people was only on the surface, hiding a great inner holiness. It was a superficial defect, as it says, ‘Do not look upon me [disdainfully] because I am black; for [it is only] the sun that has darkened me’ (*Song of Songs* 1:6).

The Messianic Donkey

We find a similar idea with regard to the future redemption. The Sages noted that the prophets used conflicting metaphors to describe the Messianic Era. In Daniel’s nighttime vision, the Messianic king arrives “on the clouds of the heaven” (7:13). The prophet Zechariah, on the hand, spoke of a righteous king who makes his appearance as “a pauper, riding on a donkey” (9:9). So how will the Messiah arrive — floating on clouds, or sitting on a donkey?

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explained that the Messiah’s form of transportation depends on us:

“If [the people of Israel] merit, he will come ‘on heavenly clouds.’ If they do not merit, then he will be ‘a pauper riding on a donkey.’” (*Sanhedrin* 98a)

In other words, if the Jewish people attain a spiritual level high enough, they will merit a supernatural redemption replete with wonders and miracles — the Messianic king on clouds. If, however, the redemption arrives because the final hour has come, but the Jewish people are not worthy — then the redemption will unfold through natural means (see *Ohr HaChaim* on Num. 24:17).

Thus, “a pauper riding on a donkey” is a metaphor for an undeserved redemption, a redemption which comes despite a poverty of merits. It is a redemption based on natural processes, as exemplified by the donkey, a symbol of the material world. Yet this donkey, while externally crass and impure, has a special holiness hidden within — the holiness of the firstborn.

According to Rav Kook, the image of the Messiah arriving on a donkey characterizes the period of *Ikveta deMashicha*, the generation when the ‘footsteps’ (*ikvot*) of redemption are first heard. The Talmud (*Sotah* 49b) describes this era as a time of terrible spiritual decline, replete with

brazeliness, immorality, and corruption. But the Zohar asserts that, despite its external faults, the generation will be “good on the inside.” This inner goodness is reflected in the unusual nature of the Jewish people in the pre-Messianic Era. Despite the darkness clouding their behavior and beliefs, they are characterized by an innate holiness, which finds expression in their great love for the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

The Function of Chevlei Mashiach

The Sages indicated the deeply disturbing nature of *Ikveta deMashicha* with the term *chevlei mashiach*, the ‘birth pangs’ that precede the Messianic Era. In his seminal work, *Orot*, Rav Kook discussed various reasons for the intensified degree of materialism that characterizes the era of national revival. His central argument is that the Messianic ‘birth pangs’ come to correct an imbalance stemming from centuries of stateless dispersion.

Rav Kook explained the process using the following analogy. The dregs at the bottom of a wine bottle help preserve the wine. If a bottle lacks dregs, and we wish to correct the situation by adding dregs, the initial result will be to muddy the entire bottle, temporarily ruining it. But as the dregs settle at the bottom, the wine regains its clarity and benefits from the preservative nature of the dregs.

So too, involvement in material pursuits is necessary to ensure the flow of normal life. The exile, with its concentration on spiritual matters, enervated the life-force of the Jewish people to such an extent that their national survival was in danger. The Jewish people needed to return to their land in order to survive as a nation. The return to the land and to a more balanced national life meant greater involvement in life’s material aspects. Thus the early pioneers were occupied primarily with the physical revival of the Jewish people in *Eretz Yisrael* — draining swamps, planting crops, building cities, establishing defense organizations, political institutions, and so on. Initially, the crassness and brazeliness of the pre-Messianic Era are cause for great consternation. But as the negative forces are subdued, like the settling of the wine dregs to the bottom of the bottle, their detrimental aspects dissipate.

Transforming Darkness to Light

The period of *Ikveta deMashicha* is a difficult time, and not all the Sages were eager to experience it. Rav Yosef, however, demonstrated great spiritual courage, saying, “Let the Messiah come; and may I merit to sit in the shadow of his donkey’s dung” (*Sanhedrin* 98b). Once again, we find the metaphor of the donkey used in connection with the Messianic Era.

Rav Yosef was accustomed to looking at the inner essence of things. He recognized the tremendous inner holiness hidden in this problematic generation, as symbolized by the Messiah’s donkey. Rav Yosef understood that the Messianic light will demonstrate how to utilize all forces, even the most coarse — “the donkey’s dung” — for the sake of good. He knew that the darkness of national rebirth will lead to an even higher light of Torah and knowledge of God.

Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Igrot HaRe’iyah vol. II, p. 188, letter 555 (1913) (Igeret Takanah); Orot p. 85 (Orot HaTechiyah, sec. 45).

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Bo

פרק ב ב תשב"ג

ויאמר אליהם... מי ומי ההלכים... ויאמר משה בנוערינו ובזקנינו נלך... כי ח' ג' ל' נו

He (Pharaoh) said to them, “Which ones are going...” Moshe said, “With our youngsters and with our elders we will go... because it is a festival of Hashem for us.” (10:8,9)

Pharaoh finally showed a crack in his armor. He was prepared to allow some Jews to leave, and he was willing to negotiate concerning who may leave and who must remain. Moshe *Rabbeinu* replied that he had no room for negotiation, no juncture for compromise. They were all leaving. Pharaoh countered, saying that he would allow the adult men to go. Moshe said it was insufficient, “We will go with everyone — from our youngsters to our elders.” They were at an impasse, with Moshe insisting on including the young children and even feeble elders, and

Pharaoh contending that this dispensation was only available to the able-bodied men.

Clearly, the debate between Moshe and Pharaoh epitomizes the varied approaches to education and the wide chasm that existed between the Torah perspective and the pagan viewpoint expressed by Pharaoh – which has found purchase even in contemporary society. Pharaoh was of the opinion that service to the Almighty belonged in the domain of the male adults. Children had no place in the ritual service. Moshe argued that we Jews see everyone as a worthy member of the nation. Children who do not commence their Torah education at a young age will be hard-pressed to adhere to it when they get older. Furthermore, for the Jew, religion is a way of life. It sustains him. Children require religion at the earliest opportunity. It is their lifeline.

Horav Aizik Ausband, zl, explains the idea behind Moshe's rejoinder, *Ki chag Hashem lanu*; "It is a festival of Hashem for us," and its message to Pharaoh. Why *lanu*, for us? It would have sufficed to say that it is a holiday. He explains that parents do not take their children to a wedding of a close friend. They have no place there. If it is a family wedding, however, all family members are invited and expected to attend. This is what Moshe intimated to Pharaoh. *Maamad Har Sinai*, the Revelation at *Har Sinai* where we received the Torah, was no simple experience. It was a family wedding during which we were wed to the Torah. This was personal and, thus, mandatory requirement for all family members.

Torah *chinuch* begins as soon as a child is able to respond to instructions. For some, this begins at birth. The *Chazon Ish*, zl, related that from his very birth, his mother insisted on washing *netillas yadayim*, his hands, in the morning when he woke up. It was her deepest desire that, from his earliest infancy, he grow *b'kedushah u'b'taharah*, with sanctity and purity. This idea is supported by the *Ben Ish Chai*, who encouraged mothers to wash their infants' hands. The *Brisker Rav*, zl, stated that for both boys and girls, Jewish education begins with washing their hands. In this manner, they are eventually inculcated with the notion that distancing oneself from *tumah*, ritual contamination, is a requisite for a Torah Jew.

It is related that when *Horav Chaim Kanievsky*, zl, was but a child of two-years-old, his father, the venerable *Steipler Gaon*, zl, would call him over and say, "Nu, jump up on the chair and tell me the names of each *meseches*, tractate, in *Shas*, the *Talmud*." The lad jumped up on the chair, and, in a sing song voice, to a tune that the *Steipler* sang to him when he put him to bed at night, he rattled off all of the *mesechtos*. As he said the last one (*Uktzin*), he added, "And now give me the candy!" My postscript: When a child is raised with such *chavivus*, love, for Torah; when he sees from his earliest moments of cogency what his parents value, it is no wonder that he attained such extraordinary proficiency in those *mesechtos*.

The *Ponovezher Rav*, zl, related an inspiring story concerning *Rebbetzin Meita Schlesinger*, a"h, wife of *Horav Yechiel Michel Schlesinger*, founder and *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Kol Torah*. When the *Rav* was yet a young man, he founded a *Kollel* (in Lithuania) for young Torah scholars who would dedicate their entire days and nights to Torah study. These were not ordinary young scholars. They were the cream of the *yeshivah* world who would one day go on to become *rabbanim* and *roshei yeshivah*. The idea of *kollel* was then a novelty, but, the *Ponovezher Rav* was no ordinary *gadol*. His innovative nature spurred many of his projects. His dedication to Hashem and love of Torah and *am Yisrael* are what catalyzed the merit for achieving Hashem's blessing.

One night, the *Rav* took a walk and noticed a young woman with a young child walking back and forth outside the *kollel*. Every once in a while, she would stop next to a window and listen to the sound of Torah emanating from the *kollel*. This went on for an hour. This (what appeared to be) strange behavior prompted the *Rav* to ask about this woman. Who was she? Perhaps she was in need of assistance? He walked over to her and asked, "Who are you, and why are you walking back and forth with your little boy by the *kollel*?"

The woman replied, "I am the wife of *Rav Yechiel Michel Schlesinger*, who sits by that window learning. I come here at night because my husband leaves the house early in the morning and returns late at night. We hardly see each other during the course of the day. My greatest pleasure is to stand outside 'his' window and listen to him learning. Also, I want my young son to hear and absorb the sounds of Torah."

That little boy grew up to be *Horav Moshe Yehudah Schlesinger, Shlita*, who has served as *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Kol Torah* for over fifty years. As a background to the story, *Rebbetzin Schlesinger* hailed from an aristocratic family in Hamburg, Germany. She could have chosen to live a life of luxury and entitlement. She instead chose Torah, because her greatest love was reserved for Torah. She sought a husband who was like-minded. They left Germany for Lithuania where her husband would achieve his greatest success in Torah. Aware of all this, the *Rav* told the woman who was inspired by the *kol*, sound, of Torah study, "One day, your husband will establish a *yeshivah*. I will advise him to name it *Kol Torah* in your honor. In 1939, *Rav Yechiel Michel* left Europe together with his wife and their young family and emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, where he founded *Yeshivas Kol Torah* – a fitting tribute to the dedication to, and love of, Torah that was the hallmark of his home.

וְהִי תְהִיא צַעַקָּה גְּדֹלָה בְּכָל אֶרְצֵי מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר כִּמָּהוּ לֹא נָהִיָּה וּכִמָּהוּ לֹא תְּסִפְתָּ

There shall be a great outcry in the entire land of Egypt, such as there had never been and such a there shall never be again. (11:6)

Moshe Rabbeinu warned of the impending plague of *makkas bechoros*, smiting of the firstborn. He added that the cries of grief would supersede any cries that had been and any cries that would ever be. These are strong words coming from the individual who was the medium for the last nine plagues that had devastated Egypt. One would expect that such words would have shaken up the Egyptians to their very core. The *Midrash HaGadol*, however, relates a dialogue that ensued between an elderly Egyptian woman and Moshe. The woman screamed, "You are a false prophet! An old woman who has no father, no mother, no brother, no sister, no son, and no daughter, for whom will she cry out?"

When Moshe heard this, he countered, "Your outcry will precede their outcry. (In other words, she will be beset with inconsolable grief.) Apparently, at one time, the woman had had a son who had died. She was now left alone, bereft of all family. Indeed, what did she now have to cry about? Ostensibly, this woman did not give up on the only family member that she had. She sculpted an image of him, an idol to remind her of her son. Every day, following each meal, she would stand and dance before this sculpture. This became the focus of her life. On the night of *makkas bechoros*, dogs came and attacked the sculpture, completely destroying it. The woman went berserk with grief. She cried and screamed over her loss. She fulfilled the *pasuk*, "There will be an outcry in the entire Land of Egypt."

Horav Yisrael Meir Druck, Shlita, quotes his father, who derived a fundamental lesson from this incident. We see that a person can experience visions of the Divine, actions that clearly indicate that there is a G-d Who controls the world. This woman saw the truth, but chose to either ignore or deny it. She saw and experienced the first nine miraculous plagues. She had no question in her mind that which Moshe was warning would occur – would certainly occur. Yet, she had the temerity to defy Moshe and say – "But I will not cry. So, the outcry will not be everywhere. There will be one person who (because she has nothing to cry about) will not cry." To call Moshe a false prophet exhibits an audacity that borders on mindlessness. This shows us how obtuse one's heart can be if he/she does not work on himself/herself.

The *shifchah al ha'yam*, maidservant who stood at the Red Sea, saw a revelation of Hashem's glory that was unprecedented and never repeated. *Chazal* teach that her level of prophecy (what she saw) was even greater than that of the *Navi Yechezkel*. "Nonetheless," says *Horav Chaim Shmuelitz*, zl, "she remained a *shifchah*." The experience did not transform her. We see what we want to see because

we do not develop the ability to “read” what we see, so that we can spiritually elevate ourselves.

Horav Shmuel Truvitz, zl, relates that he once traveled in a *monit*, taxi. Seeing a Torah sage, the driver, who was not himself a practicing Jew, said, “I once witnessed the Creator in action. I saw a miracle taking place right before my very own eyes.” This piqued *Rav Truvitz*’s curiosity, “So, tell me what you saw.”

The driver related that when he and his friend had been in the IDF, army, a venomous snake had wound itself around his friend and was poised to bite him. The driver told his friend, “I can shoot the snake, but he is wound so tightly around you, I might hit you by accident.” The friend, who was facing certain death if the snake bit, agreed to let him shoot. After all, he really had nothing to lose.

A religious soldier who was part of their platoon suggested, “Let us all say *Shema Yisrael* together.” As soon as they began to recite the *Shema*, the snake slithered away.

“My friend whose life was saved became a *baal teshuvah*,” the taxi driver said.

Rav Truvitz was astonished, “Your friend became a *baal teshuvah*, but what about you? You, too, witnessed the miracle. How is it that you saw the miracle as did your friend and only he became a *baal teshuvah*?”

“The snake was not wrapped around me. My life was not in danger.” A person can witness miracles and still remain unmoved.

ולא יהיה בכם נגף למשחית בבחתי בארץ מצרים

There shall not be a plague of destruction upon you when I strike in the land of Egypt. (12:13)

ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר

You shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning. (12:22)

The Jews were warned to stay home during the destruction that Hashem was wreaking in Egypt. What about the Jew who left his house? Did he perish together with the Egyptians? *Rashi* alludes to such a situation when he comments concerning the *pasuk*, “There shall not be a plague of destruction upon you.” If a Jew happened to be in an Egyptian home during the plague, was he smitten together with his Egyptian host? No. This was Hashem’s promise: “Jews will not die.” *Mishnas Rashi* wonders why there is a question that a member of the Jewish People would suffer in the destruction. Just because he happened to be in an Egyptian home during the plague is not reason for inclusion in the punishment – or is it?

Mishnas Rashi explains that we must first ask ourselves what a Jew is doing in the house of an Egyptian. Apparently, a Jew who felt comfortable visiting an Egyptian must have been dealing with some severe spiritual deficiencies. If, after all the Egyptians did to us, he had the temerity to visit and maintain a social relationship with one of them, he was profoundly challenged in his spiritual realm. Furthermore, after Egypt endured so much from the plagues that devastated Egypt, one would think that by now the most obtuse person would acknowledge that Hashem was involved in every aspect of the world. Yet, this person defied Hashem and left his house to pay a social call to his Egyptian friend! While outwardly he may have appeared to be a Jew, his self-loathing actions indicated that he would have liked to be perceived as an Egyptian. This is grounds for the assumption that he should have been treated as an Egyptian and suffered their punishment.

Thus, the Torah writes, “There shall not be any plague of destruction upon you.” A Jew remains a Jew, regardless of his nefarious actions. A Jew has no exit strategy. Hashem protects him. He always leaves the “light on” for His children – regardless of their errant behavior. That is what parents do.

When we see a Jew who, for a variety of reasons, has chosen – or was a victim of his parents’ choice – to negate Torah and *mitzvah* practice, it is not a reason for us to look at him askance. If Hashem accepts him the way he is – so should we. Impressions go two ways. When a non-practicing Jew looks at us in a disapproving manner, it is no less inappropriate. We are inclined to accept everyone who might be different from us even when he/she: adheres to and lives a life of moral deviance and abandon; chooses to liberalize his/her moral/ethical

compass; or rejects the Divine Authorship of the Torah, including all the ramifications that result from this belief. Yet, when an observant Jew walks by with his *Tzitzis* proudly displayed, wears a *Tallis* in the street on *Shabbos*, or displays our distinctive mode of dress (both male and female), they cringe, snub, and, at times, make uncalled for remarks.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski, zl, related (“Generation to Generation”) that he was once on a bus, dressed in his usual *chassidic* garb. A passenger who was displeased with his mode of dress, accosted him. “Why can’t you people catch up with the times? You aren’t living in Europe. We are in modern America. Get with the program!” *Rabbi Twerski* replied that he was Amish. When the passenger heard this, he apologized profusely and even lauded him for adhering to his traditions.

קדש לו כל בכור... ויאמר משה אל העם זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים... והיה כי יביאך ד'

Sanctify to Me every firstborn... Moshe said to the people, “Remember this day on which you departed from Egypt... And it will come to pass that Hashem shall bring you.” (13:1,2,4)

Rarely does a *mitzvah* receive such a *hakdamah*, foreword, prior to presenting the actual *mitzvah* to *Klal Yisrael*. Apparently, the *mitzvah* of *kiddush b’chorim*, sanctification of the firstborn, is tied directly to the story of the Egyptian bondage and the ensuing exodus. First, we note that unlike for the *b’chor* of an animal whose *kedushah* is pronounced by the declaration, *Harei zeh kadosh*, “This is sanctified,” this declaration does not suffice for a human firstborn. It is critical that we expend much effort in raising the infant *b’chor* to achieve Heavenly *kedushah*. This is the idea behind prefacing the *mitzvah* with the *Pesach* story.

Let me explain. *Horav Moshe Tzvi Neriyah, zl*, quotes *Horav Tzadok, zl*, *m’Lublin* (*Pri Tzaddik*), who observes that, concerning the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the firstborn, the Torah does not write, “Speak to *Bnei Yisrael*, and they should consecrate for Me their firstborn.” Rather, the Torah commences with, *Va’yidaber Hashem el Moshe*, “Hashem spoke to Moshe, sanctify for Me every firstborn.” It is almost as if Hashem issued the *mitzvah* directly to Moshe, that he should sanctify the firstborn. Why? He explains that Hashem commanded Moshe *Rabbeinu* – who is the *shoresh*, root/source (who gave the), of Torah *She’b’ksav*, the Written Law, to imbue the *b’chorim* with *kedushah*, derived from Torah *She’b’ksav*, connecting them to the first word of the Torah: *Bereishis*, “In the beginning.” They are intricately bound with the Torah. They, too, are *bereishis*, first (the beginning of a family). Their *kedushah* should emanate from the Torah. While this is applied to the original firstborns who left Egypt, a similar idea holds true for ensuing firstborns throughout time: From day one, when they enter this world, they must be inculcated with *kedushas HaTorah*. It does not just happen; we must make it happen.

How is this done? *Rav Neriyah* explains that even prior to the *b’chor* learning Torah *She’b’ksav*, he must be imbued with the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the exodus from Egypt. He should hear clearly of the *emunah*, faith, of his ancestors during their travail. *Chinuch*, education, begins in steps; the stories, the faith and love, precede the actual study.

Concerning *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the Torah commands us to relate the story to our sons and grandsons. With regard to the Revelation at *Har Sinai* and the Giving of the Torah, we are instructed to “Make them known to your children and your children’s children” (*Devarim* 4:10). We have no requirement to tell them the entire story of how it happened and what led up to that epic moment. Just tell them what took place without embellishing it with a story line. Why?

Concerning the transmission of Torah from generation to generation, stories are sorely insufficient. The only way to transmit Torah is to study and master it. If I may add – *yetzias Mitzrayim* is about the past. *Mattan Torah* is about the present and future of *Am Yisrael*. Stories will not suffice.

Va’ani Tefillah

ישלח עוזר מקודש וממצוין יסעדך – Yishlach ezricha miKodesh u’miTzion yisadeka. May He dispatch your help from the sanctuary and support you from Tzion.

In his *Divrei Yechezkel*, the *Shiniever Rav*, zl, distinguishes between *eizer*, help, and *saad*, support. Concerning he who has sanctified himself, who lives a life of ascetic purity, far removed from the physical and material drives that overwhelm and take us captive, he deserves “help” – which is a stronger form of assistance. One, however, who appreciates *kedushah* and *taharah*, who yearns for it, whose desire to study Torah is powerful and all-consuming (but he is still not on the level of an individual who lives a life of *kedushah* and *taharah*), for him, who *kedushah* and *taharah* are but a *tzion*, signpost, marker, an impression that inspires – Hashem will support him *Mitzion yisadeka*: As a result of your desire to be inspired, you will be Heavenly-supported.

Malbim distinguishes between *eizer*, which refers to the primary cause of salvation, and *saad*, which is a reference to secondary, auxiliary support. David *Hamelech* prays that his primary aid should emanate from *mikodesh*, holy sources. He understands that when armies march out of Yerushalayim to wage battle against our enemies, they are merely a *saad*, secondary support to the mainstay, *kodesh*, of the battle, which assures their victory.

יעילו נשות
איידל קעללער בת ל יעקב שמען פאללאך ע'ה
נאר "ג שטט קיטסן"

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Making Havdalah with Shemitta Wine

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Although we are currently in the Eighth year (Shenas Hasheminis) of the Shemitta cycle, and hence actually post-Shemitta, all the same, now is the time when many Shemitta Sheilos first occur, as much Kedushas Sheviis produce only now starts flooding the marketplace and becoming commercially available. The vigilant consumer must remain on high alert to know how to properly deal with these ‘holy fruit’.[1] This includes “Holy Wine” that is currently easily obtainable.

As detailed at length in previous articles,[2] Chazal derived several essential Shemitta halachos from several pesukim in Parshas Behar that pertain to preserving the sanctity of Kedushas Sheviis produce.

Regarding to the Shemitta year, the Torah states “V’hayah Shabbos Ha’aretz Lachem L’achlah...V’livhemtachah V’lechayah Asher B’artzechah Tihiyeh Kol Tevuasah Le’echol - And the Resting of the Land should be for you to eat... and for your domesticated animals and the wild animals in your fields, all the produce should be for consumption.”[3]

Personal Uses

One important halacha that is inferred from these pesukim is:

Lachem- for you, lechol tzarcheichem, for all of your needs. (Sukkah 40a and Bava Kamma 102a)

According to the Mishnah, and duly codified as halacha, Kedushas Sheviis produce is not only permitted to be eaten, it is even allowed to be utilized in whichever manner the owner deems it necessary: including drinking, anointing, dyeing, and even lighting.

However, there is a very important caveat, namely that the owner’s use of it during Shemitta must be that product’s main use year round. Otherwise, it would be considered ‘ruining’ the ‘holy’ fruit and duly prohibited, as inferred from the pasuk.[4]

L’achlah- for you to eat, and not for hefsed, letting go to waste. In other words, one may not needlessly waste fruits containing Kedushas Sheviis. (Pesachim 52b) Still, this maxim should not really affect our holy uses of holy Shemitta wine. This is because wine’s main use is for it to be drunk, which involves direct bodily benefit (hana’ah) for us. In the immortal words of Dovid Hamelech, “V’yayin Yisamach Lev Enosh” – “(and) wine gladdens the hearts of man.”[5] In fact, the great codifier of Ashkenazic psak, Rav Moshe Isserlis, better known as the Rema, concludes his writings on Hilchos Purim (as well as all of Orach Chaim) with the wise words of Shlomo Hamelech, “V’Tov Lev Mishteh Tamid,” (and) one of good heart drinks often (i.e. is one who is happy with his lot).[6] We see that wine’s main purpose is to benefit us, so why should potential Shemitta restrictions for improper use trouble us? Shemitta wine should be perfectly fine for sacramental purposes, including making Kiddush and Havdalah, as anyway it is being drunk and giving the drinker direct hana’ah.

Doubling-Up Your Mitzvos

Indeed, there is a minority opinion of Rav Yitzchak de Leon, the renowned Megillas Esther, in his commentary on the Ramban’s additions to the Rambam’s Sefer HaMitzvos, who makes an interesting inference from the aforementioned pesukim in Parshas Behar. He writes that “Lachem L’achlah, for you to eat,” is teaching us that there is an actual Mitzvah incumbent upon us (Mitzvah Chiyuvis) to partake of Kedushas Sheviis produce. Although not the normative halacha, there are still Poskim who maintain that one does indeed fulfill a Mitzvah by eating fruit imbued with Shemitta sanctity (Mitzvah Kiyumis) even though one is under no obligation to eat specifically that fruit.

According to both of these opinions, if one can ensure that all Shemitta halachos are being strictly adhered to (including proper disposal of remains), and has the option to choose a Shemitta fruit or a similar non-Shemitta fruit, it seems that there would be a preference to do so.[7] Certainly, following this minority opinion, although not the halacha, would mean that not only is it permitted to use Shemitta wine for Kiddush and Havdalah, it would actually be the preferable option.

Indeed, this is the opinion of the famed Ridbaz, Rav Yosef Dovid Wilovsky, perhaps best known for his renowned commentaries on the Yerushalmi.[8] His reasoning is that instead of simply performing one Mitzvah, making Kiddush or Havdalah with regular wine, one can instead perform it with Kedushas Sheviis wine and enhance the Mitzvah with another Mitzvah. What Jew does not like a good buy-one-get-one-free bargain, especially regarding Mitzvos, with their eternal reward?

Cooking Cause for Concern

Although this idea seems to have been widely accepted regarding making Kiddush with Kedushas Sheviis wine, conversely, several Poskim raised a few concerns with using Kedushas Sheviis wine for Havdalah.

Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky and Rav Avrohom Yitzchok HaKohen Kook, utilizing a novel approach, advised not to use Shemitta wine for Havdalah.[9] They posit that since women generally do not lechatchilah perform Havdalah nor drink Havdalah wine,[10] Havdalah may not be fully considered a common enough use to allow its performance with Shemitta wine.

This idea, that if some cannot use Kedushas Sheviis produce then it becomes forbidden for others, stems from a Mishnah regarding the prohibition of cooking a Kedushas Sheviis vegetable in Terumah oil, as it will likely end up getting ruined.[11] According to the explanation of Rav Efraim Yitzchak, Dayan in Premishla, better known by the name of his commentary on Seder Zeraim, the Mishnah Rishonah, since Terumah produce may exclusively be eaten by a Kohen, this “minimizing use” is what forbids its consumption for the rest of us when cooking Kedushas Sheviis vegetables in Terumah oil.[12]

On the other hand, several Poskim argue,[13] explaining that this approach, as well as its application to making Havdalah with Kedushas Sheviis wine, seems to be a chiddush(quite novel), as well as a chumrah yeseira (an unfounded stringency) that is not the common minhag.

These Poskim point out that other Rishonim do not seem to agree with this explanation, rather understanding the Mishnah’s warning that the Shemitta vegetable may end up getting Tamei, burnt, or used after Biur (this will be explained later in the article), all of which would be akin to causing its loss, and hence, prohibited.[14] Moreover, the Rambam allows cooking a small amount of Shemitta vegetables in Terumah oil, as long as one intends to eat it right away – ensuring that no hefsed (loss) occurs.[15] These Poskim assert that drinking a cup of Havdalah wine should not be afforded any less consideration, as it is also immediately drunk after reciting Havdalah.

Furthermore, according to the vast majority of Poskim, women actually can make Havdalah if necessary. It is simply the common minhag and preference that they do not.[16] Hence, these Poskim conclude, it would be a non-compelling comparison to the case of cooking Shemitta vegetables in Terumah oil, which would be actually prohibited from a halachic perspective. Therefore, it would seem that this argument is not the main one for not allowing Shemitta wine for Havdalah.

Cup Runneth Over

To be more precise, the main objection that many Poskim have for making Havdalah with Shemitta wine is not due to the actual act of making Havdalah itself, but rather due to several of its corollaries – the traditional overflowing of the Havdalah wine, as well as extinguishing the Havdalah candle in / with it.

As is well known, the Rema cites performing these specific actions as part of the Havdalah process as a Siman Bracha – a Siman Tov (a blessed and good omen) for the new week being ushered in, as well as Chavivus HaMitzvah (showing affection for the Mitzvah).[17] Although these ‘extras’ have long become part-and-parcel of how much of Klal Yisrael makes Havdalah, they are precisely the cause as why many Poskim object to making Havdalah with Kedushas Sheviis wine. As overflowing the cup, and hence, essentially wasting the wine, is what brings the Siman Bracha to our homes, how can this be done with Kedushas Sheviis wine, which is prohibited from being wasted?

One approach to this dilemma is given by Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul, who maintains that since Kedushas Sheviis produce can be used in the same manner as

its counterpart non-Shemitta produce normally is,[18] the same should apply here as well. Since we customarily overflow our Kos Havdalah and extinguish our Ner Havdalah using the spilled wine year-round, this has become considered normal uses of Havdalah wine. Ergo, in his opinion, both of these actions, as well as putting its drops into our eyes, are actually permitted with Shemitta wine as well.[19]

On the other hand, most other contemporary Poskim disagree, arguing that doing these Havdalah extras would be forbidden with Shemitta wine. Since spilling wine is not considered wine's main use, and one receives no direct benefit from it, it might be more accurately defined as wasting (certainly extinguishing a flame in it would be), and many authorities prohibit doing so with Shemitta wine.[20] Therefore, although technically it would indeed be permitted to use Kedushas Sheviis wine for the actual Havdalah itself, the majority consensus is that it still should not be used any time one may not come to finish the entire cup. In fact, they rule that one must be careful not to spill it, nor use it to put out the candle; rather, if one wishes to use Kedushas Sheviis wine for Havdalah, they maintain that he must ensure that it not only is "good 'till the last drop," but that he drinks every last drop (even the overflow that spilled onto the saucer or plate). Definitely not necessarily the easiest way to make Havdalah!

However, it is known that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach would use Sheviis wine for Havdalah while being careful not to let the cup overflow, and was not worried about the few drops that would naturally spill. Several other Poskim, including Rav Moshe Sternbuch, as well as Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner conclude similarly, that one need not worry about a spill of several drops that one would not ordinarily concern himself with, as this is the normal way one drinks.[21] However, most agree that one should not purposely spill his Shemitta wine while making Havdalah.

Pondering Preferences

This leads us to an interesting question. If most Poskim maintain that one may not do the Havdalah extras with Kedushas Sheviis wine, then would it be preferable to perform Havdalah with all the trimmings using non-Shemitta wine, or to make Havdalah with Kedushas Sheviis wine – without overflowing the cup, putting its drops in our eyes and pockets, or extinguishing the candle with it?

Not just a hypothetical question, it is reported that this exact question was asked to Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, as well as later his son-in-law, Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Both replied that as long as there are no other potential issues involved, it would be preferable to make Havdalah with Kedushas Sheviis wine, while being careful not to spill it et al. Rav Elyashiv explained that all of these extras are considered 'Chibub Mitzvas Havdalah,' whereas if people would refrain from obtaining Otzar Beis Din wine[22] - which assists in farmers being able to properly observe Shemitta[23] – simply due to this rationale of not using it for Havdalah, then it may cause irreparable damage to the observance of the Mitzvah of Shemitta. Hence, in their opinion, 'Kiyum Mitzvah' would trump 'Chavivus HaMitzvah'.[24]

The Biur Necessities of Wine

Of course, it goes without saying that this remarkable ruling is only applicable when there are no other halachic concerns regarding the Kedushas Sheviis wine. These include its presence is exclusively in Eretz Yisrael (as using, and even just having Kedushas Sheviis wine in Chutz La'aretz hosts an additional set of problems, and certainly if it was purchased in a normal manner),[25] as well as this Havdalah taking place prior to the wine's Zman Biur (or after one properly performed Biur).

This halacha detailing the obligation of 'Biur' for Shemitta produce is learned from Parashas Behar (ibid.) as well:

V'lechayah Asher B'artzehah - the fact that the Torah stressed that Shemitta produce is also relevant to wild animals teaches us that one may partake of such produce in his own home, but only as long as it is still available to the animals in the wild. After that time, one must remove such produce from his home and relinquish all property rights to the fruit. This action is known as Biur. (Taanis 6b, Pesachim 52b, Nida 51b, and Sifra / Toras Kohanim, Parashas Behar 1: 7)

According to most authorities, 'Biur' is accomplished by taking Kedushas Sheviis produce out of the house to a public place and giving up all rights to the fruit, announcing it as 'hefker' in front of three people.[26] After that, once one properly performs Biur he may actually reacquire the produce himself.[27]

Every type of fruit has its own specific Zman Biur, time of year when this must be performed, as it depends on when each species of fruit is no longer commonly available in the fields. The Gemara (Pesachim 53a) informs us of the Biur dates of four types of fruit: dried figs on Chanuka, dates on Purim, grapes on Pesach, and olives on Shavuos - all in the eighth year.

Since we know that the Zman Biur for grapes, and therefore wine as well, is Pesach of the eighth year, that means that anyone wanting to use Kedushas Sheviis wine on this upcoming Pesach must perform Biur on Erev Pesach on all of his Shemitta wine. One more exciting thing to do on busy Erev Pesach - this means mandating lugging all of your wine bottles out to the street and publicly declaring them hefker. If one did not do so, according to most Poskim, all of his Kedushas Sheviis wine would be prohibited.[28] Talk about Erev Pesach

pressure. But don't worry, according to most Poskim, after a successful Biur, you may simply reacquire your wine, and it is Havdalah-ready again.

In conclusion, we see that at least in Eretz Yisrael, it may be preferable to make a cautious Havdalah with Kedushas Sheviis wine; nonetheless, certainly while fulfilling a Mitzvah, one would not want to Chas V'shalom be transgressing others. Although the potential issues raised are just several matters of concern when dealing with Kedushas Sheviis produce, who would have thought that a seemingly simple Havdalah could be so complex?

Yet, this demonstrates, why it is advisable for all of us, including those in Chutz La'aretz, and even in the eighth year (Sheminiis), and perhaps gives us the impetus, to become proficient in Hilchos Sheviis. Certainly a worthwhile investment.

Note: This article is not intended to serve as an exhaustive guide, but rather to showcase certain aspects of the intricate and myriad halachos of produce imbued with Kedushas Sheviis.

[1]Kedushas Sheviis status for olives, grapes, and the five grains is determined by when they are one-third grown, no matter when actually picked, plucked, or procured. See Rosh Hashanah (12b-13b), Rashi and Tosafos (ad loc. s.v. *hazeisim*), Tosefta (Sheviis Ch. 2: 10), Yerushalmi (Sheviis Ch. 2, *Halacha* 5), Rambam (Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel Ch. 4: 9), and Chazon Ish (Sheviis 7: 15 s.v. *tevah*). Hence, although technically post-Shemitta, now is the time when such "Holy Wine" abounds.

[2]Shemitta Basics: 'Kedushas Sheviis Produce' and 'Fruit Use and Fruit Juice'.

[3]Parashas Behar (Vayikra Ch. 25: 6-7).

[4]See Mishnayos Sheviis (Ch. 8: Mishnah 2), Yerushalmi Sheviis (Ch. 7: *Halacha* 1), Tosefta Sheviis (Ch. 6: 1-3), Rambam (Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel Ch. 5: 1-3), Ra"sh (on Mishnayos Sheviis *ibid.*), Aruch Hashulchan Ha'Asid (Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel 24: 3; however he classifies this as a separate issur and not that of 'ruining'), Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 7: 4), Chazon Ish (Sheviis 10: 4), and Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 8: 102). This topic was delineated at length in a previous article titled 'Kedushas Sheviis Produce'.

[5]Tehillim (Ch. 104: 15).

[6]Rema (Orach Chaim 697: 1), citing Mishlei (Ch. 15: 15; see Rashi ad loc.).

[7]Rav Yitzchak de Leon, the renowned Megillas Esther, in his commentary on the Ramban's additions to the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos (Mitzvas Asei 3; see also the Mishneh L'Melech's Derech Mitzvosecha appended to his Prashas Drachim), writes that he understood the Ramban to mean that he held eating Kedushas Sheviis produce is a Mitzvah Chiyuvis. Others who share this assessment of the Ramban's shittah include the Tashbetz (Zohar Rakiyah al Ha'azharos, Mitzvas Asei 66:36) and the Mahari Alzazi (in his commentary on the Ramban's Hilchos Challah, 2:14). See also Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 7:2, and footnote 2). However, most other authorities disagree with his assessment, including the Megillas Esther himself, maintaining that there is no Mitzvah to specifically consume Shemitta produce. In fact, several other Poskim, most notably the Chazon Ish (Sheviis 14: 10, s.v. *v'lamdanu*; based on the Tosefta, Sheviis Ch. 6: 1), understand that the Ramban would even agree with this as well. In a similar vein, the Kamarna Rebbe (Otzar Chaim Hakatzar, Mitzvos Asei Shelo Nimnu, Mitzvah 3) explains that even according to the Ramban, due to the double language of the pesukim, 'achillah' in this context actually refers to being 'mafkhir' Shemitta produce, and not doing any 'sechorah' with it. See also Aruch Hashulchan Ha'Asid (Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel 24: 6), Shu"t Seridei Aish (new edition; Yoreh Deah 90: 1), Derech Emunah (vol. 4, Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel Ch. 5: 2 and Biur HaHalahach ad loc.), Shu"t Ohr L'Tzion (Sheviis Ch. 2: 1), Mishmeres HaSheviis (Ch. 15, footnote 37), and Sefer Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 16: 1) whom all rule similarly. However, see Toras Ha'aretz (vol. 1: 8, 26), Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 7, footnote 2), and Shu"t Shevet Halevi (vol. 4: 232, 4; printed at the end of the sefer), who nevertheless maintain that one still fulfills a Mitzvah Kiyumis upon consuming Peiros Shevis. See also Kovetz M'Beis Levi (vol. 16, pg. 34, footnote 3) who posits that based on this and with all other factors being equal, it is preferable to eat a fruit containing Kedushas Sheviis than eating one that does not, especially if by choosing the other one, the 'holy' fruit might not get eaten and possibly go to 'waste'. In a similar vein, see Chut Shani (Shemitta, pg. 344) and Minchas Asher (Sheviis, Tinyana 10), who conclude that the Chazon Ish's shittah is indeed correct in the Ramban's opinion and there is no inherent Mitzvah incumbent upon us to eat Kedushas Sheviis produce. Yet, they posit from the fact that the Torah stressed 'L'achlah,' nevertheless shows that Hashem wants these fruits to be eaten and not to go to waste.

[8]Beis Ridbaz glosses to Pe'as Hashulchan (Sheviis, Ch. 5: 18, *haghah*; cited in Dinei Sheviis Hashalem, Ch. 32, 1: 4).

[9]Sefer HaShemitta (Ch. 7: 3, footnote 4) and Shabbos Ha'aretz (Kuntress Acharon to seif 22). See also Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchah (vol. 2, Ch. 60, footnote 5).

[10]See Rema (Orach Chaim 296: 8), Bach (ad loc.), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 4; citing the Shelah), Eliyah Rabba (ad loc. 4), Tosefes Shabbos (ad loc. 5), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (ad loc. 19), Chida (Birkei Yosef ad loc. 7), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 8: 12), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (96: 7), Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Yavetz 12), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 296: 5), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 6), and Kaf HaChaim (ad loc. 14; see also ad loc. 55, where he maintains that women may not perform Havdalah at all). As an aside and quite interestingly, the not drinking Havdalah wine, first cited by the Magen Avraham quoting the Shelah, is not brought by the Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Chayei Adam, nor Ben Ish Chai.

[11]Sheviis (Ch. 8, Mishnah 7).

[12]See Mishnah Rishonah (ad loc.).

[13]See Bris Olam (Sheviis 5: 3), Chut Shani (Sheviis, pg. 263), and Shemiras Haguf V'HaNefesh (vol. 2: 131, end footnote 5 s.v. *heyos*). The Beis Ridbaz made a similar assessment as well.

[14]See, for example Rashi and Tosafos to Zevachim (75b s.v. Sheviis), and the commentaries of the Rambam, Ra"sh, Bartenura, and Tifres Yisrael to our Mishnah (ad loc.).

[15]Rambam (Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel Ch. 5: 4), see Kessef Mishneh (ad loc.).

[16]See Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 296: 8) as well as Bach (ad loc. end, s.v. *aval*), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 11), Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav ad loc. 7), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 35), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 5) [and not like the *Taz* (ad loc. 7; who understands that women may not make Havdalah due to it being a Mitzvah Asei Derabbanan Shehazman Gramma]. See also MV'R Rav Yosef Yitzchak Lerner's excellent Shemiras Haguf V'HaNefesh (vol. 2: 131, 2) at length. This understanding can perhaps best be illustrated by several semi-common scenarios – see, for example, Shu"t Shevet Halevi (vol. 4: 54, 7) regarding a woman who is weak from fasting and is waiting for her husband to come home from shul on Motza'ei Yom Kippur – that she should make Havdalah herself. Moreover, when Tisha B'Av occurs on Motza'ei Shabbos and a woman needs to break her fast over the course of Sunday, according to the vast majority of Poskim, she should make Havdalah herself. This topic was detailed at length in a previous article titled 'How to Make Havdalah when Motza'ei Shabbos is Tisha B'Av'.

[17]Rema (Orach Chaim 296: 1).

[18]This was discussed at length in a previous article titled 'Fruit Use and Fruit Juice.'

[19]Shu"t Ohr L'Tzion (Sheviis, Ch. 2: 6).

[20]Additionally, one may not even put the customary several drops in the eyes and pockets; all of the above are not the ordinary way to drink wine. Hence, according to the majority consensus, all of these Havdalah extras are forbidden with Shemitta wine. See Sefer HaShemitta (pg. 31: 4), Shabbos Ha'aretz (Kuntress Acharon to seif 22), Shemitta Kehilchah (Ch. 3: 11), Derech Emunah (vol. 4, Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel Ch. 5, Tziyun HaHalahach 19), Bris Olam (Sheviis, Ch. 5: 3), Chut Shani (Shemitta, pg. 218), Mishpetei Aretz (Sheviis, Ch. 21: 5 and 6), Mishnas HaGri"sh (pg. 83), Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 16, s.v. Shimushei Mitzvah 3), and Yalkut Yosef (Sheviis, Ch. 22, 7).

[21]Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Pesach Ch. 9: footnote 242) and Shemitta Kehilchah (Ch. 3: footnote 11); Rav Wosner's opinion is cited in Dinei Sheviis Hashalem (Ch. 32, 1: 12). As mentioned previously, Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul (Shu"t Ohr L'Tzion ibid.) certainly took no issue with minute spillage of Shemitta wine.

[22] The institution of *Otzar Beis Din* and all related issues were discussed at length in a previous article titled 'Shemitta Sheilos: 'Using Arbah Minim of Sheviis.' Basically, it is based on the *Tosefta* (Sheviis Ch. 8; 1 - 3) [and cited by several Rishonim, including the *Ramban* (*Parashas Behar*, Ch. 25: 7), the *Rash* and *Rosh* in their commentaries to *Mishnayos Sheviis* (Ch. 9, *Mishnah* 8), and the *Raavad* (*Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel* Ch. 7: 3)] that explains that during *Shemitta*, *Beis Din* has the right to gather (hefker) *Kedushas Sheviis* produce to store and distribute it as they see fit in small quantities. The *Tosefta* also mentions that they may appoint workers to aid with their task. Often, after a farmer signs over his fields for the *Beis Din* to control, they hire back the farmer to perform permitted work to enable the collection and distribution of the *Kedushas Sheviis* produce, as he knows his own fields and business best. In this manner this also allows the *Shemitta* observant farmer to collect back at least a small portion of the money he is losing by letting his land lay fallow. Although one may not actually pay for *Kedushas Sheviis* produce, as it is halachically hefker, and as explained in previous articles, there is an 'Issur Schoirah' on business transactions with *Shemitta* produce, nonetheless, the *Otzar Beis Din* workers may get paid for their time and effort as well as distribution costs. However, this means that the price one pays for *Otzar Beis Din* *Kedushas Sheviis* produce must be significantly and substantially less than one would generally pay for such produce in an ordinary year. Additionally, such produce may not be bought in the regular manner, but rather acquired (as one is not actually purchasing, but rather receiving a distribution, with payment exclusively reserved for necessary operating costs) on credit or in advance, with no regard to the actual weight or amount of each individual item. Of course, since *Otzar Beis Din* produce contains *Kedushas Sheviis* it must be treated as such, with all of the nuances that entails.

[23] Many contemporary Gedolim, most notably the *Chazon Ish*, championed the cause of setting up *Otzar Batei Dinim* to enable distribution of *Kedushas Sheviis* produce, which still has to get from the field to the consumer, as well as ensuring proper *Shemitta* observance. See *Chazon Ish* (*Sheviis* 11: 7 and 12: 6 and 8) and *Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish* (vol. 2: 73). *Orchos Rabbeinu* (old print vol. 2; new print vol. 3) dedicates an entire chapter (titled 'Otzar Beis Din') describing how the *Chazon Ish* attempted to set up properly run *Otzar Batei Dinim* across Eretz Yisrael every *Shemitta*. *Mishpetei Aretz* (Sheviis pg. 230-232) prints the *Chazon Ish*'s actual instructions to storekeepers and suppliers on how to properly set up and distribute *Otzar Beis Din* produce. See also *Shu'ot Mishnah Halachos* (vol. 9: 319) as well as the 'Michtavim' printed in the back of *Chut Shani* on *Hilchos Yom Tov v'Chol Hamoed* (pg. 371-372) from *Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv* and *Rav Nissim Karelitz* on the importance of establishing *Otzar Batei Din*. For more on the nuances of *Otzar Beis Din* and its relevant halachos and how they are properly applied, see the 'Kuntress *Otzar Beis Din*' in *Chut Shani* on *Shemitta*, *Derech Emunah* (vol. 4, *Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel* Ch. 6: 19), *Orchos Rabbeinu* (old print vol. 2; new edition vol. 3 - Ch. 'Otzar Beis Din'), *Shemitta Kehilchah* (Ch. 3: 16), *Mishpetei Aretz* (Sheviis Ch. 13), *Dinei Sheviis Hashalem* (Ch. 20), *Yalkut Yosef* (Sheviis Ch. 18, 'Otzar Beis Din'), *Shu'ot Minchas Shlomo* (*Tinyana* 123: 11), *Shu'ot Mishnah Halachos* (vol. 9: 319), *Minchas Shlomo* (Sheviis Ch. 9: pg. 250), *Rav Tzvi Cohen*'s 'Shemitta' (Ch. 23), and *Kara Shemitta* (Ch. 9: 6, 'Otzar Beis Din'; he also details the first *Otzar Beis Din* set up in modern times - in 1910, for the Rechovot vineyards of *Rav Tzvi Hirsch Kahn*, author of *Imrei Tzvi*, by the *Badatz* of *Yerushalayim*, consisting of such luminaries as *Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld*, *Rav Chaim Berlin*, and *Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank*). On the other hand, many *Poskim* were and are wary of the *Otzar Beis Din* system, as it unfortunately lends itself to abuse. See the *Badatz*'s *Dvar HaShemitta* (5775, pg. 30-31 and 50), citing *Rabbanei Yerushalayim* of over 100 years ago, that they never accepted 'Otzar Beis Din' as a practical means of allowing distribution of *Kedushas Sheviis* produce, as the system regrettably can lend itself to abuse by unscrupulous individuals, especially if it is not run properly. They cite examples of 'Otzar Beis Din' produce somehow finding its way into supermarkets and being sold in the normal manner, quite counter-indicative of its halachic *Kedushas Sheviis* status. Unfortunately not an uncommon occurrence, this author has seen *Otzar Beis Din* produce being sold in regular stores (ostensibly with reliable *hechsherim*) this past *Shemitta* year by weight and price. The *Star-K*'s *Kashrus Kurrents* article titled 'Shemitta 5775' refers to a great deal of wine produced under the auspices of *Otzar Beis Din* that ended up in supermarkets... in the United States. See also *Minchas Asher* (Sheviis, *Tinyana* 48b) who cites an example of *Ezrog* merchants abusing the *Otzar Beis Din* system by reserving top quality *Ezrogim* for 'Admorim and *Mechubadim*'. Similarly, *Orchos Rabbeinu* (new print vol. 3, pg. 260-261; 3-4) relates that certain years the *Steipler Gaon* would not rely on an *Otzar Beis Din* for *Ezrogim*, as he held that (perhaps those specific ones) were improperly run, and charging too high of a price to only include actual expenses. Unfortunately, abusing the *Hetter* of *Otzar Beis Din* seems to be the norm nowadays (or at least 'a norm'), to this author's great consternation. Other contemporary *Poskim* who were wary of 'Otzar Beis Din' include *Rav Moshe Sternbuch* (*Shemitta Kehilchah* Ch. 3: 16; *Moadim Uzmanim* vol. 8, *Lekutei Ha'aros* to vol. 6: 54; and *Teshuvos V'Hanhagos* on *Sukkos* pg. 345 and pg. 357 - 358), *Rav Mordechai Eliyahu* (*Shu'ot Maamar Mordechay* vol. 5, *V'shavah Haaretz*, 11; he additionally notes that the *Rambam* did not cite such a proviso) [Others however, answer up that 'Otzar Beis Din' is an 'eitzah', not a *chiyuv*, and that is why the *Rambam* did not need to mention it], and the *Karlsberg Rav*, *Rav Yechezkel Roth* (*Shu'ot Emet Hateshuva* vol. 2: 1). See also the *ma'amar* on the *inyan* of how *Otzar Batei Din* are commonly run (as potentially opposed to how they are supposed to be run) in *Kovetz Beis Aharon V'Yisrael* (Av-Elul 5782), as well as *Rav Yirmiyahu Kaganoff*'s excellent recent article titled 'Otzar Beis Din or Hetter Otzar Beis Din?'. [24] *Kovetz Halichos Sadeh* (Issue # 196; Av 5576, pg. 5-7). *Rav Chaim* added that one would not need to perform *Hataras Nedarim*, as there is no known *minhag* of specifically overflowing or extinguishing candles with *Kedushas Sheviis* wine, and one's *daas* of doing so would be when one is halachically able to do so, i.e. when using regular wine that contains no *Shemitta* concerns.

[25] Using *Kedushas Sheviis* wine in *Chutz La'aretz* hosts an additional set of problems, including that of taking *Shemitta* produce out of Eretz Yisrael: *B'artzehah* - in your land, and not in *Chutz La'aretz*, meaning that *Kedushas Sheviis* produce may not be exported from Eretz Yisrael (*Mishnayos Sheviis* Ch. 6, *Mishnah* 5; see commentaries ad loc.), as well as *L'achlah* - for you to eat, and not for *sechorah*, merchandise or commercial use (*Avodah Zarah* 62a and *Bechoros* 12b; see also *Mishnayos Sheviis* Ch. 8, *Mishnah* 3 and 4) - hence, one may exclusively obtain *Kedushas Sheviis* produce in a non-standard manner. Although most *Poskim* maintain that *b'dieved* one may indeed partake of them (although one should be aware that the exporters and importers most likely relied upon *Hetter Mechirah*; which is not a simple proposition, as delineated in previous articles), this allowance, however *b'dieved*, is strictly prior to the fruit's *Zman Biur*. Otherwise they are assur, but still must be treated with proper *Kedushas Sheviis* status (as explained above). These are important issues to be aware of, and if possessing *Shemitta* wine in *Chutz La'aretz* on *Erev Pesach*, one must ascertain what to do from a knowledgeable halachic authority. Taking all of the above into account, it would certainly seem that with all of the inherent issues with *Kedushas Sheviis* wine in *Chutz La'aretz*, using a non-problematic wine for *Hadlalah* would undoubtedly be a preferred option. For detailed treatments on these subjects, see previous articles titled 'The Perplexing Puzzle of the Possibly Purloined Peppers' and 'Shemitta Sheilos: Using Arbah Minim of Sheviis.'

[26] See *Ramban* (*Parshas Behar* Ch. 25: 7), *Rosh* (Sheviis Ch. 9, *Mishnah* 8: 5), *Rash* (ad loc.), *Minchas Chinuch* (*Parshas Behar*, *Mitzvah* 329: 7), *Shu'ot Maharit* (vol. 1: 43), *Shaarei Tzedek* (19: 4 and 5), *Pe'as Hashulchan* (27: 3), *Pnei Yehoshua* (*Pesachim* 52b), *Aruch Hashulchan Ha'asid* (*Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel* 27: 8), *Ribbaz* (Sheviis Ch. 12: 7), *Chazon Ish* (*Shemitta* 11: 6 and 7; 14: 13; and 26, *Seder HaSheviis* 1 end s.v. pri), *Shemitta Kehilchah* (Ch. 3: 20), the *Badatz Eidah Hachareidis*' *Dvar HaShemitta*, *Pesakim* *V'Hora*'os 4, pg. 55 - 56), and *Sefer Dinei Sheviis Hashalem* (Ch. 21). When the *Zman Biur* for a specific fruit arrives, the *Mishnah* (Sheviis, Ch. 9: *Mishnah* 8) teaches us that one may still keep enough of that particular fruit for three meals worth for every member of the household. However, there is another opinion, that of the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel* Ch. 7: 1-3) that *Biur* refers to actually destroying said produce when it is no longer available in the field. As mentioned, this is not the normative halacha and *Ashkenazim* certainly follow the *shittah* of the *Rosh*, *Rash*, and *Ramban*, of removing it from the house and making it hefker, as cited by the aforementioned *Poskim*. [Interestingly, the *Chochmas Adam* (*Shaarei Tzedek* Ch. 19: 4 and 6) expresses preference to fulfilling *Mitzvas Biur al yedei Sereifah*, like the *shittah* of the *Rambam*.] However, whether *Sefardim* need be *machmir* for the *Rambam*'s *shittah* is a matter of dispute between contemporary *Sefardic* authorities, with *Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul* (*Shu'ot Ohr L'Tzion*, Sheviis Ch. 3: 4) ruling to be *machmir* and *Rav Ovadiah Yosef* (*Ma'ohr Yisrael* vol. 2, pg. 105; also cited in *Yalkut Yosef*, Sheviis, Ch. 21: 1, pg. 468) maintaining that making the produce hefker is sufficient.

[27] This is due to the fact that the halacha follows *Rabbi Yosi*'s opinion - see *Mishnayos Sheviis* (*ibid.*), *Tosefta* (Sheviis Ch. 8: 4); *Yerushalmi* (Sheviis Ch. 9, *Halacha* 4), *Chazon Ish* (*Hilchos Sheviis* 11: 6 and 26, *Seder HaSheviis* 1 s.v. pri), and *Shu'ot Minchas Shlomo* (*Tinyana* 123: 10 and vol. 3: 132, 13).

[28] The majority of *Poskim* maintain that if *Biur* was not performed, the *Shemitta* wine becomes prohibited. See *Shu'ot Dovev Meisharim* (vol. 3, 1: 3), *Shu'ot Har Tzvi* (*Orach Chaim* vol. 2: 68), *Chazon Ish* (Sheviis Ch. 15: 7), *Even Yisroel* (vol. 2, *Hilchos Ma'acholos Asuros* Ch. 13: 25), *Halichos Even Yisroel* (pg. 157 - 158), *Halichos Shlomo* (*Moadim* vol. 2, *Pesach* Ch. 9, *footnote* 69), *Orchos Rabbeinu* (new version 5775; vol. 3, pg. 330), *Minchas Asher* (Sheviis, *Tinyana* 38), and *Sefer Dinei Sheviis Hashalem* (Ch. 21). On the other hand, *Rav Asher Weiss* (*Minchas Asher* on Sheviis; *Tinyana* 42) offers an alternate solution and novel approach, utilizing a *tziruf* to be *meikel b'shaas hadchak* and *hefsek merubah*, as there are those, including the *Chochmas Adam* (*Shu'ot Tzedek* Ch. 19: 5; citing the *Sefer HaChareidim*) and *Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky* (*Sefer HaShemitta* Ch. 9: 10), who hold that *b'makom oness* (*duress*), not performing *Biur* will not prohibit the produce. See also *Yalkut Yosef* (Sheviis Ch. 22: 2-5, 7, and 9; pg. 479-483) who holds similarly, that *b'dieved* there is what to rely upon that the wine did not become prohibited. Either way, it is certainly preferable to lechatchilla not come into a *sheilah*.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

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לע"ג

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
בילא בת (אריה) ליבע ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

Parshat Bo: Getting to Know You

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Parashat Bo is an exciting, jam-packed place to be! Bo boasts:

- * The final plagues.
- * The Exodus itself!
- * Mitzvot (some of these count as more than one mitzvah):
 - a) Maintaining the Jewish calendar
 - b) Sacrificing the Korban Pesah (Passover sacrifice)
 - c) Observing Pesah (the holiday)
 - d) Eating Matza (during Pesah)
 - e) Retelling the story of the Exodus (on Pesah)
 - f) Not eating Hametz (the prohibition to eat or own leaven during Pesah)
 - g) Instructions about the plague of the firstborn (not a mitzvah for future generations).
 - h) Special instructions for firstborn humans and animals.

OUR QUESTIONS THIS WEEK:

- 1) Since "way back" in Parashat Shemot, we have noted that something totally new is happening in terms of the relationship between Hashem and humanity. What are the chief indicators, and what transition do they signal in the relationship? The answer to this question is intimately connected with the next question . . .
- 2) In this week's parsha, the plagues appear to accomplish their purpose . . . or at least they end. But what *is* the point of all these plagues? Why does Hashem subject Egypt to plagues at all, and why so many? How does Moshe's role change as the process of the plagues unfolds?
- 3) How do the mitzvot we encounter in Parashat Bo impact powerfully on the God-human relationship? Why are these the first mitzvot given to Bnei Yisrael? (Perhaps we will get to this next week.)

"I AM Y-HVH":

In Parashat Shemot, Hashem commands Moshe to report to the elders of Bnei Yisrael that God has appeared to him and announced the coming redemption. Moshe asks Hashem what Name he should report to Bnei Yisrael to refer to the God who has appeared to him. Hashem responds enigmatically, "Ehyeh asher ehyeh" -- "I shall be what I shall be." It remains unclear whether this is a name, a description, both, or neither.

Moshe seems unsatisfied by Hashem's mysterious response; in any event, Moshe remains silent, awaiting further details than Hashem at first provides. Hashem "tries again," instructing Moshe to tell the people that the God "Ehyeh" has sent him to announce the redemption to the people. Moshe, unsatisfied, still does not respond, so Hashem seems to give in, telling Moshe to tell the people that "Y-HVH, the God of their fathers, God of Avraham, God of Yitzhak, and God of Ya'akov," has appeared to him.

This enigmatic event in Parashat Shemot sets the stage for Parashat Va-Era, which begins with Hashem's spelling out for Moshe that the Avot (Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya'akov) somehow had access only to the name "E-I Shad-dai," but not to the name "Y-HVH"; they knew or experienced Hashem as "E-I Shad-dai" only. Of course, a quick check of Sefer Bereishit (Genesis) shows that the name Y-HVH appears 165 times. If "Y-HVH" is so ubiquitous in Sefer Bereishit, in what way can we understand that the name was hidden from the Avot? Stranger yet, Hashem explicitly refers to Himself by this name in several conversations with the Avot! Clearly, He cannot mean that the Avot did not *know* this name, as many mefarshim point out. Instead, Hashem is telling Moshe that the *aspect* of Himself which was manifested to the Avot was only the aspect of "E-I Shad-dai," not the aspect of "Y-HVH."

What do "E-I Shad-dai" and "Y-HVH" mean? What aspects of Hashem or modes of divine behavior do they represent? One way to look for differences between them is to examine in what contexts they each tend to appear:

GOD OF THE AVOT:

"E-I Shad-dai" is a fairly rare name for Hashem in Tanakh (the Bible). It appears five times in all of Sefer Bereishit; once in Sefer Shemot (Parashat Va-Era); once in Sefer Yehezkel (Ezekiel); and three times in Sefer Iyyov (Job). In Bereishit, it appears in the following very similar contexts:

- 1) The blessings Hashem gives to Avraham at the Berit Milah (covenant of circumcision) -- nation, land, and permanent relationship with Hashem -- are delivered by "E-I Shad-dai."
- 2) Yitzhak promises Ya'akov that the "blessing of Avraham" (see above) will be delivered to him by "E-I Shad-dai."
- 3) As promised, Hashem appears to Ya'akov, introduces Himself as "E-I Shad-dai," and blesses him with the blessing of Avraham (nation, land, relationship with Hashem).
- 4) Ya'akov, sending his sons to Egypt to buy food, prays that "E-I Shad-dai" place mercy in the heart of the Egyptian ruler (really Yosef) before whom his sons must appear.
- 5) Ya'akov reports to Yosef that "E-I Shad-dai" had blessed him (see #3). (Ya'akov also blesses Yosef with the name "Shad-dai," minus the "E-I.")

E-I Shad-dai appears to be the Covenant-Maker, offering a promise of nationhood, land, and relationship with Him. E-I Shad-dai is also a protector, invoked by Ya'akov to protect his sons.

MY NAME "Y-HVH" WAS NOT KNOWN TO THEM:

Now for the more difficult name: what does "Y-HVH" mean? Some mefarshim suggest that it indicates that Hashem is eternal/timeless: they understand this name as a combination of "hayah," ("was," spelled HYH), "hoveh," ("is," spelled HVH), and "yihyeh" ("will be," spelled YHYH). But if the purpose of Hashem's statement here is to communicate to Moshe that He will now begin to manifest Himself in a new way, a way in which He did not manifest Himself to the Avot in the past, this is a difficult interpretation: what does Hashem's eternity have to do with His acting one way or another now? And was Hashem not just as eternal in the time of the Avot?

Perhaps we can use some elements of the above interpretation to suggest a different one: the state-of-being verb which is at the root of this name ("HVH") does not indicate simply that Hashem exists, but that He is **present.** This aspect of Hashem -- His manifest and obvious presence in the world -- is the aspect which was not made known to the Avot. This does not mean that the Avot were unsure of His existence, but that He did not generally make Himself publicly manifest in the physical world in their lifetimes; He did not openly interfere with the natural order of the world. The patriarchal experience of Hashem is primarily a visionary and covenantal one: the Avot see Hashem in prophetic dreams and trances; He promises them a destiny of nationhood and relationship with Him. But He does not perform open miracles before them. In this sense, He is not present **in** this world in open ways, although He guides the events of the world; He is not yet ready to reveal Himself as Y-HVH, the One who is present in the world.

Y-HVH IS HERE:

All this is about to change: Hashem is about to emerge not just as a reality in the ultimate, spiritual sense, but as a concrete force in the events of history. He is about to make the front page.

This is Hashem's cryptic message to Moshe at the beginning of Parashat Va-Era. Just before He embarks on this new phase in His career, so to speak, He breaks the news to Moshe: the exodus from Egypt will not be a quiet one, subtly guided by the hidden hand of Hashem; instead, He will act powerfully with "a strong hand and an outstretched arm," striking at His enemies with open miracles, warning them to acknowledge and obey Him. Hashem is about to make Himself "present" in the world. This idea is expressed quite clearly by Hashem in the opening of Parashat Va-Era:

SHEMOT 6:2-7

Hashem spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am Y-HVH. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzhak, and to Ya'akov as "E-I Shad-dai," but by My name 'Y-HVH' I was not known to them. I now uphold My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their dwelling, in which they dwelled. I have also heard the groaning of Bnei Yisrael . . . and I recall My covenant. Therefore, say to Bnei Yisrael, 'I AM Y-HVH! I shall take you out from under the burden of Egypt, and I shall

save you from their enslaving, and I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall take you to Me as a nation, and I shall be for you a God, and YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM Y-HVH . . .

In Shemot 6:2, Hashem introduces Himself as "Y-HVH." This, however, requires elaboration: how does He plan to express His "Y-HVH-ness" at this point? In the next pasuk (verse) He explains that the Avot experienced only "E-I Shad-dai," but not "Y-HVH." In 6:4-5, Hashem recalls His covenant with the Avot and the suffering of their children. In 6:6, Hashem instructs Moshe to introduce Him to Bnei Yisrael *as* Y-HVH: "Therefore, say to Bnei Yisrael, 'I am Y-HVH.'" This does not mean simply, "I am Hashem"; it means "I am the Present One." Hashem goes on to amplify in 6:6-8: "I shall take you out . . . I shall save you . . . I shall redeem you . . . I shall take you to Me . . . and you shall know that I am Y-HVH, when I take you out from under the burden of Egypt . . ." Hashem is about to express the aspect of Y-HVH by bursting onto the world scene in a display of power never before witnessed.

WHY ALL THOSE PLAGUES?

This explanation of the change in Hashem's mode of interacting with the world leads us directly into our next issue: what is the purpose of the plagues with which Hashem strikes Egypt? Obviously, the plagues have little to do with the goal of taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt; if that were all He wanted, He could have accomplished the redemption without decimating Egypt. One well-aimed plague could have accomplished the job. Why must Paro's heart be hardened repeatedly? Why does Hashem want Paro *himself* to approve the departure of Bnei Yisrael? Fortunately, the Torah provides the answers:

SHEMOT 5:1-2 --

Then Moshe and Aharon came and said to Paro, "So says Y-HVH, God of Yisrael: 'Send forth My nation, so they may celebrate [worship] Me.' Paro said, 'WHO IS Y-HVH, that I should obey His voice and send out Bnei Yisrael? **I DO NOT KNOW Y-HVH** -- and I will not send out Yisrael."

By his own admission, Paro needs to become "acquainted" with Y-HVH. Y-HVH is only too happy to oblige him, responding to his arrogant dismissal of the Hebrew God by turning his world upside down and ripping it to shreds. Paro "does not know Y-HVH"? Well, that will swiftly change!

SHEMOT 7:5 --

"EGYPT SHALL KNOW THAT I AM Y-HVH, when I stretch forth My hand over Egypt and take Bnei Yisrael out of their midst" (7:5).

Of course, this show is not just for Egypt's or Paro's benefit; Bnei Yisrael also need to get to know Y-HVH better:

SHEMOT 6:7 --

"YOU [plural] WILL KNOW THAT I AM Y-HVH, your God, who takes you out from under the burden of Egypt."

It turns out that the goal of the "Makkot," the Plagues, is to teach both Bnei Yisrael and Egypt a lesson in theology. Hashem is Y-HVH: He is the One Who Is Present. As the plagues demonstrate (as we will see), this presence is manifest in Y-HVH's control of, well, absolutely everything. Hashem is introducing Himself to the world at large. The introduction is more pleasant for some than for others: if you are an Egyptian slavedriver, you get to know Hashem through the blood in your Nile, the frogs in your bed, the lice on your body, the locusts devouring your fields If you are a Jewish slave, you get to know Hashem as He spares you from these plagues, takes you out of slavery, splits the sea for you

This theme of "da'at Y-HVH" -- knowing Y-HVH (not just knowing Hashem, but knowing Him in His capacity as Y-HVH) is a major theme in the story of the Plagues; it appears not only in the pesukim above, which introduce the whole process of the Plagues and redemption, but also throughout the process:

BLOOD:

SHEMOT 7:16-17 -- "Say to him [Paro]: 'Y-HVH, God of the Ivrim ["Hebrews"], has sent me to you to tell you, 'Release My nation so that they may serve Me in the desert,' but you have not obeyed so far. So says Y-HVH: 'Through this *YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM Y-HVH*: I shall strike upon the water in the river with the staff in my hand, and it shall turn to blood!'"

FROGS:

SHEMOT 8:4-6 -- Paro called Moshe and Aharon and said, "Pray to Y-HVH, that He should remove the frogs . . ." He [Moshe] said, "As you say -- so that *YOU SHALL KNOW THAT THERE IS NONE LIKE Y-HVH*, our God."

WILD BEASTS/GNATS (AROV):

SHEMOT 8:18 -- "I shall distinguish the Land of Goshen on that day, on which My nation lives, so that there will be no wild beasts there, so that *YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM Y-HVH IN THE MIDST OF THE LAND.*"

HAIL:

SHEMOT 9:14-18 -- "This time, I am sending all of My plagues at your heart, your servants, and your people, *SO THAT YOU SHALL KNOW THAT THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN THE LAND.* I could have sent forth My hand and stricken you and your people with a [deadly] plague, and you would have vanished from the land. But for this reason do I keep you standing: to show you My power, and SO THAT MY NAME [Y-HVH] SHALL BE TOLD IN THE WHOLE LAND"

HAIL (again):

SHEMOT 9:29 -- Moshe said to him [Paro], "When I leave the city, I will spread my hands out to Y-HVH. The thunderclaps will stop, and the hail will be no more, *SO THAT YOU SHALL KNOW THAT THE LAND IS Y-HVH's.*"

LOCUSTS:

SHEMOT 10:1-2 -- Hashem said to Moshe, "Come to Paro -- for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, so that I can place My signs in his midst, and so that you will tell over in the ears of your son and your grandson what I did to Egypt, and the signs I placed in them, and *YOU SHALL KNOW THAT I AM Y-HVH.*"

There are several additional examples, but I think the point is demonstrated. The reason the plagues must come, the reason Paro's heart must be hardened, the reason Hashem does not want to whisk the people out of Egypt on a magic carpet, but instead wants Paro to agree to let them go, is because He wants the world, Egypt, and Bnei Yisrael to "know Y-HVH," the "One who is present."

A MESSAGE WRIT LARGE:

As the plagues unfold, there is a constant repetition of sweeping phrases like "in the whole land of Egypt," "in the rivers, in the streams, in the lakes, in the cisterns," "in you, your servants, your people, your house, your servants' houses, your bed, your ovens, your serving-trays," and many other examples which, taken collectively, shout the message: "Y-HVH controls everything!"

The same message is implicit in Y-HVH's instructions to Moshe and Aharon, at various points during the plagues, to stretch forth the Matchet Elokim, the divine staff, over the water, the land, and the sky. The message: Y-HVH controls every medium, sky, earth and water. He is not a "local" deity; He is not the God of this river, or that mountain, or of fertility, or diseases, or animals, or weather, or the sun, or death. Y-HVH controls everything. This is a message to be absorbed by both Paro, representative of human power and of the belief in a pantheon of gods who control various spheres of influence, and by Bnei Yisrael. Once Paro gets this message and truly believes it, he will "know Y-HVH" and do what he was told to do in the first place: release Bnei Yisrael.

[It is worth mentioning that the theme of "knowing Y-HVH" is prominent not only here, but in many places in Tanakh, especially Sefer Yehezkel [Ezekiel], where it appears at least 72 times! It is important to compare how this theme develops in each place and to see if it is used the same way in different places.]

MOSHE GROWS STRONGER:

Moshe Rabbeinu's stiffening posture as the plagues progress is a telling catalogue of the growth and development of our most important leader. As we know, Moshe begins his prophetic career with great reluctance, attempting several times (five times!) to avoid being selected to challenge Paro and lead the people out of Egypt. When Hashem finally loses patience and becomes angry with him, Moshe takes the job, along with his brother Aharon as spokesman. Early on, Moshe does exactly as told by Hashem: he reports to the people that Y-HVH has appeared to him, and the people believe him. But when he delivers Hashem's demands to Paro and Paro reacts by increasing the people's workload, Moshe turns to Hashem and complains: "Why did you send me to Paro? Things have only gotten worse!"

Hashem responds with a full explanation of His plan: to conduct the world's greatest public relations campaign, teaching the world about Y-HVH while rescuing Bnei Yisrael from slavery and making them His nation. Moshe reports the news to the people, but they are too depressed and busy to listen to him. When Hashem then commands Moshe to go to Paro and present His demands, the "old," reluctant Moshe returns: "Even my own people, Bnei Yisrael, did not listen to me -- how will Paro listen?!"

Hashem patiently explains to Moshe that he has misunderstood his job. His task is not to get Paro to obey! "Exactly! He will not listen to you -- that is the plan!! In fact, I Myself will harden his heart so that he does not listen, because I want the opportunity to teach him that I am Y-HVH." From this point on, Moshe demonstrates no reluctance. He now understands that it is not his job to convince Paro to obey by speaking eloquently; it is his job to deliver warnings which will be ignored, so that Hashem can break Paro's arrogance, so that Paro and Egypt will know that "I am Y-HVH."

A FEW TRICKS OF HIS OWN:

In place of his previous self-doubt, his disappointment with his failure to get Paro to knuckle under, Moshe's stance becomes one of confidence. Not only does he carry out Hashem's instructions, he independently invents ways in which to make even clearer to Paro that he is at Y-HVH's mercy. When Paro breaks down and asks Moshe to pray to Y-HVH for the removal of the swarming frogs, Moshe sarcastically says to him, "Go ahead, lord it over me -- when do you want me to pray . . . to remove the frogs?" (8:5). Paro, not wanting to appear too desperate, says "Tomorrow." Moshe agrees, adding, "So that you will know that there is none like Y-HVH, our God!" And when Moshe prays, "Hashem listened to *him*," indicating that the idea of humbling Paro by praying for him is Moshe's plan, to which Hashem agrees.

Later on, when Paro again asks for Moshe's prayers to remove the "Arov" plague, Moshe wags a finger at Paro: "I am going out to pray for you . . . but let Paro no longer deal deceitfully in not letting the people go . . ." (8:25). Once again, "Hashem did as Moshe said" -- again, it is Moshe's idea to use prayer to Y-HVH as a way to get Paro to kneel, as an opportunity to humble and chastise him.

As the plagues continue, Paro's support among his advisors crumbles and he becomes deeply sullen, grudgingly attempting to compromise with Moshe. But Moshe has begun to sound like a powerful and confident leader; not just like Hashem's messenger, but as leader of a nation which has been commanded to serve Hashem. When Paro expresses willingness to let some of the people go and asks Moshe whom he intends to take and whom he will leave behind as "insurance," Moshe confidently brushes aside the offer, asserting that he has no intention of compromising:

SHEMOT 10:9 --

Moshe said, "With our old and our young we will go, with our sons and daughters, with our sheep and cattle, for we have a festival to Y-HVH!"

Why should I settle for less, Moshe says, when I can have whatever I want?

Perhaps Moshe's most dramatic speech to Paro is his final one. After Egypt is stricken with three days of paralyzing darkness, Paro calls Moshe and makes a new offer: Bnei Yisrael, children included, can go to their worship in the desert, as long as they leave their sheep and cattle behind. Moshe rejects this offer as well: not only will Bnei Yisrael take their own animals, but in fact "You, too, will place in our hands sacrifices and offerings for Y-HVH, our God . . . not a single hoof will be left behind . . ." (10:25). Not only will Bnei Yisrael bring sacrifices to Hashem, but Paro will contribute sacrifices too! Infuriated by Moshe's temerity, Paro throws Moshe out and threatens that if he sees him again, Moshe will die. Moshe agrees: "You have spoken correctly: I shall see your face no more! . . . Your servants will come down to me [after the plague of the firstborn] and bow to me . . . and *THEN* I will go!" Then Moshe, furious (11:8), leaves.

As planned all along, in the end Paro finally "knows Y-HVH" and submits to Him, allowing the people to leave Egypt for their festival in the desert. Next week, we will talk about the Exodus, the mitzvot surrounding it, the splitting of the sea, and other events of Parashat Be-Shalah.

Shabbat Shalom

PARSHAT BO - Pesach in Sodom

This may sound rather strange, but according to Rashi, Pesach was already celebrated some four hundred years BEFORE the Exodus! Rashi, commenting on Breishit 19:3, claims that Lot baked specifically MATZOT for his guests because they arrived on Pesach.

In this week's shiur, while discussing the purpose and significance of the Korban Pesach, we show how there may be a very basic thematic connection between the destruction of Sdom and the process of Yetziat Mitzraim.

INTRODUCTION / REVIEW

In our study of Sefer Shmot thus far, we have focused on the double mission which Moshe receives at the burning bush:

- (1) The mission to Pharaoh, that he allow Bnei Yisrael to worship God in the desert.
- (2) The mission to Bnei Yisrael, that they recognize that God has come to fulfill His covenant.

Although these two missions are interrelated, each constitutes an independent Divine goal: Firstly, it is significant that Egypt, the center of ancient civilization, recognize the existence of God and Bnei Yisrael's right to worship Him. Likewise, it is crucial that Bnei Yisrael be aware not only that the God of their forefathers has come to redeem them, but also that they be willing and ready to obey Him (Shmot 6:2-9). Unfortunately, Bnei Yisrael do not heed God's call for "teshuva". Nonetheless, the miraculous redemption process (bshem Havaya) continues, for the Sake of His Name (Ezekiel 20:5-10). [See shiurim on Parshiot Shmot & Va'yeira.]

Bnei Yisrael's redemption from Egypt is merely the first step towards the fulfillment of God's covenant. However, it is not only God's responsibility to redeem them, Bnei Yisrael are expected to BECOME His Nation. [A covenant, by its very nature, requires active commitment by BOTH partners.] By following His laws and establishing a model nation in the Promised Land, Bnei Yisrael will lead all mankind toward the recognition of God - the final goal of that covenant (the theme of Sefer Breishit).

BNEI YISRAEL AND THE FIRST NINE PLAGUES

It is interesting to note that during the first nine "makot" (plagues), Bnei Yisrael appear to be 'out of the picture'. From the time that "makot" (plagues) are introduced to Moshe and Aharon (7:1-7) until the completion of the ninth plague (10:29), Sefer Shmot focuses exclusively on the confrontation between Moshe and Pharaoh, i.e. between God and Egypt. During that lengthy narrative, we find no mention of any instruction or commandment to Bnei Yisrael. The purpose of these makot is stated explicitly in the introduction to this unit:

"v'yadu MITZRAIM ki Ani Hashem" - And EGYPT will recognize that I am God, when I stretch out My Hand over Egypt..." (7:5)

These chapters form a distinct unit, for they describe the fulfillment of Moshe's mission to Pharaoh (1). Note the connection between the opening (7:1-7) & closing psukim (11:9-10) of this unit.

In contrast, from this point in Parshat Bo and onward, Chumash changes its focus from the Egyptians to the Israelites. Moshe must now complete his mission to Bnei Yisrael (2) by encouraging them to become an active partner in the process of Yetziat Mitzraim. "Parshat Ha'Chodesh" (12:1-20), containing the first "mitzvah" given to Bnei Yisrael, begins this new unit.

THE TENTH PLAGUE

During the first nine plagues, God finds no particular difficulty differentiating between Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians (e.g. arov, dever, barad, choshech). Nevertheless, for the final plague - Makkat

Bchorot - it seems that a special sign is necessary: Bnei Yisrael must sprinkle the blood of the "korban Pesach" on their doorposts so that God can distinguish between them and the Egyptians. Surely, God is mighty enough to recognize who was an Israelite even without a sign on their doorposts. Why then is this special sign necessary?

Based on our introduction, the answer is quite simple: God does not need to see the blood on the doorposts to determine the ethnic identity of the household. Rather, God requests this sign in order to determine who is WORTHY of redemption. Through the korban Pesach, Bnei Yisrael show that they understand the purpose of their redemption. They prove to God that they DESERVE to be saved.

This explains why Bnei Yisrael are commanded to prepare this korban on the tenth of Nisan (12:3). The three (or four) days before their redemption need to be dedicated to spiritual preparation.

The korban Pesach is significant in itself. Its purpose was not only to provide the blood for the sign on the doorposts. Considering that this korban is offered as Bnei Yisrael become free from their slavery (and their oppressor is punished /see Br. 15:13-14), the korban Pesach serves as a proper thanksgiving to God for His fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim [see Further Iyun Section].

To fully appreciate this idea, the special name of this korban - Pesach - requires additional explanation.

A change in lifestyle, especially that of a nation, cannot take place overnight. How much more so, the transformation of an enslaved people, immersed in Egyptian culture, into a free nation willing and ready to obey God. Had Bnei Yisrael begun this teshuva process prior to the first plague, as God had originally demanded, they could have been ready for the ideal redemption process. Possibly, Bnei Yisrael would have commenced their three day journey to Har Sinai immediately after the tenth plague. Spiritually ready to obey God, they would have received the Torah and continued to the Land of Israel only a short time later.

Had Bnei Yisrael truly been worthy of this ideal redemption, the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts may not have been necessary. However, as we explained in last week's shiur, the people were not worthy; their hastened preparation for the Exodus was hardly sufficient to entirely erase their past. Now that God is about to reveal Himself b'shem Havaya, they deserve to be punished together with the Egyptians; but God has Mercy (Ezekiel 20:7-9). The fact that God has to PASS OVER their houses emphasizes this very point - that they actually deserve to be punished, but instead of smiting them, He saves them at the last minute. ["po'sey'ach" in Hebrew implies skipping over. One 'skips over' that which he should have stepped on.]

Therefore, the Korban Pesach serves a double purpose:

- (1) By sprinkling the blood of the korban Pesach on their doorposts, Bnei Yisrael display recognition that they do not deserve to be saved. [Blood is a fitting symbol.]
- (2) Offering the korban in thanksgiving for the fulfillment of the first stage of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, reminds them that if they are saved, it is IN ORDER that they can fulfill the next stage of that covenant, i.e. to become His special Nation in the Promised Land. [The special laws which govern HOW this korban is to be eaten (12:8-11), further enhances Bnei Yisrael's perception of this purpose.]

This awareness, that although they deserve punishment, God 'passes over' them, is the primary purpose for offering this korban in this situation; and hence its name - "korban Pesach".

Any "teshuva" process must begin with both (1) man's recognition of God's Mercy in allowing him a second chance, as well as (2) man's realization of his purpose in life.

[Note: Even if Bnei Yisrael had been deserving of their redemption, it may have been proper to offer this "korban l'Hashem" at this time (or three days later at Har Sinai) in thanksgiving for Brit Bein Ha'Btarim. However, the ritual of sprinkling the blood on the doorposts would have been superfluous. One could also suggest a reason why God afforded them a second chance. Although inexcusable, their stubbornness was understandable. As we explained in last week's shiur, because of their crushed spirits and cruel bondage ("m'kotzer

ruach u'm'avodah kasha"), Bnei Yisrael did not heed God's original call (6:9). Possibly, for this reason Sefer Shmot only hints of their low spiritual level at that time, and does not record what Sefer Yechezkel mentions explicitly.]

With this background, we can return to our opening question in order to find a thematic connection between Sdom & Pesach.

PESACH IN SDOM

Lot's situation in Sdom is strikingly similar to Bnei Yisrael's in Egypt. Recall that Lot is originally attracted to Sdom because of its climatic similarities to Egypt (Nile & Jordan Rivers / See Br. 13:10). The people of Sdom, as a result of their natural resources, are confident in themselves. They find no need for God and thus evolve into a corrupt society (13:13 / see shiur on Parshat Va'yera). In total disgust for this society, God punishes them b'shem Havaya (18:20-21).

Before destroying Sdom, God first consults with Avraham Avinu. Antithetical to the society of Sdom, Avraham's offspring were destined to become a 'blessing to Mankind' by establishing a Nation characterized by "tzekek u'mishpat" (see 18:17-19). Can Lot, a disciple of Avraham, not save that city?

Upon hearing of the forthcoming destruction of Sdom, Avraham immediately assumes exactly what we have posited - that God would not punish the righteous together with the wicked:

"Will you sweep away the innocent together with the guilty?... Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (18:23-25).

Although he is more righteous than his neighbors, Lot does not merit to be saved from the destruction of Sdom. [He preferred the lifestyle in Sdom over the challenges of life with Avraham (13:10-12).] In an act of Divine Mercy (19:16!), and for the sake of Avraham (19:29), God removes Lot from Sdom before He destroys the city. Lot is so undeserving that he is not even permitted to look back and watch the destruction.

It is only God's covenant with Avraham Avinu that evokes Divine Mercy. Like Bnei Yisrael during Makkat Bchorot, Lot is saved from destruction even though he is not worthy. Based on this thematic similarity, we can appreciate Rashi's concise comment regarding the time of year when the destruction of Sdom took place.

Rashi comments on the pasuk that describes the meal which Lot prepared for the two "malachim" (who came to destroy Sdom):

"And he [Lot] made for them drinks, and baked MATZOT, and they ate..." (19:3).

On the word MATZOT, Rashi explains that 'it was PESACH' that evening. After all, why else would they be eating matzah?

Does Rashi need to inform us what time of year this episode took place? Do we need to know how 'frum' Lot was, that he kept all mitzvot, even matzah on Pesach?

Rashi is not coming to teach us "pshat" (the simple meaning of the text). Rather, he hints to the thematic similarity between Lot and Yetziyat Mitzraim.

[Note: The following explanation illustrates the danger of understanding "drash" as "pshat". When we too quickly accept "drash" as "pshat", not only are we liable to miss the beauty of "pshat", we might also lose the full appreciation of the "drash".]

According to "pshat", Lot did not bake matzot (19:3) because it was Pesach, rather he baked matzot (instead of bread) because his guests arrived SUDDENLY. In order to bake bread, the dough needs time to rise, while matzot can be baked much more quickly.

The "drash", brought down by Rashi, that Lot baked matzah because it was Pesach, thematically links the events leading to the destruction of Sdom to the story of Yetziyat Mitzraim. In both events, God reveals Himself, b'shem Havaya, in Judgement. Thus, Rashi's commentary of this pasuk does not explain "pshat", rather, it points to a much deeper biblical theme - that of 'Yom Hashem'!

YOM HASHEM

This biblical concept of a day when God reveals Himself, causing the wicked to be punished while the righteous are saved, is

known throughout Tanach as "Yom Hashem" - God's Day of Judgement.

For example, when Yeshayahu foresees the destruction of Bavel (Isaiah 13:1-22), he consistently refers to that day as 'Yom Hashem' (see 13:6,9,13). While describing that calamity, Yeshayahu even compares Bavel to Sdom:

"Bavel, glory of kingdoms, splendor of the Kassdim, shall become like Sdom and Amorah, overturned by God" (13:19)

Another important example is found in Amos. During the time period of Yerovam ben Yoash, Israel had reached prosperity and affluence. They eagerly awaited an even greater redemption, even though they were not deserving. In reaction, Amos warns the people concerning the danger involved (5:18):

"Woe, you who wish for 'Yom Hashem', why should you want 'Yom Hashem', [for you] it shall be darkness and not light."

If the people are not spiritually prepared for God to reveal Himself, Amos warns, 'Yom Hashem' will bring upon them destruction rather than salvation.

Our final example 'comes from God's 'farewell' message to Mankind; the last prophesy of the last prophet - Malachi:

[also a popular song]

"Hiney anochi sho'lay'ach la'chem..." - Behold I am sending you Eliyahu the prophet BEFORE the great and terrible Day of the Lord ['Yom Hashem'] comes. And he will bring about the REPENTANCE of the fathers by the sons, and the repentance of the sons by the fathers, LEST I COME and STRIKE the entire land with DESTRUCTION." [this last phrase, we don't sing!] (3:23-24)

Here again we find the necessity to perform teshuva prior to redemption, otherwise God's revelation will lead to destruction. Since the ultimate redemption of Am Yisrael is the hope of all the prophets, it is only fitting that this becomes the closing prophetic message to Am Yisrael.

As we have seen, the redemption process begins without Bnei Yisrael being worthy of salvation. However, its continuation - receiving the Torah and inheriting the Promised Land - require spiritual readiness. In this week's shiur we explained how the offering of the korban Pesach was the 'first step' in the right direction, an important milestone on the road to spiritual redemption.

Every year, when we commemorate the events of Yetziyat Mitzraim on 'Passover', we thank God for His fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim (MAGID) and pray for our final redemption (HALLEL/ NIRTZAH). Before that prayer, we invite Eliyahu to our Seder table not only to taste our wine, and not only to encourage him to smite our enemies; Eliyahu comes to remind us that we need to do proper "teshuva" PRIOR to our redemption, and to warn us of the consequences lest we do not.

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. THE KORBAN TODAH AND KORBAN PESACH

See Vayikra 7:11-21. The Korban Todah is special in two ways:

1) The time frame in which one can eat it is limited to the day when it was offered and that evening, while a regular Shlamim can be eaten the entire next day.

2) It must be eaten together with MATZOT:

The Korban Pesach is similar in both these aspects. It can only be eaten that evening, and it must be eaten together with matzot.

Relate this as well to when we are obligated to offer a Korban Todah (based on Tehilim 107/ "arba chayavim l'hodot")

B. Recall the pasuk that we quote as the seder before inviting Eliyahu: "shfoch chamotcha al ha'goyim..." (see Yirmiyahu 10:25) and relate this to Yechezkel 20:8-9 [note "v'omar lishpoch chamati aleiyhem, v'aas l'maan SHMI..."] and to main point of the above shiur.

PARSHAT BO

- KORBAN PESACH AND BRIT MILA -

In our shiur on Parshat Bo discussing Parshat ha-Chodesh / Shmot 12:1-20, we discussed why the Torah 'prematurely' presented the laws of 'chag ha-matzot'. In the following shiur, we discuss why the Torah 'belatedly' [i.e. after Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt] presents the laws of 'chukot ha-Pesach'.

INTRODUCTION

To clarify the problem that our shiur deals with, we begin with a quick overview of the Torah's presentation of the story of Yetziat Mitzraim by charting the progression of 'parshiot' (and their respective topics) in chapters 12 and 13. As you review these two chapters, note how the topics of these 'parshiot' alternate between "mitzvot" [LAWS] and "sipur" [STORY, i.e. narrative]

PSUKIM TOPIC

12:1-20 Hashem commands Moshe to tell Yisrael the LAWS of:
a. Korban Pesach in Egypt (12:3-13)
b. Korban Pesach for future generations (12:14)
c. The laws of eating matza for seven days (12:15-20)

12:21-28 Moshe relays these laws to Bnei Yisrael, but only the LAWS of:
a. Korban Pesach in Egypt (12:21-23)
b. Korban Pesach for future generations (12:24-28)

12:29-36 The STORY of the Tenth Plague and the Exodus [How the Egyptians rushed Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt.]

12:37-42 The STORY of traveling from Egypt, baking matza, and concluding remarks regarding the '430 years'...

12:43-50 Some more LAWS re: offering Korban Pesach [This section is titled - "zot chukat ha-Pesach".]

12:51 A short summary pasuk

13:1-10 Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael more the LAWS
13:1-2 -God commands Moshe
re: 'kedushat bechor'. [laws of the first born]
13:3-10 Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael the laws of:
eating matza for seven days ["chag ha'matzot"]
not eating (or owning) chametz for 7 days

13:11-16 Moshe tells Yisrael the LAWS of the 'first born'.

As you study the above chart, note how the LAW sections relate directly to the STORY sections. For example, the laws for how to offer the korban Pesach precede the story of the Tenth the Plague, for the purpose of that offering was to protect Bnei Yisrael from that Plague (see 12:12-13 & 12:21-23).

However, at the conclusion of the story of the Exodus (in 12:42), we find yet an additional 'parshia' concerning additional laws that relate to offering the Korban Pesach - which clearly appears to be 'out of place'!

"And God said to Moshe and Aharon: These are the laws of the Pesach - anyone not circumcised may not eat from it..."

"Then Bnei Yisrael did just as God had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did" (see 12:43-50).

To our amazement, this entire 'parshia' appears to be recorded in Chumash a bit too late! Let's explain why:

The laws in 12:43-49 command Bnei Yisrael to perform 'brit mila' BEFORE offering the Korban Pesach. Therefore, it must have been taught BEFORE Bnei Yisrael left Egypt. Furthermore, this 'parshia' includes several other laws that would apply to offering the korban Pesach in Egypt (even though these laws apply to korban Pesach in future generations as well).

Finally, the last pasuk of this unit informs us that Bnei Yisrael

did exactly as Moshe commanded them (see 12:50).

[Note now Rashi on 12:43 immediately concludes that this 'parshia' is 'out of place'; and even Ramban agrees!]

Why then does the Torah record these laws only AFTER the story of the Exodus? Shouldn't this 'parshia' have been included together with all the other laws of Korban Pesach (i.e. somewhere along with 12:2-14 and 12:21-28)?

Considering our discussion in our first shiur that 12:15-20 may also be 'out of place' (i.e. It really 'belongs' with 13:2-8), we find a very peculiar phenomenon in chapter 12: The laws of chag ha-matzot (12:15-20), which technically should have recorded AFTER the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, are recorded beforehand - while the laws of 'chukat ha-Pesach' which should have been recorded earlier, are recorded AFTER the story of the Exodus.

In other words, to put this chapter back into its correct 'chronological order,' we would simply have to swap these two parshiot.

Nevertheless, the Torah prefers to record them 'out of order', and the obvious question is WHY.

THEMATIC ORDER

These questions relate to a wider topic of Chumash study known as "ein mukdam u-me'uchar" - that the parshiot in Chumash do not necessarily follow chronological order. However, this does not mean that Chumash follows a completely random sequence. Rather, even though the Torah usually does follow chronological order, it occasionally prefers to place a certain 'parshia' in a different place IN ORDER to emphasize a THEMATIC connection.

[One could say that this is the Torah's way of saying: 'darsheini'!]

If this assumption is correct, then we can conclude that the Torah presented these parshiot in this manner in order that we should search for a thematic connection between:

- a) Korban Pesach and chag ha-matzot; and
- b) the concluding story of Exodus and chukat ha-Pesach.

In Part I we discussed (a); now we must discuss (b).

Let's begin by taking a closer look at the previous 'parshia' that concludes the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim:

"...And the settlement of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt was thirty years and FOUR HUNDRED years. And it came to pass after thirty years and FOUR HUNDRED years, on this day, all of God's hosts LEFT from the land of Egypt..." (see 12:40-42).

Clearly, these psukim focus on the completion of FOUR HUNDRED years; but the Torah is not precise in regard to what these four hundred years are counting from.

BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM & CHUKAT HA-PESACH

The commentators all agree that the 'four hundred years' mentioned in these psukim must relate in one form or other to God's promise to Avraham Avinu concerning the 'bondage of his offspring in a foreign land,' as promised in 'brit bein ha-btarim'. [See Breishit 15:13-14, see also Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra on 12:40.]

In other words, this final 'parshia' (12:37-42) points to the fact that this Exodus from Egypt marks God's fulfillment of His promise to Avraham Avinu at 'brit bein ha-btarim'.

With this in mind, let's take a look at the 'parshia' that follows: "And God said to Moshe and Aharon: These are the laws of the Pesach - a son of a non-Jew may not eat from it... and if he owns a servant, then he must CIRCUMCISE him, and then he may eat it... and if a stranger lives with you and wants to offer a korban Pesach, first he must be CIRCUMCISED... and anyone NOT CIRCUMCISED may not eat from it." (see 12:43-48).

Note how the primary focus of these mitzvot in 'chukat ha-Pesach' is the requirement to perform BRIT MILA before offering the Korban Pesach (note 12:43,44,48).

But as we noted above, the final psukim of the preceding story relate back to the theme of BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM!

Therefore, this juxtaposition may point once again to thematic connection between these two central covenants of Sefer Breishit. [See last week's shiur on Parshat Va'era.]

In this manner, Chumash may be alluding to an important thematic message: If we consider Korban Pesach as the manner by which we thank God for His fulfillment of Brit bein Ha-btarim, then before doing so, we must first remind ourselves of our commitment to His covenant of 'brit MILA'.

[Recall how Brit Mila reflects the special relationship [or partnership] between God and Bnei Yisrael (to accept Him as our God - "lihiyot lachem l-Elokim" / see Breishit 17:7-8).]

Hence, this intentional juxtaposition may emphasize how one must first confirm his commitment at a personal and family level - as reflected in Brit Mila, before he can proclaim his affiliation at the national level, as reflected in the offering of the korban Pesach - to thank God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim.

This critical balance between one's commitment to God at both the personal and national level will emerge as a primary theme in Chumash, especially in our study of Sefer Shmot and Sefer Devarim.

Iy'h, we will return to this topic in the shiurim that follow; Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN:

A. The Position of 'Zot Chukat Ha-Pesach'

Three answers as to why this section is transplanted from its chronological location appear in the following commentators:

1) Ibn Ezra, Seforo and Chizkuni claim that the laws of "chukat ha'pesach" apply only to future generations, and hence this entire section is not out of chronological sequence.

The Mechilta (on 12:43) quotes a debate between Rabbi Yosha and Rabbi Yonatan as to whether these psukim refer only to Pesach Mitzrayim or to Pesach dorot, as well. The Ibn Ezra disputes both views, and claims that this section deals strictly with Pesach dorot.

In regard to the concluding pasuk of this section -"All of Bnei Yisrael did just as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon... " - which we quoted as the strongest proof that these psukim belong earlier (see 12:50) - Ibn Ezra explains that these halachot bore relevance only for subsequent years, i.e. when they observed Pesach in the wilderness.

Chizkuni explains differently, that this pasuk tells of Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of these laws for observance in future years (even though did not apply at that time).

2) Ramban cites Ibn Ezra's approach and strongly rejects it. Despite his general aversion towards applying the principle of "ein mukdam u-me'uchar", the Ramban here nevertheless accepts Rashi's view, the one we adopt in the shiur, that this section was transmitted earlier, before Yetziyat Mitzrayim.

The Ramban explains that the Torah wished to first record the story of Yetziyat Mitzrayim immediately after Moshe conveys to Bnei Yisrael God's promise of redemption - as they express their faith by prostrating themselves (see 12:23-27). This juxtaposition underscores Hashem's fulfillment of His promise. After the story of yetziyat Mitzrayim, the Torah then returns to complete the transmission of the laws relevant to the korban pesach. Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi, in his work on Rashi's commentary, explains along similar lines.

3) A much different explanation is given by the Abarbanel and, later, by Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch. They claim that this section, which deals primarily with the procedure required before a foreigner or a convert may partake of the korban Pesach, is directed towards the 'erev rav', about whom the Torah speaks just several verses earlier. (In their respective commentaries, both the Abarbanel and Rav Hirsch go through all the halachot mentioned in this section and explain how they all address the unique circumstance of the erev rav.)

B. The Four Hundred and Thirty Years of Bondage

As we noted, the Torah says in 12:40 that Bnei Yisrael spent 430 years in Egypt. Rashi there notes that based on the genealogical record of Yaakov's family when he relocated in Egypt (in Parshat Vayigash - Breishit 46:8-27) as well as that in Parshat Va'era (Shmot 6:14-25), this is a mathematical impossibility. (In short, Kehat, Moshe's grandfather, is included among those who moved with Yaakov to Egypt; four hundred years could not have passed from Kehat's move to Egypt until his grandson, Moshe, led the slaves to freedom at the age of eighty.) Further confounding the issue is the fact that Hashem had informed Avraham of a 400-year period of bondage, not 430 years.

For this reason, most sources among Chazal and the mefarshim claim - as mentioned in the shiur - that the period in question began with the birth of Yitzchak. Hashem had promised that Avraham's offspring would be "foreigners in a land not their own" (Breishit 15:13). This period began when his heir, Yitzchak, was born in a country where he was deemed a foreigner. Why Yitzchak - and, after him, Yaakov and his children - held foreigner status in Canaan is not entirely clear. Ibn Ezra (commenting on our pasuk) cites a theory that during this period Canaan was subject to Egyptian rule. Although the Ibn Ezra claims that there is no source to substantiate such a theory, Rav Menachem Kasher (Torah Shleima on our pasuk, footnote 601) indeed brings several sources to this effect. The Maharal, by contrast, in his commentary, "Gur Aryeh" on our pasuk, posits a different explanation for this foreigner status. As Hashem had decreed that Avraham's offspring would come under subjugation in a foreign land, their residence in Canaan before their descent to Egypt was not permanent. As such, they could not be considered anything more than foreigners. Rashi, in his commentary to Breishit 15:13, cites psukim that imply that Yitzchak and Yaakov's residence in Canaan was indeed that of foreigners.

In any event, the sixty years of Yitzchak's life before Yaakov's birth (Breishit 25:26) and Yaakov's one hundred and thirty years before moving to Egypt (Breishit 47:8) combine to comprise 190 of the 400 years of exile. This leaves 210 years, the commonly accepted duration of the Egyptian exile (see Breishit Rabba 91:2).

This theory, that the period of 'exile' began with the birth of Yitzchak, dates back as early as the Septuagint, which adds onto our pasuk the words, 'u-bish'ar aratzot', meaning, that the 430 years mark the period in which Bnei Yisrael were foreigners in Egypt as well as in other lands.

As for the discrepancy between the 400 and 430 years, we find four approaches in the Midrashim and mefarshim:

1) The Mechilta on our pasuk, as well as Rashi here and in Breishit 15:13, maintain that the 400-year period began with the birth of Yitzchak, and the 430-year period began at brit bein ha-btarim, which took place thirty years prior to Yitzchak's birth. This raises a vexing problem: Avraham was 100 years old when Yitzchak was born (Breishit 21:5), which would mean that he was only 70 at the time of brit bein ha-btarim. Yet, he was already 75 years-old when he first migrated to Canaan (Breishit 12:4). How, then, could Avraham have been only 70 at brit bein ha-btarim, which occurs three chapters after his resettlement in Canaan?

The Seder Olam Rabba therefore explains that Avraham originally moved to Canaan at age 70. After the brit bein ha-btarim, he returned to Charan for five years, after which he once again settled in Canaan. The presentation in Parshat Lech-Lecha

thus does not follow chronological sequence.

2) The Ramban (in his commentary to our pasuk) argues that the 430 years began with brit bein ha-btarim; the 400 years which Hashem mentioned to Avraham marked the minimum duration of the exile, not the definite period. As a result of Bnei Yisrael's sins in Egypt, Hashem added thirty years to the decree, resulting in a total of 430 years. According to the Ramban, Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt for 240 years, not 210 as is commonly understood.

3) The Ibn Ezra and Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor suggest that the 430 years begin with Avraham's migration with his father from Ur Kasdim. Towards the end of Parshat Noach (11:31), the Torah tells that Terach took his family from Ur Kasdim to live in Canaan, but for some reason he never made it past Charan. These mefarshim suggest that this event, which, they claim, occurred thirty years prior to brit bein ha-btarim, marked the beginning of Avraham's period of 'exile', as this was the point at which he uprooted himself from his homeland. (The Netziv adopts this approach, as well, and elaborates further on the significance of Avraham's move from Ur Kasdim.)

4) The Abarbanel cites a view that the pasuk in brit bein ha-btarim that speaks of 400 years was imprecise; it rounded off the number 430 to an even 400. This view would then yield the same result that emerges from the Ramban's approach: Bnei Yisrael spent 240 years in Egypt. (The Abarbanel himself, however, accepts the Ramban's position.)

All these mefarshim agree that the 400 years of bondage foreseen at brit bein ha-btarim begin at that point, when Hashem informs Avraham of the exile. They argue only as to the nature of the thirty years. We do find two other views, which deny this assumption upon which all the aforementioned explanations are predicated:

Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer (48) cites the view of Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach that the 430-year period begins with the birth of Efrayim and Menashe, the last two tribes of Yisrael to be born. Their birth occurred five years before Yaakov and his family moved to Egypt, such that 215 years passed from their birth to the Exodus. Since the slavery required Bnei Yisrael's service both by day and night, they served as slaves for the functional equivalent of 430 years. (Haktav Ve-hakabbala explains this based on another Midrash, that the Egyptian taskmasters forced the slaves to sleep in the fields rather than going home to their families; they thus 'worked' both by day and by night.) More familiar is the Midrash cited by the Vilna Gaon, in Kol Eliyahu on Parshat Shmot, that states more simply that the torture and hardship of the 210-year slavery term rendered it equivalent to a standard, 400-year term. According to this approach, that Bnei Yisrael's slavery equaled - but did not last for - 400 years, our pasuk does not at all relate to brit bein ha-btarim.

Perhaps the most startling view is that of the Shadal, who claims, in opposition to all other commentators (including the Septuaginta, as quoted above), that Bnei Yisrael indeed spent four hundred and thirty years in Egypt. Earlier, we parenthetically noted the proof against this possibility, that the Torah identifies Kehat as Moshe's grandfather (Shmot 6:18, 20), and he was among the seventy members of Yaakov's family who descended to Egypt (Breishit 46:11). The life-spans of Kehat and his son Amram, plus Moshe's eighty years before freeing Bnei Yisrael, do not add up to anywhere near 430 years. The Shadal refutes this proof by claiming that the Torah omits several generations in its genealogical record in Parshat Va'era. In fact, he brings a very strong proof to his claim: in Parshat Va'era, the Torah lists only eight members of the tribe of Levi in Amram's generation (Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, Uziel, Machli, Mushi, Livni and Shimi - Shmot 6:17-19). Yet, when Moshe - Amram's son - took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, the tribe of Levi numbered 22,000 (Bemidbar 3:39). Clearly, Levi's population could not have grown from 8 to 22,000 in a single generation. Undoubtedly, the Shadal argues, there were several interim generations that the Torah - for whatever

reason - neglects to mention.

Rav Yaakov Medan (of Yeshivat Har Etzion - Daf Kesher vol. 3, p.220) refutes this seemingly convincing proof of the Shadal. He suggests quite simply that the Torah omitted not interim generations, as the Shadal claims, but rather the brothers of those eight levites, or even the brothers of their parents. Rav Medan notes that when Yaakov bestows the bechora upon Yosef, whereby his sons, Efrayim and Menashe, become independent tribes, he adds that any future children born to Yosef will be included in those two tribes (Breishit 48:6). In other words, 'less significant' brothers often became formally included as part of their brothers' families. It stands to reason, then, that in each generation in the genealogical listing the Torah records only several brothers. In fact, Rav Medan adds, the genealogical records in Va'era, Bemidbar and Pinchas do not mention any grandsons of Yaakov besides those listed as part of the family that descended to Egypt. As Yaakov's sons were still relatively young when they relocated in Egypt, we have no reason to believe that they did not continue bearing children in Egypt. Clearly, then, there were siblings omitted in the Torah's genealogical record, thus refuting the Shadal's

PARSHAT BO

TWO REASONS FOR MATZA - OR ONE?

Ask anyone - why do we eat Matza on Pesach? Invariably you will hear one of the two following answers:

- To remind us of the 'poor man's bread' that we ate when we were slaves in Egypt ['lechem oni'];
[As we say in the Haggada - "ha lachma anya..."]
- Because we left Egypt in haste and our dough didn't have time to rise ['chipazon'].
[As we say in the Haggada - "Matza - al shum ma? al shum she-lo hispik betzeikam le-hachmitz..."]

So, which reason is correct?

In the following shiur, we uncover the biblical roots of these two reasons in Parshat Bo - in an attempt to better understand and appreciate why we eat matza on Pesach.

INTRODUCTION

In Parshat Bo, we find two Biblical commands that relate to eating matza:

In relation to **korban Pesach**, we are instructed to eat **matza** & maror together with the meat of this offering. [See Shmot 12:8.]

In relation to "**chag hamatzot**", we are instructed to eat **matza** (and not eat chametz) for seven days. [See Shmot 12:15-20 and 13:3-8.]

In Part One of our shiur, we study these two sources to show how (and why) each of these two mitzvot stems from a totally different reason.

In Part Two, we study the intricate manner of the Torah's presentation of these two mitzvot - and together with some historical considerations, we will explore an underlying theme that may tie these two separate reasons together.

PART ONE - REMEMBERING SLAVERY or REMEMBERING FREEDOM

In the middle of Parshat Bo (right before the story of the Tenth Plague), God instructs Moshe concerning several mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep - more specifically, the laws of the korban Pesach (see 12:3-14) and a commandment to eat matza for seven days (see 12:15-20).

[This section (12:1-20) is better known as "Parshat ha-Chodesh", as it is read on the shabbos prior to Rosh Chodesh Nisan.]

As both of these mitzvot relate in some manner to eating matza, we begin our shiur by reviewing their definitions in regard

to how they are to be kept in future generations:

* The KORBAN PESACH - An Offering of Thanksgiving

Definition:

Each year we are commanded to offer a special korban on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan, and eat the korban on that evening, together with matza & maror; while thanking God for our deliverance from 'makkat bechorot'.

(See 12:24-27, based on 12:8-14)

Reason:

Because God 'passed over' the houses of Bnei Yisrael on that evening when He smote the Egyptians (see 12:26-27). As we eat the korban, we are supposed to explain this reason to our children.

* CHAG HA-MATZOT- A Holiday to commemorate the Exodus

Definition:

To eat matza (& NOT to eat chametz, own it, or even see it) for seven days, from the 15th to the 21st of Nisan.

(See Shmot 13:3-8, based on 12:15-20.)

Reason:

To remember the events (and their miraculous nature) by which God took Am Yisrael out of Egypt. (See Shmot 12:17 and 13:8.)

Even though these holidays 'overlap' on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan and both holidays include eating matza; each holiday serves a different purpose. By offering the korban Pesach we thank God for saving us from the Tenth Plague. In contrast, on Chag Ha-matzot we remember leaving Egypt into the desert, and hence our freedom from slavery.

[Note that each holiday has ample reason to stand alone.]

MATZA - A PRIMARY or SECONDARY MITZVA

With this background, let's examine the purpose for eating matza in each mitzvah. Clearly, on "chag ha-matzot" [the name for the holiday when we eat matza for seven days] - eating matza for seven days is presented as the **primary** mitzvah:

"Seven days you shall eat MATZA, even on the first day you shall rid yourselves from any unleaven in your houses..." (Shmot 12:15, see also 13:2-8).

As we shall soon explain, by eating matza (and not eating 'chametz') during those seven days, we remind ourselves of how God helped us when we left Egypt.

In contrast, eating matza with the korban Pesach is presented in a secondary manner, while the primary mitzvah is to eat the meat of the korban:

"And you shall eat the meat on this night, roasted on fire with MATZOT, together with bitter herbs..." (Shmot 12:8).

[Review from 12:3-13, noting how most of these psukim deal with how the **korban** is to be eaten, while matza is presented in a very secondary manner.]

Unfortunately, the Torah is not very specific in regard to WHY the Korban Pesach should be eaten with matza. It simply states in 12:8 to eat the meat roasted, together with matza & maror, without explaining why.

On the other hand, in regard to eating matza for the seven days of chag ha-matzot, the Torah is much more explicit:

"And you shall keep the (laws regarding) MATZOT, for on this very day I have taken your hosts out of the land of Egypt..." (see Shmot 12:17, see also 13:3!).

This pasuk suggests that eating matza for seven days will cause us to remember that God took us out of Egypt. But why should eating matza cause us to remember those events?

To understand why, we must return to the story of the Exodus in Chumash, and follow the narrative very carefully to show why 'eating matza' would remind Bnei Yisrael of the Exodus.

THE COMMON 'EXPERIENCE'

Contrary to the popular understanding, Bnei Yisrael had plenty of time to prepare for the Exodus. After all, already two weeks before the Tenth Plague, Bnei Yisrael had already received early warning (see Shmot 12:1-13). Furthermore, Moshe had already advised them to be ready to 'borrow' from their Egyptian neighbors the necessary gold & silver and clothing for their journey (see 11:1-3!). However, even though they had plenty of time to prepare, they were also in no special hurry to leave on the evening of the 15th of Nisan. In fact, Bnei Yisrael were under a specific directive to remain in their homes that entire evening:

"And Moshe told the leaders of Israel: Everyone should take a lamb... and none of you shall leave the entrance of your houses UNTIL THE MORNING" (see Shmot 12:21-22).

Hence, Bnei Yisrael most likely assumed that they would not be leaving Egypt until sometime the next morning. Considering that they were planning to embark on a long journey into the desert (see 11:1-3, read carefully), the people most probably prepared large amounts of dough on the previous day, with the intention of baking it early on the morning of the 15th of Nisan (before their departure). [The fresher the bread, the better!]

However, due to the sudden nature of the events that transpired that evening, these original plans changed. Recall how the Egyptians (after realizing the calamity of the Tenth Plague), **rushed** the Hebrews out of their homes. Pharaoh demanded that Moshe lead his nation out to worship their God (see 12:29-32), in hope that the sooner they would worship their God, the sooner the Plague would stop, see 12:33 (and 5:3!). The Egyptians were so eager for them to leave that they willingly **lent** their belongings.

It was because of this 'rush' that Bnei Yisrael didn't have time to bake their 'fresh bread' as planned. Instead, they quickly packed their bags and took their dough ('and ran'):

"[So] Bnei Yisrael carried their DOUGH before it had time to rise ['terem yechmatz'], as they wrapped with their garments and carried it over their shoulders.

[See Shmot 12:34.]

Two psukim later, the Torah tells exactly what Bnei Yisrael did with this dough. After setting up camp in Succot, on their way towards the desert (see 12:37-38), we are told:

"And Bnei Yisrael baked their DOUGH that they took out of Egypt as MATZOT, for it had not risen ['ki lo CHAMETZ'], for they were EXPELLED from Egypt, and they could not wait [in the their home to bake the dough properly], nor had they prepared any other provisions [and hence the only bread they had to eat was from this dough]" (see 12:39).

[This seems to be the simplest translation of this pasuk (see JPS). Note, however, that Ramban explains this pasuk in a different manner. The reason for this is discussed in the further iyun section.]

In this manner, everyone who left Egypt shared a common experience. As they set up camp on their way to the desert (the first time as a free nation) everyone shared the common predicament of: no bread; 'lots of dough'; and only makeshift methods for baking it. Therefore everyone improvised by baking their dough as thin matzot on makeshift 'hot-plates'.

This background explains the first instruction that Moshe Rabbeinu commanded Bnei Yisrael on that momentous day:

"And Moshe said to the people: REMEMBER THIS DAY that you have LEFT EGYPT from slavery, for God has taken you out with an outstretched hand - you shall not eat CHAMETZ. You are leaving in the month of the spring [therefore] when you come in the Promised Land... on this month EAT MATZA FOR SEVEN DAYS... you shall not see or own CHAMETZ in all your borders. And you shall tell you children on that day, it was for the sake of this [MATZA] that God took us out of Egypt..." (see Shmot 13:3-8, read carefully!).

In other words, the next year, by eating matza (and not owning any chametz) this generation would remember this

special experience together with the miraculous events of the Exodus. To preserve this tradition (and its message), the Torah commands all future generations as well to eat matza for seven days, while telling over these events to their children (see again Shmot 13:8).

In a shorter form, this is more or less the reason that we cite in the Haggada when we explain why we eat matza:

"MATZA... AL SHUM MA? This matza that we eat, for what reason (do we eat it)? - For the dough of our forefathers did not have time to become leaven when God the King of all kings revealed Himself and redeemed us, as it is stated (followed by the quote of Shmot 12:39)."

This certainly provides us with a logical reason for the commandment to eat matza for the seven days of "chag ha-matzot", but it certainly doesn't explain why Bnei Yisrael were first commanded to eat matza with the Korban Pesach BEFORE they left Egypt (see again 12:1-8). It simply wouldn't make sense for God to command Bnei Yisrael to eat matza in Egypt with the korban - to remember how they left Egypt!

Therefore, there must be an independent reason for eating matza with the korban Pesach, unrelated to the events that transpired when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt

To find that reason, we must return to Parshat ha'Chodesh, and consider the thematic connection between the mitzva to eat matza and all of the other mitzvot that accompany the Korban Pesach.

PESACH MITZRAYIM - A FAMILY AFFAIR

Certainly, the primary purpose of offering the Korban Pesach in Egypt was to sprinkle its blood on the doorposts to save Bnei Yisrael from the Tenth Plague (see 12:12-13). However, this commandment also included several other special laws that focus primarily on how this offering was to be eaten by its owners.

This in itself is noteworthy, for one would expect that a korban (an offering) set aside for God would be forbidden for human consumption, as is the case in an OLAH offering.] Yet, in regard to the Korban Pesach, eating this korban seems to be no less important than the sprinkling of its blood (see 12:3-11). Let's take a closer look at these special laws.

First of all, note how it was necessary to carefully plan this 'dinner' in advance:

"Speak unto all the congregation of Israel -On the tenth day of this month everyone must take a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a **household**; and if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbor next to him shall take one according to the number of the souls; **according to every man's eating** you shall count them for the lamb... (see Shmot 12:3-4)

Clearly, this was supposed to be a 'family meal' (see 12:3), and planned well in advance. Now, let's consider the cuisine.

"And they shall eat its meat on that night:

- * roasted over the fire
- * with MATZA
- * with MAROR (bitter herbs)
- * Do not eat it raw (uncooked)
- * [nor can you eat it] cooked in water
- * eat it only roasted,
its head, legs, and entrails, (together)
- * No 'leftovers', anything left over must be burnt.

And this is how you should it eat it:

- * your loins girded
- * your shoes on your feet
- * your staff in your hand
- * and you shall eat it in haste [CHIPAZON]

it is a PESACH [offering] for God." (Shmot 12:7-11)

As you review these psukim, note once again how eating matza is only one of many other instructions that go along with how this korban is to be eaten. Let's begin our discussion with some of the 'other' laws; afterward we'll return to the matza.

NO LEFTOVERS

The law that no meat can be left over relates once again to the special atmosphere of this evening. When someone knows that any leftovers 'go to the garbage', it is more likely that he will eat to his heart's content and enjoy the meal (ask any "Yeshiva bachur"). If it was permitted to save the meat, then people would refrain from eating to their heart's content, preferring to save some of the meat for another meal (ask any poor man).

Coming to the meal fully dressed, and eating with eagerness and readiness, certainly would make this evening more memorable. [Remember as well that in ancient time a staff ("makelchem be-yedchem") is not necessarily a walking stick for the aged, but rather a sign of importance.]

It also goes without saying that lamb is most tasty when barbecued, as opposed to being boiled in water (ask anybody).

With this background, let's consider the wider picture:

A family meal - planned well in advance,
by invitation only,
fresh lamb - well done, roasted on an open spit
(roasting is much more tasty than cooking)
with fresh pita ('eish tanur' style), i.e. matza
with a spicy salad (bitter herbs), i.e. maror
no leftovers allowed
everyone coming well dressed (best attire)
eating it with readiness, zest, excitement ('chipazon')

Any of us who have attended a formal dinner should not be surprised by these laws, for this seems to be their primary intention - to create a full fledged 'shabbos table' atmosphere.

Consider the circumstances. A nation of slaves, now about to become free, and ready to embark on a momentous journey to Har Sinai and then to the Promised Land. Certainly, we want this to be an 'evening to remember', and hence 'only the fanciest restaurant' will do!

[Recall as well that it would not be often that slaves could afford to eat 'fleishigs' for dinner.]

Our main point is that the PRIMARY reason for all of these special laws was to assure that every family would participate in a formal meal, in order to make this a memorable evening. Therefore, only the best meat, cooked in the best manner, with bread and salad; with the eager participants in their best attire.

With this in mind, let's return to consider the reason for eating matza at this meal.

Considering our discussion thus far, it would have made more sense to enjoy the korban with a fresh 'chametz' bun, rather than simple 'matza'!

To appreciate why, let's return to our analogy of 'going out to eat' to celebrate an important occasion. Now the question becomes: What restaurant would be most appropriate?

Will it be Chinese? Italian? French?

In the case of korban Pesach, the best way to describe the menu would be - 'anti-Egyptian'!

Let's explain.

Not only does God want Bnei Yisrael to enjoy a family meal on this important evening, He also wants this meal to carry a theme. The menu should not only be 'formal', but it should also carry a 'spiritual message'. [For those Americans on the list, just ask your neighbors why turkey is traditionally served for Thanksgiving dinner.]

Let's consider the menu.

LAMB FOR DINNER

As we explained, eating meat is in itself special. But why specifically lamb? Let's explain why eating lamb would be considered 'anti-Egyptian'

Recall when Yaakov and his sons first went down to Egypt, Yosef was embarrassed by their profession, that they were shepherds, for anyone who raised sheep was a 'to'eva' [an 'abomination'] to Egyptians. (See Breishit 43:32.)

Furthermore, when the Plagues began, Pharaoh first agreed

that Bnei Yisrael could offer their korbanot in Egypt, but not in the desert. To this offer Moshe replied, should Am Yisrael offer 'to'evat Mitzrayim' [an abomination to the Egyptians] in Egypt, would they not be stoned? (See Shmot 8:22.)

From that interchange, it becomes quite clear that offering a 'lamb' would be antithetical to Egyptian culture. Rashi's commentary on this pasuk seems to imply that a 'lamb' was considered a type of a god to the Egyptians, and hence offering a 'lamb' in Egypt would be a desecration in their eyes. [Sort of like burning someone's national flag. See Ramban 12:3]

[Note Ibn Ezra (on Shmot 8:22) quotes a Kaarite who explained that a 'lamb' was the symbol of the god who controls their land. He himself argues that it was not just a lamb, but any type of animal, for he claims that the Egyptians were vegetarians.]

[One could also suggest an 'astrological' explanation that relates to the fact that the Nile (Egypt's source of water) reaches its highest level in the spring during the zodiac of 'taleh' [a lamb, see Nile mosaic in Tzipori!] See also a similar explanation in Sefer Ha-toda'a by Eliyahu Ki-tov, re: Nisan (page 14).]

Therefore, burning a lamb, complete with its head, and legs and entrails, etc. on an open spit (see Shmot 12:9), and then eating it, would serve as a sign to Bnei Yisrael that they are now free from Egyptian culture, and its gods.

MATZA & MAROR

As we explained, the primary reason for eating matza would be no different than having rolls at a cook-out. But eating specifically matza could be considered once again symbolic. The simplest reason would be simply to remind Bnei Yisrael that on this evening God is taking them out of slavery. As 'matza' is the typical bread of a poor-man, or a slave, it would be most fitting to eat the meat together with this style of bread.

[This would reflect our statement of "ha lachma anya" that we say at the beginning of the Haggada.]

This doesn't mean that a poor-man's bread tastes bad. It is merely a simple style of bread that can actually taste good!

However, one could also suggest that 'chametz' itself may have been a symbol of Egyptian culture. It is well-known among historians that the art of making leaven was first developed in Egypt, and it was the Egyptians who perfected the process of 'bread-making'.

[See 'On Food and Cooking -The Science and Lore of the Kitchen' - by Harold McGee / Page 275 - based on archeological evidence, raised bread began in Egypt around 4000 BCE. On page 280 - then beer froth was eventually used as first yeast. And page 615 - bread-making became refined with invention of ovens around 3000 BCE in Egypt.]

Similarly, eating bitter herbs with the korban certainly makes the meat 'tastier' - but why specifically **bitter** herbs rather than sweet ones? Like matza, one could suggest that the reason would be to remind us on this evening of the bitterness of the slavery that we are now leaving. In fact, this is exactly what we explain in the Haggada in the section "MAROR - AL SHUM MA".

[One could also explain that the reason for eating the korban 'well dressed' and in hurriedness (even though Bnei Yisrael would not be leaving until the next morning) was to emphasize the need be 'ready & eager' for their redemption.]

In this manner, all of the mitzvot relating to Pesach Mitzrayim can relate to both the need to make this a memorable evening, with a formal family dinner etc.; but at the same time, every action also carried a symbolic function as well. This evening was to leave a lasting impression on its participants, in order that they would pass on this memory to their children and grandchildren. It had to be special!

In summary, we have shown how there may be two totally independent reasons for eating matza on the night of the fifteenth

of Nisan:

- One matza - 'lechem oni', poor man's bread - is to be eaten with the korban Pesach, in order to make this korban tasty, but at the same time to remind us to thank God for being saved from Makkat Bechorot & slavery.
- The second matza - "bread that was made in haste", 'chipazon' - is an integral part of the mitzva of chag ha-matzot (eating matza for seven days) which we eat in order that we remember the events of how God took us out of Egypt.

In Part Two we will search for a deeper connection between these two reasons for eating matza.

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PART II / FROM PESACH MITZRAIM TO PESACH DOROT

INTRODUCTION

In Part One, we offered two reasons for eating matza with the Korban Pesach: Either to remind us of the hardships of slavery (similar to the reason for why we eat 'maror'); or to remind us of the need to reject Egyptian culture as a pre-requisite for redemption (similar to the reason for why we sacrifice a lamb).

If the following shiur, we will pursue this second line of reasoning, and apply its logic to help explain some of the peculiar laws of "chag ha'matzot" [i.e. the commandment to eat matza (and not eat chametz) for seven days].

Let's begin with the very pasuk in Chumash that appears to explain the reason for "chag ha'matzot":

"And Moshe said to the people: REMEMBER THIS DAY that you have left Egypt... you shall not eat CHAMETZ.... [therefore] when you come in the Promised Land... EAT MATZA FOR SEVEN DAYS... you shall not see or own CHAMETZ in all your borders..." (see Shmot 13:2-8).

This commandment implies that by eating matza (and not eating chametz) for seven days, we will remember the events of the Exodus. In Part One of our shiur, we explained how (and why) eating matza would remind us of that experience.

However, based on that explanation, it would have made more sense for Moshe to say: "Remember this day... **by eating matza**". Instead, he commands them to remember this day by **not eating chametz**!

Furthermore, from the laws that follow, it seems like the Torah puts a greater emphasis on the prohibition of "chametz", more so than it does on the obligation to eat "matza". If we assume, as most people do, that the Torah forbids eating 'chametz' as a means to ensure we eat 'matza' instead, it certainly wouldn't make sense for the prohibition against 'chametz' to be more important than the commandment to eat matza!

It also seems rather strange that the Torah would forbid not only eating chametz, but also owning or seeing it - if the only purpose of these prohibitions was to ensure that we eat matza.

Finally, there doesn't appear to be any obvious reason for the need to observe this holiday for seven days.

[Recall that all these laws were originally given way before the story of the splitting of the Red Sea took place.]

Therefore, it would be difficult to conclude that all of these strict prohibitions against 'chametz' stem merely from the need to provide an incentive to eat matza - which are eating solely to remember an 'incidental' event that took place when Bnei Yisrael were 'rushed out' of Egypt.

Instead, we will suggest that 'chametz' should be understood as a symbol of Egyptian culture. If so, then many of these severe prohibitions begin to make a lot more sense. To explain how, we must return to Sefer Yechezkel chapter 20; and our discussion in last week's shiur on Parshat Va'era.

BACK TO YEchezkel

Let's quote once again from Yechezkel's rebuke of the elders of Yehuda, as he reminds them of the behavior of their forefathers - PRIOR to Yetziat Mitzraim:

"On the day that I chose Israel... that same day I swore to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey... And I said to them [at that time]: Each man must RID himself of his detestable ways, and not DEFILE ('tum'a') himself with the fetishes of Egypt - [for] ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM . But, they REBELLED against Me, and they did not OBEY me, no one rid himself from his detestable ways...and I resolved to pour out My fury upon them..." (Yechezkel 20:5-8).

In other words, God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to rid themselves of their 'avoda zara', i.e. their Egyptian culture, BEFORE the redemption process began.

Unfortunately, Bnei Yisrael did not 'listen', and hence deserved to be destroyed! Nevertheless, God saved Bnei Yisrael, Yechezkel explains, for the sake of His Name: "va-a's lema'an shmi, levilti hachel le-einei ha-goyim" (see 20:9).

This background helped us understand the need for "korban Pesach" in Egypt. This offering gave Bnei Yisrael one last chance to show their loyalty to God prior to 'makkat bechorot'.

[The word 'pesach' - the name of this korban, reflects this purpose, as God must 'PASS OVER' the houses of Bnei Yisrael (who otherwise deserve to be punished (see 12:27).]

To show their rejection of Egyptian culture, Bnei Yisrael were instructed to offer a lamb and eat it with matza (instead of chametz), due their symbolic nature.

[For a similar explanation that shows the connection between chametz and Avoda Zara, see Rav Kasher in Torah Sheleima vol #19, miluim #20.]

This can explain why 'chametz' becomes such a central theme when these events are commemorated in future generations. For example, not only must the korban Pesach of future generations must be eaten with matza, but one is also prohibited from owning 'chametz' before he can offer that korban:

"Lo tishchat al CHAMETZ dam zivchi" - "You shall not offer the Korban Pesach with chametz still in your possession" (see Shmot 23:18 and its context from 23:13-20).

If indeed chametz is symbolic of Egyptian culture, then it makes sense that one can not offer this korban, without first showing his rejection of that culture. When we offer the korban Pesach, we must remember not only WHAT HAPPENED, but also WHY God saved us, i.e. for what purpose!

To help concretize these sentiments of teshuva, a symbol is required. Hence, the korban Pesach - the 'korban Hashem' (see Bamidbar 9:7 and context) - is not just an expression of thanksgiving but also a DECLARATION of loyalty; - a willingness to obey; - a readiness to fulfill our Divine destiny.

Furthermore, in Parshat Re'eh, when Moshe Rabeinu explains the laws of the Pesach to the generation that is about to enter the Land, he reminds them:

"Keep the month of the spring, and offer a korban Pesach... You shall not eat any CHAMETZ with it, instead for the seven days [afterward] you shall eat MATZA - 'lechem oni', because you left Egypt in a hurried manner - IN ORDER that you remember the day that you left Egypt for every day of your life" (see Devarim 16:1-3).

This source also suggests that the matza that we eat for seven days relates directly to the korban Pesach, and hence it makes sense that they would share a common reason.

BACK TO PARSHAT HA'CHODESH

This interpretation can also help us understand why God's original commandment to Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael about "chag

ha-matzot" (in 12:15-20) was recorded 'pre-maturely' (i.e. before they ever left Egypt) - immediately after the laws of korban Pesach (see 12:11-15).

After instructing the nation to offer korban Pesach in every future generation (see 12:14), the Torah records the laws prohibiting 'chametz' for the next seven days. Even though eating matza for those seven days reminds us of how we left Egypt, the prohibition of 'chametz' reminds us of how must reject 'avoda zara' in order to be deserving of future redemption. This can also explain yet another difficult pasuk in Parshat ha'Chodesh:

"Seven days you should eat matza, but EVEN ON THE FIRST DAY you must REMOVE ALL CHAMETZ from your houses, for whoever eats chametz on these SEVEN days, that person shall be cut off from the nation of Israel" (see Shmot 12:15).

Chazal understand that 'yom ha-rishon' refers to the 14th of Nisan (not the 15th), i.e. at the time when the Korban Pesach is offered. This makes sense, for one must rid himself from the symbol of Egyptian culture before offering the korban Pesach. [Note as well Shmot 23:18 - "lo tishchat al chametz dam zivchi!"]

The reason for Chag Ha-Matzot now becomes clear. Our declaration of thanksgiving when offering the korban Pesach is meaningless if not accompanied with the proper spiritual preparation. Just as Bnei Yisrael were commanded to rid themselves of their 'avoda zara' in anticipation of their redemption, future generations must do exactly the same when they commemorate those events. By getting rid of our chametz in preparation for Korban Pesach, we remind ourselves of the need to first cleanse ourselves from any corrupt culture that we may have adopted.

From this perspective, the matza that we eat for seven days, and the matza that is eaten with the korban Pesach both serve as powerful reminders that Bnei Yisrael must become active and faithful partners in any redemption process.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

=====f ELIYAHU AT THE SEDER

Based on the above shiur, we can explain why we invite Eliyahu ha-navi to the seder (after we finish our last 'kezayit' of matza) to remind us of the need to perform teshuva in preparation for future redemption (see Mal'achi 3:23-24). It also explains why we read these psukim (that form the final message of the Neviim in Tanach) for the Haftara of Shabbat Ha-gadol, in preparation for Pesach.

BE-ETZEM HA-YOM HA-ZEH

An important phrase that the Torah uses in its presentation of the laws of chag ha-matzot provides further support for this approach. Recall the original pasuk in which the Torah provides the reason for chag ha-matzot:

"And you shall keep [the laws] of the matzot, for ON THIS VERY DAY [BE-ETZEM HA-YOM HA-ZEH] God has taken your hosts out of the land of Egypt..." (see Shmot 12:17).

It is not often that the Torah employs this phrase "be-etzem ha-yom ha-zeh", and when it does, it always marks a very important event.

In relation to Yetziat Mitzrayim we find this very same phrase mentioned two more times at the conclusion of chapter 12, as the Torah recaps the events of Yetziat Mitzraim - in the context of God's fulfillment of His promise to Avraham Avinu at Brit bein Ha-btarim:

"And the time of Bnei Yisrael's stay in Egypt was 400 years and 30 years, and it came to pass after 430 years - ON THIS VERY DAY [be-etzem ha-yom ha-zeh] all of God's hosts were taken out of Egypt..." (see 12:40-41, see also 12:51!)

It is not by chance that we find specifically this phrase "be-etzem ha-yom ha-zeh" in relation to God's fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim. In Sefer Breishit, we find this same phrase in two instances, and each relating to the fulfillment of a 'brit' between God and man. The first instance was God's 'brit' with Noach:

"And I shall keep My covenant with you, and you will enter the ark, you and your sons and wife..." (see Breishit 6:18).

Then, when Noach actually enters the ark, the Torah uses this phrase when informing us how God kept His covenant:

"Be-etzem ha-yom ha-zeh - on that very day, Noach and his sons and wife... entered the ark..." (see 7:13).

Similarly, when God enters into a covenant with Avraham Avinu concerning his future, better known as BRIT MILA; God promises:

"And I shall keep My covenant between Me and you and your offspring an everlasting COVENANT to be Your God... this is [the sign] of My covenant that you shall keep, circumcise every male child..." (see Breishit 17:7-10 and its context).

Then, when Avraham performs this mitzva, the Torah once again uses this phrase when informing us how Avraham kept His part of the covenant:

"be-etzem ha-yom ha-zeh - on this very day - Avraham was circumcised and his son Yishmael..." (see 17:26, & 17:23).

Considering that these are the only times that we find this phrase in Sefer Breishit, and both relate to the fulfillment of a major covenant between God and man; when we find that the Torah uses this phrase in Sefer Shmot, we should expect that it too relates to the fulfillment of a covenant. Clearly, this phrase in both Shmot 12:17 and 12:41 must relate to God's fulfillment of Brit bein ha-btarim. Hence, one can suggest that its use in 12:17 in relation to the mitzva to eat matza for seven days relates to Bnei Yisrael's need remain faithful to its side of the covenant with God. Based on the psukim quoted above from Yechezkel, the thematic connection is rather obvious. If Am Yisrael is truly thankful for their redemption from slavery, they must show their dedication by totally removing themselves from the 'avoda zara' of Egypt.

Note as well that the phrase of be-etzem ha-yom ha-zeh also appears in Sefer Vayikra, once in relation to Shavuot (see 23:21) and twice in relation to Yom Kippur (see 23:28-30). [Note that it does not appear in relation to any of the other holidays in Emor!]

One could suggest that here again this relates to 'britot'; Shavuot relating to 'brit sinai' - the first luchot, and Yom Kippur relating to 'brit sinai' - the second luchot. See TSC shiur on Parshat Ki Tisa on the 13 midot of rachamim.

One last mention of this phrase is found at the end of Parshat Ha'azinu in relation to 'brit Arvot Moav'.

Finally, we find this phrase in Yehoshua 5:11, mentioned as Bnei Yisrael performed both BRIT MILA & KORBAN PESACH when they crossed the Jordan River and began conquest of Eretz Canaan! Again the fulfillment of yet another stage of both brit mila and brit bein ha-btarim.

RAMBAN's APPROACH

See Ramban on Shmot 12:39, how he explains that Bnei Yisrael's original intention was to bake matza, the rushing only caused them to bake the dough matza on the road instead of in their homes in Egypt. Even though this does not appear to be the simple pshat of the pasuk, it stems from the Ramban's approach of yesh mukdam u-me'uchar, and hence God's commandment to Moshe in 12:15-20 was indeed given before Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, and hence applied to the first generation as they left Egypt as well!

BA'ZMAN HA'ZEH

It should be noted that since we don't offer a Korban Pesach now of days, we obviously cannot fulfill the mitzva of eating matza with it. Therefore, the matza that we make the 'bracha' of 'achilat matza' on at the Seder night is for the second reason, based on

the pasuk "ba-erev tochlu matzot" (see Shmot 12:17-18, and its context). On the other hand, to remember this matza, we eat an extra piece of matza together with maror - "zecher le-mikdash ke-Hillel" - to remember how this mitzva was fulfilled during the time when the Temple stood.

Parshas Bo: That the Torah of Hashem Should Be in Your Mouth

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Our Parashah is the first to introduce Mitzvot which are an expression of the unique and exclusive relationship between G-d and the B'nei Yisra'el (note the comments of Rashi on B'resheet 1:1).

Along with the many details regarding the Korban Pesach (which we hope to revisit in anticipation of Pesach later this year), the commemoration of the Exodus is marked with the obligation to sanctify the first-born (people and animals), celebrate the anniversary of the Exodus by feasting for seven days, avoiding Hametz and relating the story to our children – and by wearing T'fillin. (all found in Sh'mot 13:1-16). It is the reason given for this final Mitzvah that I'd like to address this week as a springboard for entering into a discussion which properly belongs to next week's Parashah. Since it is, however, a two-part essay, we will begin our analysis this week in order to complete it in a timely fashion.

In defining the purpose of T'fillin, the Torah states:

In order that the Torah of Hashem shall be in your mouth (13:9).

Although the most straightforward understanding of this phrase relates to the following phrase: "that Hashem your G-d took you out of Egypt with a strong hand", nonetheless, it is Halakhically understood as relating to the entire Torah.

Thus, for instance, the Midrash Halakhah states:

"...in order that the Torah of Hashem should be in your mouth" – based on this text, the Rabbis stated that anyone who puts on T'fillin is considered as if he studied the Torah and anyone who studies the Torah is exempt from T'fillin. (Mekhilta Bo #17 – see Shulhan Arukh OC 38:10).

Note that the Mekhilta did not limit this Halakhah to someone studying about the Exodus – any study of Torah exempts one from wearing T'fillin. Regardless of how this Halakhah is practically understood and applied, the Halakhah understands that the verse is referring to the overall study of Torah and engagement in G-d's law.

Although there are a few mentions of the importance of engagement in Torah study in the Torah itself, the clearest and most powerful expression in T'nahk is found in the opening section of Sefer Yehoshua:

This Book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth; but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written on it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. (1:8)

This command, given to Yehoshua, sets an important tone for this Sefer – one to which we will return in next week's essay. In the meantime, since we will first meet Yehoshua in next week's Parashah, let's take this opportunity to analyze – if only briefly – this first post-Toraic Navi and hero of the conquest of Eretz K'na'an.

II. ENTER YEHOSHUA

When we are first introduced to Yehoshua, we are given neither biographical background nor a resume which would explain his qualifications for being appointed by Moshe to defend the B'nei Yisra'el against the attack of the nomadic Amalekites:

Then came Amalek, and fought with Yisra'el in Rephidim. And Moshe said to Yehoshua, Choose for us men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of G-d in my hand. So Yehoshua did as Moshe had said to him, and fought with Amalek; and Moshe, Aharon, and Hur went up to the top of the hill... (Sh'mot 17:8-10)

Note that we do not even know his patronym nor his tribal affiliation – he is just "Yehoshua"

Although we later find out that he had a shorter name (Hoshea – Bamidbar 13:16), that his father's name is "Nun" (Sh'mot 33:11) and that he is an Ephraimite (Bamidbar 13:8), we learn very little else about him until Moshe is told that Yehoshua will be the next "shepherd" of the B'nei Yisra'el and some of his leadership qualities (Bamidbar 27:18-20). It is only through the unfolding of Sefer Yehoshua itself that we get a complete picture of the son of Nun, Moshe's disciple and the man

who leads the B'nei Yisra'el through what is arguably the pinnacle of their military strength.

III. YEHOSHUA 24: TWO QUESTIONS

We will frame this week's essay by raising two questions about Yehoshua (both the man and the Sefer) which arise from the final chapter of that book. In Chapter 24 (best known for its historiography [vv. 2-13], a section of which [vv. 2-4] is incorporated into the Haggadah shel Pessach), set in Sh'khem, Yehoshua brings the B'nei Yisra'el into a covenant with G-d just before his death. We are then told:

And Yehoshua wrote these words B'sefer Torat Elokim (in the Book of the Torah of G-d)... (v. 26)

What could this phrase possibly mean? Does it mean that "Sefer Torat Elokim" is a reference to some other book, besides the Five Books of Mosheh (so Y. Kil in Da'at Mikra among other contemporary scholars)? Does the prefix "B" indicate that Yehoshua wrote the conditions of the covenant on a scroll and rolled it inside of the Torah of Mosheh (so Rashi, quoting the Targum)?

In any case, this text needs clarification.

There is a more enigmatic verse near the conclusion of the Sefer. After the death and burial of Yehoshua, we are told that: And the bones of Yoseph, which the B'nei Yisra'el brought out of Egypt, buried they in Sh'khem, in a parcel of ground which Ya'akov bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Sh'khem for a hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the sons of Yoseph.

We know that the B'nei Yisra'el carried Yoseph's bones through the desert (see Sh'mot 13:19) in order to inter them in K'na'an (see B'resheet 50:25) – but why did they wait until after the death of Yehoshua to do so?

From all of the information we can glean from the text, Yehoshua was approximately 80 years old at the time of the conquest (see Yehoshua 14:6-10, especially v. 7) – and he died at the age of 110 (24:29).

Why did the B'nei Yisra'el keep Yoseph's bones "on ice" for those thirty years and only inter him in Sh'khem after the death and burial of Yehoshua? This question is exacerbated by the fact that the B'nei Yisra'el held a major covenant ceremony upon their arrival in the land – again at Sh'khem. Even if Yoseph's final resting place was pre-determined as Sh'khem, they had been there fairly soon after crossing the Yarden – why wait until Yehoshua's career was over before interring Yoseph?

IV. BACK TO YOSEPH AND HIS DREAMS

In order to answer these questions – and, thereby, gain a greater understanding of the role of Yehoshua within Israelite history – we need to go back to the first significant interaction between Yoseph (Yehoshua's ancestor) and his brothers:

As we know (and have discussed in an earlier essay), Yoseph was involved in three sets of dreams – each set consisting of two dreams:

- 1) His own dreams, presented below (B'resheet 37)
- 2) His successful interpretation of the dreams of the butler and baker (B'resheet 40)
- 3) His successful interpretation of the two dreams of Pharaoh (B'resheet 41)

Even a cursory look at these three sets reveals that the first two dreams bear little in common with the two latter sets. Each of the latter sets was clearly understood by all involved as a form of prophecy – and each of the details was meticulously interpreted by Yoseph – and each of those interpretive details came to pass. Note, for instance, Ramban's comments at the beginning of Ch. 41, (v. 4) where he points out that even Yoseph's "advice" to Pharaoh was part of the dream interpretation.

The three days, the seven years, the "fat" and "emaciated" stalks and cows, the basket on the baker's head – all of this is accounted for in the interpretation – and every detail comes to pass exactly "as Yoseph had interpreted to them".

This clear and direct interpretive process stands in clear contradistinction to the two dreams dreamt by Yoseph himself:

And Yoseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. And he said to them: Hear, I beg you, this dream which I have dreamed; For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood around, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brothers said to him, Shall you indeed reign over us? or shall you indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him even more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brothers, and said, Behold, I have again dreamed a dream; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him, and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow down ourselves to you to the earth? And his brothers envied him; but his father kept the matter in mind. (B'resheet 37:5-11)

Besides the painful questions that must be addressed regarding the wisdom of Yoseph's revealing these dreams to his brothers – which will be assessed in a later study – the simplest question to ask here is – when are these dreams ever realized? Do the brothers ever bow to Yoseph? Certainly the second dream seems to "fall flat" – for mother isn't even alive (see Rashi ad loc., quoting BT Berakhot) and father certainly never "bows down [himself] to the earth".

Besides the issue of the fulfillment of the dream, there is another question to ask here. It is clear why the prisoners had two dreams – each had his own dream, relating to his own future – and the import of each dream was diametrically opposite. It is also explicitly stated why Pharaoh had two dreams –

And for that the dream was doubled to Pharaoh twice; it is because the matter is established by G-d, and G-d will shortly bring it to pass. (41:32)

Why, however, did Yoseph have two dreams – two dreams with essentially the same message? If we are to focus on the addition of father and mother (the sun and moon) in the second dream, why not just grant Yoseph that one dream, which includes the subjugation of his brothers?

V. RAV SAMET'S EXPLANATION

Rav Elhanan Samet, of Makhon Herzog, suggests that we are misled in our understanding of Yoseph's dreams because we assume that the reactive-interpretations of both brothers and father are accurate. To wit, we believe that both dreams foretell Yoseph's future role as "king" of the family and that his brothers, father and mother(!) will bow to him in subjugation. That understanding seems to be adopted by Yoseph himself, as reflected by the evocation of these dreams when the brothers appear before him in Egypt:

And Yoseph knew his brothers, but they knew not him. And Yoseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, (42:8-9)

Rashi, ad loc., comments that now Yoseph saw the dreams fulfilled, since his brothers were bowing to him. Ramban disagrees and maintains that as a result of Yoseph remembering the dreams, he realized that they were not yet fulfilled, since father was not yet here, nor were all the brothers. (Ramban utilizes this interpretation to defend Yoseph against the claim that he erred in not notifying his father that he was alive and well. See the Akedat Yitzhak ad loc. for a critique of Ramban's approach).

One could argue that the brothers never did bow to Yoseph -for even when they bowed to the Egyptian governor, they did not know of his identity. The essence of subjugation lies in awareness – the slave prostrates himself before his liege because he is aware that that selfsame ruler is his master. If the brothers bowed to the Egyptian Tzaph'nat Pa'anach, that seems to have little, if anything, to do with the fulfillment of these dreams.

The only time that they knowingly bowed to Yoseph was after father Ya'akov's death (50:18) – and it seems difficult to see this act, over 40 years after Yoseph's dreams, as having anything to do with them.

Rav Samet suggests that we err in understanding Yoseph's dreams as the brothers did – because we aren't paying sufficient attention to "dream language". Since we accept the notion that the sheaves, stars, sun and moon are all symbolic – why are we assuming that the prostration is literal? If we interpret the dreams consistently, than we should understand the

prostration of the family members as a symbolic act.

What, then, could their bowing to brother Yoseph symbolize?

Although bowing often indicates subservience, we find numerous occasions where it has other uses. For instance, Avraham bows to the Hittites twice during his negotiations for the Cave of Makhpelah (23:7,12) – and Avraham certainly did not accept their dominion (they called him a prince). We also find that Ya'akov bowed to Yoseph (albeit without prostration – he was in bed) when Yoseph committed to burying Ya'akov in K'na'an (47:31).

In other words, the act of bowing within T'nahk context may indicate appreciation and dependence – without implying subservience or servitude.

Let's see how this understanding of "prostration" (in dream language) plays out in an interpretation of Yoseph's dreams:

A: THE FIRST DREAM

The first dream, involving the sheaves, has clear literary "markers" which set off three independent scenes – each introduced with the word "Hinei":

- 1) For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and,
- 2) lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and,
- 3) behold, your sheaves stood around, and made obeisance to my sheaf.

The framework and setting of this dream are clear – the field, representing agriculture and sustenance.

In the first scene, the brothers are all working together – representing a common economic venture. This is most plainly understood as representing the period of "the present" – when the entire family is still working as one cohesive financial unit.

In the second scene, only Yoseph is present – the brothers are "off-stage". In other words, there will be a period in the future when Yoseph will comprise an independent financial unit, separate from that of the family. This sheaf rises and stands upright – implying consistent and stable financial success in this new, independent position.

The final scene (the focus of the brothers' angry reaction) has the brothers (represented by their sheaves) bowing to Yoseph (represented by his sheaf. Once we understand "bowing" as symbolizing a relationship of dependence, we can clearly see the complete realization of this dream. When Yoseph finally revealed himself to his brothers, one of the first things he said was:

And there will I nourish you; (45:11).

Again, after the burial of Ya'akov:

Now therefore do not fear; I will nourish you, and your little ones. (50:21)

The entire family was totally dependent on Yoseph for their sustenance – a role he was only too happy to fulfill. We might even argue that this "enlightened" understanding of the meaning of the dreams occurred to Yoseph when his brothers came before his throne:

And Yoseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, (42:9) The word "Lahem" (of them) may be translated "about them"; to wit: he remembered the dreams that he dreamt about his brothers. It may, alternatively, be understood as "on their behalf", meaning "he remembered the dreams that he dreams for them." In other words, Yoseph now understood that he had risen to this great position in order to help the family out of their present financial crisis (see our essay on Parashat Vayyigash this year).

The first dream is not only less threatening to the brothers, but every detail comes true.

B: THE SECOND DREAM

Beside the shift from the agricultural to the cosmic arena (and the apparent inclusion of father and mother), the second dream is distinct from the first in that Yoseph is consistently represented as himself. The stars bow – not to Yoseph's star, rather to Yoseph himself.

If we are to explain these dreams with the same rigorous attention to detail as Yoseph employs in interpreting dreams in Egypt, we must take this nuance into account. In addition to this, we must also address the overall question of what new message this dream is conveying; otherwise, what need is there for a second dream?

Again, we must focus on the setting of the dream: The stars above. What do the stars represent in Sefer B'resheet (and throughout T'nakh)? The answer is quite simple: The stars represent the B'nei Yisra'el. Note B'resheet 22:17 (Avraham), 26:4 (Yitzhak), Sh'mot 32:13 (the Avot as a group), D'varim 10:22 (Mosheh).

[Parenthetical note: Although the B'nei Yisra'el are also compared, in their vast numbers, to the sand by the shore (e.g. B'resheet 22:17, 32:16, Hoshea 2:1), Haza"l sensitively point out that these do not reflect the same type of greatness: This people is likened to the dust and it is likened to the stars. When they go down, they go down to the dust, and when they rise they rise to the stars. [BT Megillah 16a]

The comparison to the stars is, therefore, not just about the sheer multitude of Avraham's children – it is about their greatness, nobility and achievement of the objectives of that great blessing.)

Once we take this symbolism into account, the meaning of the second dream – and its significance independent of the first dream – becomes apparent. Again utilizing our interpretation that in dreamspeak prostration implies a dependence, the second dream means that the success of the family, as the continuation of the Avrahamic tribe and tradition, will be wholly dependent (at least at one point in time) on Yoseph.

Here is where the difference between the dreams, noted above, comes into play. Whereas Yoseph was represented by a sheaf in the first dream – putting him on somewhat equal billing (if not footing) as his kin, in the second dream they are all represented by heavenly bodies while Yoseph appears as himself.

The meaning becomes quite clear when we understand that the message of this dream is that Yoseph will be the one responsible for managing, maintaining and ensuring the success of the family in their noblest and most critical endeavor: Being a blessing for all of Mankind (B'resheet 12:3).

Indeed, upon the descent of the family to Egypt (B'resheet 46), Yoseph uses his position and cunning to create favorable conditions for the family to prosper – spiritually as well as economically – in their new environs. When presenting his brothers to Pharaoh, Yoseph advises them:

And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? That you shall say, Your servants' trade has been keeping cattle from our youth until now, both we, and also our fathers; that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. (46:33-34)

We now understand why Yoseph appears "as himself" in the second dream. It is not Yoseph as a "symbol" or as a figurehead that will ensure the survival and success of the family; rather, it is Yoseph as a person, using his own personality, charm and cunning, who will help keep the family alive.

This is most clearly seen in Yoseph's final words:

And Yoseph said to his brothers, I die; and G-d will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land which he swore to Avraham, to Yitzhak, and to Ya'akov. And Yoseph took an oath from the B'nei Yisra'el, saying, G-d will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here. (50:24-25). How powerful a statement: It is Yoseph, the man who succeeded in Egypt like no other foreigner could have, the man who engineered the family's descent and resettlement there – it is that selfsame Yoseph who keeps the dream alive and reminds his brothers that "this is not home" and that G-d will surely bring them back home.

VI. THE SUN AND THE MOON

The section above is a synopsis (faithful, I hope) of Rav Samet's explanation of Yoseph's dreams.

There is one major problem with his explanation – the role of the sun and the moon. Although it would be tempting to accept his explanation – that the success not only of the children but also of their parents – is dependent on Yoseph, I believe that this is insufficient. If we accept the stars as symbolic of the B'nei Yisra'el, then the sun and moon have no place in their orbit. Although the sun and moon appear as the chief heavenly bodies throughout T'hakh (e.g. B'resheet 1:16, T'hillim 148:3, Iyyov 9:7), they are never associated with the B'nei Yisra'el.

The answer to this final "missing piece" of the puzzle of Yoseph's dreams is found much later in Israelite history. Whereas the "sheaf" dream is fulfilled rather immediately – within the lives of all who were originally involved with the dream – the "stars" dream is only realized after a number of generations.

Before suggesting a solution to this puzzle, I'd like to point out one last anomaly – this time at the end of Sefer B'resheet:

And Yoseph lived in Egypt, he, and his father's house; and Yoseph lived a hundred and ten years...So Yoseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; (50:22,26)

Why does the text mention his life-span twice within a matter of five verses? Even Mosheh, whose age of 120 becomes the archetype for the life of an extraordinary person (e.g. Rabbi Akiva), only has his final age mentioned once (D'varim 34:7). Mosheh does own up to his age in his farewell speech – [31:2], but that is a full three chapters away and within the context of his speech. Yoseph is still the only person in Torah whose age at death is mentioned by the text twice).

I'd like to suggest that although Yoseph died in Egypt at the age of 110, his mission (as laid out in the dreams) was not yet complete and would not be complete until the B'nei Yisra'el were brought back to Eretz Yisra'el as a nation.

This mission would only be accomplished through his descendant, Yehoshua bin-Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim – who lived to the ripe old age of 110.

VII. BACK TO YESHOSHUA

Although Yehoshua had the allegiance of all of the tribes of Yisra'el – more so than any leader since – his greatest moment was undoubtedly during the battle against the alliance of the five southern kings, as their armies fled the B'nei Yisra'el down the slopes of Beit Horon:

Then spoke Joshua to Hashem in the day when Hashem delivered the Amorites before the people of Yisra'el, and he said in the sight of Yisra'el, Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and you, Moon, in the valley of Ayalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the Book of Yashar? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, when Hashem listened to the voice of a man; for Hashem fought for Yisra'el. (Yehoshua 10:12-14)

There was never a man to whom the sun and moon showed obeisance – save Yehoshua bin-Nun, a member of the tribe of Ephraim, a son of Yoseph

We now understand why Yoseph's bones were kept with Yehoshua's army until his storied career came to a close. Yehoshua's task was Yoseph's – that which the ancestor had begun, the descendant had to complete.

We also understand why there is a veiled reference to the possible inclusion of Sefer Yehoshua in the canon of Torah at the end of the Sefer:

And Yehoshua wrote these words B'sefer Torat Elokim since Yehoshua's mission was the completion of the task of that hero of Sefer B'resheet, his ancestor Yoseph. Although Sefer Yehoshua remains outside of the Torah, the many textual and thematic associations which bind it to the Humash will be the focus of next week's shiur, as we attempt to understand Yehoshua, the man, the leader and the disciple of Moshe Rabbenu.

VIII. POSTSCRIPT: SEFER HAYASHAR

In the critical section from Yehoshua 10 quoted above, the text states that this story and/or prayer/song was written in

Sefer haYashar. What is this book?

Most scholars follow Ibn Ezra's lead (Bamidbar 21:14) that the T'nakh text will refer to Sefarim that existed at the time of the T'nakh and are lost to us (e.g. Sefer Milhamot Hashem, Sefer haYashar, Sefer haShir), Haza"l interpret Sefer haYashar as referring to any number of books within the canon. In the central Talmudic section, the first assay is:

What is the Sefer haYashar? – Said R. Hiyya b. Abba in the name of R. Yohanan: It is the book of Avraham, Yitzhak and Ya'akov, who are designated as Yesharim (righteous), (BT Avodah Zarah 25a)

Although the Gemara goes on to find a faint allusion to the miracle of the sun and moon standing still, I'd like to suggest that if Sefer haYashar is indeed Sefer B'resheet, the text is quite clear in asking: Is it not written in Sefer haYashar?

Indeed, it is clearly written:

Behold, I have again dreamed a dream; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

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