

Potomac Torah Study Center

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Tu B'Shevat starts Wednesday evening, January 24-25

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.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

"Bo opens with Moshe and Aharon continuing to deal with Paro's anti-Semitism, hatred, and slavery of our people." While this sentence fits in with my messages for the past three months, I actually quoted from the first sentence of my remarks for Bo a year ago. While the ever increasing flood of anti-Semitism has been ongoing for several years, did anyone really expect the Hamas massacre of October 7? Who would have expected the explosion of hate rallies in cities all over the world and the support for Hamas (and hatred of Jews, especially in Israel) among administrators and professors at major universities all over the country? When did the United States and many other "western" countries become photocopies of Germany in 1932?

Rabbi Marc Angel points to the politically correct movement of searching for "alternative truths" and "narratives" that infer devious intentions for Jews and majority white groups rather than historic truths. (DEI is the usual description of this pc movement.) Rabbi Angel emphasizes the "alternative truth" assertions that Israel oppresses Palestinian Arabs and that Israel has stolen what was the historic land of the Arabs. In fact, Israel has owned chunks of its current land since biblical times, and Jews have always prayed in the direction of Jerusalem. (Moslems pray in the direction of Mecca.) The term "Palestinian" dates only to 1948, when many of the Arabs who had been living in Israel voluntarily left once Israel became a country – while Israelis begged them to remain. Before 1948, Jews in the area had purchased land from the people (primarily Arabs) who were living on the land. Even so, Arabs tried to expel the Jews on many occasions, such as in 1929, when Moslem mobs attacked and slaughtered a significant percentage of the Jews living in and around Hebron. (After the attack, the British government would not guarantee the safety of Jews in Hebron, so all the Jews who were still alive had to move elsewhere.)

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, asks why there is so much anti-Semitism. Part of his answer is the genius of Jewish laws that have kept Jews apart from other religions and cultures for most of the past 5000 years. During most of this period, Jews could not own land and were usually politically oppressed and prevented from becoming citizens of the country ruling the areas where they lived. Jews who had to keep separate could only marry other Jews and therefore are generally readily identifiable. Another key factor to Rabbi Sacks is the primary role of children in relating our story (such as at Pesach Seders), asking questions, leading our future, and connecting to our past. The story of Jewish freedom from

Paro and Egypt focuses on Jewish dreams for a return to freedom and a better future. To be a Jew is to see ourselves as part of the story of our people and as links in the continuity from Avraham to now and to future generations. Rabbi Yehoshua Singer points to the lesson of the plagues. Hashem is the ultimate cause of everything that happens in the world. God sets the rules of nature and changes them when He decides to do so. As Rabbi David Fohrman and his associates at alephbeta.org explain, during the period of the Exodus, God reveals Himself as Hashem, the master of nature, rather than as Kel Shakkai, the shepherd who nudges from the back, influencing nature and events in ways that are not obvious to people. Why the change in how God appears to people during the time of the Exodus? B'Nai Yisrael are so oppressed after a long period of slavery that Hashem and Moshe need to teach them that God controls nature, loves every Jew, and protects all of us. Paro, the Egyptians, and the rest of the world need to learn who Hashem is and how He is the ultimate cause of everything in the world. The plagues and the period of the Jews in the Midbar are part of this graduate level class in understanding Hashem.

Rav Kook and Rabbi Yossi Ives ask why Jews must redeem a first born donkey. After all, a donkey is not a kosher animal, and it is obvious that a donkey neither chews its cud nor has split hoofs. Rav Kook explains that a donkey's holiness comes from within and is not obvious looking at it. This lesson applies to the world today (as it has in the past). One cannot look at a person, Jew, non-Jew, friendly, or anti-Semite – and tell by looking whether the person is holy or evil. To determine the value of a person or animal requires looking inside the person. A related aspect of this lesson is that one cannot tell a person or nation's morality without a close look. Jews focus closely on children. We teach our children as much as we can and especially teach them to connect with Jews past and future. Hamas, in contrast, values children as shields to protect its leaders from attack and as propaganda material to argue that Israel is evil because we attack schools, hospitals, and residences to kill children (and the weak and elderly). Hamas is fooling those who subscribe to DEI – including many professors, students, and school/college administrators. Hamas is also winning a propaganda battle in the UN (international organization of anti-Semites) and many of the countries in the world.

My response is typically Jewish. Like Jews for thousands of years, I focus on teaching my children and grandchildren – and look forward to a future when our enemies leave us in peace (at least for some time) and when Jews can live as Jews without threat – both in Israel and in the rest of the world.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, experienced anti-Semitism many times over his life. He would have been shocked but not surprised by the explosion in anti-Semitism in recent years, and especially in the past three months. For those of a younger generation, the current environment is much more of a shock and surprise. May we soon see better times – much less DEI and much more acceptance of legitimate differences among people with different beliefs (as long as they also accept us and others of good faith).

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa

Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Bo: Guaranteed–Overnight–Delivery

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5766

And they went and they did, the Children of Israel, just as HASHEM commanded Moshe and Aaron, so they did. (Shemos 12:28)

And they went: Did they already do it? Were they not just now commanded on Rosh Chodesh? Rather since they accepted upon themselves it is considered as if they did it already. (Rashi -- Mechilta)

How potent are those seemingly extra words, *“And they went”*? What’s the big deal about choosing or accepting? What can be greater than doing? *“All is (measured) according to a majority of deeds”* the Mishne in Avos tells us. How is committing to action on par at all with performing?

Within the categories of thought, speech, and action are sub-categories. There is the thought of thought, the speech of thought, and the action of thought. A person enters a department store. It is filled with millions of items. Only a dozen are picked up, examined, and entertained for purchase. Only a few will actually be selected and paid for. So it is with pictures and ideas. Some flash past our radar -- unheeded. Others are toyed with and observed casually. A chosen few shots are fully developed, blown up larger than life, and hung as posters on the walls of our minds. The action of thought is in a sense like an action.

“When a person commits to an action or accepts words of reproof,” writes Rabbenu Yona, “that person in one instant goes out from darkness to a great light. Because at that moment that he tends his ear and makes attentive his heart, he understands and accepts the words of the speaker to fulfill them and to live up to them from today and further, and to be cautiously adherent to the words of those who know Torah wisdom and understand the times, at that very moment, with his Teshuvah he is transformed into a different person. From the time that he accepts all this in his thoughts and he is committed so in his heart he acquires for himself the merit and reward of all future Mitzvos and lessons, and he is greatly enriched because he has corrected his soul in one moment.” And so our sages of blessed memory said, *“They went and they did, the Children of Israel.” Immediately...since they accepted upon themselves to do, it is considered as if they did it already in the present.”*

Let’s marvel for one moment at the power of one moment. Like a seed, that developed thought contains in the present all the future accomplishments coded within. One is credited as having studied the entire Talmud in the moment one commits seriously to do so. All of the grandeur of Shabbos is contained in that second one chooses again to *“keep the Shabbos holy.”* So too an abundance of purity is there in the DNA of that initial decision to guard one’s speech.

A Shabbos guest told us how and why he came to Yeshiva. He had been dabbling in learning and considering taking time out to learn. He was not entirely convinced it was the right thing to do. He was dogged by doubting thoughts he couldn’t shake. He was driving Up-State New York on the Thruway along a stretch of “no exit” -- highway. His mind was turning this way and that. “Should I or shouldn’t I?”

Then he couldn't hold back anymore and he blurted out, *"If it's the right thing G-d then show me!"* Just at that instant, believe it or not, he found himself boxed in for the next twelve miles by two huge trucks that seemed to have appeared from nowhere. One was now in front and the other hemmed him in on left with bold writing – the acronym for, "Guaranteed Overnight Delivery" – "G" "O" "D." His decision was sealed. It was then as if he had already accomplished all. And so the Children of Israel in a moment otherwise lost were able to find for all time Guaranteed – Overnight – Delivery.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5766-bo/>

Bo – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Should a new ger toivel their dishes?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

"Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow from his neighbor, and every woman from her neighbor, jewels of silver and jewels of gold." (Shemot 11:2).

QUESTION - Brooklyn, NY

What is the Rosh Yeshiva's position on whether a new ger should be toveil their dishes?

ANSWER

This issue is a matter of debate between the poskim. There is no evidence that this was ever done in the past and poskim from previous generations don't talk about, so the evidence from silence is that it is not required. As to why not – one nice explanation is that just as he enters into kedushat Yisrael, the sanctity of the Jewish people, when he undergoes in his act of conversion, all of his possessions, and in particular his cooking and eating vessels, do as well. Others also argue that a person is only obligated when the vessel is purchased from a non-Jew, which did not happen here. Some poskim disagree, and some adopt the position that it is doubtful as to whether it is required, so one should immerse metal vessels, which many believe are Biblically obligated in immersion, but do so without a brakha. Given the mitzvah of ahavat ha'ger, loving the convert, and trying to not make the conversion even that much more burdensome, it seems to me that if it will be a difficulty to do it (either in terms of effort, or just emotionally difficult), one should rule like the majority of the poskim that he is exempt. On the other hand, if the convert feels that doing so will help mark a transition from his past life to his present one, he should immerse the vessels without a brakha.

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<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/01/bo5784/>

From Ani Par'o to Ani Hashem

By Rabbi Dan Margulies *

Why? Parashat Bo begins with a brief explanation of what all these plagues have been about. *"In order that I may put these my signs among them, and in order that you may recount in the hearing of your child and of your child's child how I have dealt harshly with Egypt, and my signs, which I have placed upon them."* (Ex. 10:1-2, Everett Fox trans., 1995) As God instructs Moshe, the basic reason for the miracles and wonders of the exodus from Egypt is a demonstration of God's power and justice before both the Israelites and the Egyptians.

But this brief introduction concludes quite differently. *"Vidatem ki-ani Hashem"* — *"that you may know that I am [Hashem]"* (Ex. 10:2, Fox). Careful readers who were paying attention last week, and last year, will remember how this phrase *"ani*

Hashem” repeats numerous times throughout the Torah. Last week, in Parashat Vaera, the 4 (Or 5, or 7?) verbal expressions of redemption are bracketed by this declaration of God’s essence, sending the message that one major goal of the exodus is cementing knowledge and awareness of God into the Israelite nation.

Those who can remember back all the way to the book of Vayiqra last spring will remember that the phrase “*ani Hashem*” repeats 52 times throughout the latter part of the book, punctuating the numerous mitzvot with their declared purpose: to inculcate a knowledge of God.

Digging a little deeper with the help of our sages, however, reveals an even more pointed significance to the refrain “*ani Hashem*” throughout the Torah. In the midrash Vayiqra Rabba 24:9, Rabbi Shimeon ben Laqish and Rabbi Levi point out how the declaration “*ani Hashem*” is a direct parallel to the grandiose claims of greatness by an earlier wicked Pharaoh “*ani Par’o*” — “I am Pharaoh!” (Gen. 41:44). Thus, God’s declarations of “*ani Hashem*” throughout the exodus narrative amount to a perfect rejection of Pharaoh’s rule and oppression of the Israelites. If Pharaoh continues to oppress and abuse the slaves by claiming it is his right as the one who can say “I am Pharaoh” then he deserves to be countered by the one who truly rules and can declare “*I am Hashem*.”

This neatly ties up the appearances of “*ani Hashem*” in Shemot in the context of the plagues and the exodus, but the vast majority appear in Vayiqra in legal contexts! How are we to understand the repetition there? This is indeed the original context of the midrash cited above. Because we do not always read the Torah with a “wide-angle lens” we often gloss over the clear fact that the mitzvot of the Torah are given as a direct consequence to the exodus from Egypt. This significant pairing begins in Parashat Bo with the Torah’s first significant collections of mitzvot and the beginning of the first “halakhic midrash” the Mekhilta on Shemot.

Thus it seems clear that by linking the defeat of the Pharaoh, the miracles of the exodus, and the numerous laws comprising much of the end of Vayiqra, “*ani Hashem*” serves to carry the wonder and awe of the exodus and the requirement to instruct future generations into the main event of covenantal Judaism through the giving of the numerous and varied mitzvot. Nowhere is this evident than in Parashat Qedoshim (Lev. 19), the beating heart of Vayiqra where “*ani Hashem*” appears a whopping 16 times in 37 verses, the concluding lines of which instruct us:

“You are not to commit corruption in justice, in measure, weight, or capacity; scales of equity, weighing-stones of equity, an efa of equity and a hin of equity you shall have. I am [Hashem] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt! You are to keep all my laws and all my regulations, and observe them; I am [Hashem]!” (Lev. 19:35-37, Fox)

The reason for the exodus is to fight injustice and to promote justice. The reason for the exodus is to ensure fairness and equality in the marketplace and the world of commerce. Who better than exploited slaves to know the value of a day’s work and a fair price. And all of this to be able to tell their children and grandchildren, “*We do all this because Hashem took us out of slavery in Egypt. Because Pharaoh declared ‘I am Pharaoh’ and was defeated by the one who declares ‘I am Hashem.’*”

* Dean and Rebbe, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Semikha YCT 2014. Hebrew texts omitted because of difficulties keeping Hebrew consistent across word processing platforms. For the Hebrew, go to the source below.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/01/vaera5784/>

Alternative Facts: Thoughts for Parashat Bo

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When confronted with a blatant falsehood uttered by a former President, his spokesperson said that the President was not lying but was presenting “alternative facts.” Apparently, “alternative facts” are not lies; they are to be considered as legitimate ways of describing things the way we wish to see them, regardless of whether or not they are true.

George Orwell, in his classic book *1984*, was far ahead of the President’s apologist. He envisioned a world that embraced three slogans: War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; Ignorance is Strength. If those in power enforce “alternative facts,” then these lies become normative truths that govern society. Woe unto the world where lies are presented as truth, where people have no courage to stand up against “alternative facts.”

Ancient Egypt enslaved the Israelites. Moses told Pharaoh to free the slaves from their servitude. Moses would have stated the obvious truths: no one has the right to enslave another human being; no nation has the moral justification for ruthless exploitation of another nation. But Pharaoh would have replied with “alternative facts.” Egypt is doing a great favor to the Israelites, providing them with full employment, giving them food and shelter. Their work is not slavery, but productive effort for the benefit of the entire nation.

Moses told Pharaoh that God would unleash terrible plagues on Egypt if the Israelites were not freed. Pharaoh saw with his own eyes the devastation unleashed by the plagues. His advisers were frightened, and told him to spare Egypt further suffering by letting the slaves go free. But Pharaoh had “alternative facts.” These plagues are temporary discomforts, but not really so bad as some people say. All countries have natural disasters from time to time; there’s nothing to get excited about here; this will soon pass and life will return to normal. Believe me.

No matter what Moses said and no matter how severe were the plagues, Pharaoh had “alternative facts.” He would not let truth or real facts get in the way. The consequences for him and his people were devastating. A society or institution devoted to “alternative facts” cannot stand. Truth will ultimately prevail.

The sin of “alternative facts” is not confined to Pharaoh or other such tyrants. It is evident in all strata of society. Too many people are ready to believe only what they want to believe or only what they are told to believe — without taking the time and effort to determine what is actually true. If real facts are unpleasant, then why not rely on “alternative facts?”

It seems to have become “politically correct” to speak of narratives, rather than to focus on historical truth. This tendency is blatantly evident in some discussions about Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. We are told that each group has its own narrative, implying that each group clings to its own version of truth and should be respected for its views. This approach — seemingly objective and non-judgmental — actually leads to the distortion of facts and undermining of historic truth. It simply is not true to say — as some Palestinian spokespeople say in their narrative — that the land of Israel is the historic homeland of Palestinian Arabs. It isn’t a “Jewish narrative” that Israel is the Jewish homeland; it is historically true. It has been true since biblical times; it was true during Temple days in antiquity; it was true through the nearly 2000 years of exile in which Jews prayed facing Jerusalem and yearned for the return to their holy land; it is true based on the ongoing presence of Jews in the land of Israel throughout the ages, based on archaeological evidence, based on archives, documents, photographs etc.

For there to be peace between Israel and its neighbors, it is essential to seek truth, not “narratives.”

In a world where “alternative facts” and “alternative narratives” are pervasive, the moral fiber of society is seriously compromised. The only guarantee for human freedom and peace is a commitment to truth.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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 during its winter fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3194>

Changing the World, One Person at a Time – Thoughts on Parashat Bo

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Moses Judah (1735-1822) is a relatively unknown American Jew, a member of New York's Congregation Shearith Israel throughout his life. He had fought in the American Revolution, had served in various synagogue offices, and generally led a quiet life. He is buried in Shearith Israel's historic Chatham Square Cemetery. He died on Yom Kippur. In announcing his death, the New York Evening Post noted that he was *"a native of this city and one of its oldest freemen... He was much esteemed for his correct deportment."*

In 1799, Moses Judah was elected to the New York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves. The Society, founded in 1785, had the goal of helping slaves gain their freedom. Moses Judah was instrumental in the freeing of many slaves.

He was one of those special human beings who exert themselves to fight injustice. During his lifetime, most people supported slavery, or tolerated it, or simply looked the other way. To his eternal credit, Moses Judah not only opposed slavery in theory, but did something actively to redeem slaves.

The American experience with slavery reminds us that evil generally does not go away by itself. Good people have to make sacrifices, even go to war, in order to create a moral, just and righteous society. Without these many *"unsung heroes,"* evil would persist.

The Torah portion this week continues the story of the redemption of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. While the Torah makes it clear that it was God who effected the liberation of Israelite slaves, it also reminds us of little – but significant – acts of personal heroism. The two midwives refused to murder Israelite children, in defiance of Pharaoh's orders; the daughter of Pharaoh saved an Israelite child's life; Moses killed a cruel Egyptian taskmaster. Yet, it appears that most people in that society were supportive or apathetic in the face of injustice and cruelty to the slaves. We don't read about any Egyptian society for the manumission of Israelite slaves, and we don't even read much about Israelite resistance to their oppressors. The case of Israelite freedom is extraordinary because it came about through Divine intervention, with very little human participation. This represents an exception to the usual rule of history.

We live at a time when the world is still overflowing with oppression, cruelty, violence. The people of Israel, though no longer slaves, are under siege; anti-Semitism continues to spread; terrorism is encouraged, tolerated, or explained away by so many. Modern-day Pharaohs attempt to oppress and crush us and other peoples throughout the world.

Moses Judah provides an example to us. He demonstrated that each good person can do something positive, however humble it may seem. Each person can take a stand, make a statement, take an action, make a contribution. We cannot assume that evil will disappear on its own. It must be confronted by heroes of the spirit in every generation.

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

Bo: Kiddush HaChodesh – It's All About People

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

As Hashem prepared the Jewish people for redemption and Pesach, the first of the holidays, He instructed Moshe regarding the Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar would not pay attention exclusively to the sun and the seasons as so many other cultures do. The Jewish calendar would primarily be based on the moon.

Hashem explained to Moshe the waxing and waning of the moon and instructed him regarding the rebirth of the moon. There is a time in the lunar cycle when the moon diminishes from our view to the point that it isn't visible to us. Then, when it reappears, the high court, as the designated representatives of the Jewish people, has the authority to sanctify the day as Rosh Chodesh, the start of the new month. The authority rests with them. If they choose not to sanctify the day, it will not be sanctified.)By default, the following day is sanctified.(In this way the leaders of the Jewish people have the ability to skillfully adjust the calendar as they see fit. For example, they can decide that they do not want Yom Kippur to fall on a Friday or right after Shabbos.

There are certainly logistical differences between simply being on a lunar calendar, and the fact that the calendar depends on the declaration of people. But even more than the logistical difference, there is a fundamental way of thinking that Hashem empowered us with. *"Time depends on you."* Which day will be considered the first, and therefore which day will be considered the day of the holiday, depends on people.

During the time that the Sanhedrin met, this Mitzva was practiced in a most practical way. Witnesses who saw the new moon would travel to relate their testimony to the court. Based on their sighting, the day — at the discretion of the court — would be declared Rosh Chodesh. Communities outside of Eretz Yisroel, who did not get the information soon enough, would observe both days that could possibly be a holiday as sacred. Even when the Rabbis codified a calendar for the exile that has lasted for centuries, they declared that communities outside of Eretz Yisroel should continue to observe two-day holidays. Thus, in our time, the first day and last day of Pesach are observed as one day each in the land of Israel but are observed as two-day holidays each in the diaspora.

In recent times)in the 1800s(, a group of Jews suggested that since the calendar is anyway codified, maybe we should only observe one day holidays instead of two. Indeed, in our time we do not have doubt as to when Rosh Chodesh)and therefore each holiday(will be. It has already been codified centuries ago. So, what is the point of observing two-day holidays if the information is already known?

Rav S. R. Hirsch responded to this question by explaining that some people think that things that are factually known are better and more reliable. They see a Jewish calendar that can be recorded and disseminated years in advance as an accomplishment. But really, the current Jewish calendar reflects a sadness. The Jewish representatives do not have the ability each month to infuse the date with holiness at their discretion as they used to. By observing the two-day holidays, we express a sense of loss that control of the sanctity is not in our hands in real-time, and probably won't be restored until Moshiach's times.

There is a short story, "Franchise," by Isaac Asimov, that suggests that in the future, society will do away with voting and instead rely on a computer-generated decision based on polls, algorithms, and other artificial intelligence to decide who the winner shall be of each presidential election. It will certainly be more efficient than having everyone vote; proponents will claim that it will be more reliable. But life isn't about efficiency, mathematical computations, or even about accuracy. Life is about people. People make decisions. People build relationships. People can infuse time with sanctity.

If I can allow my mind to wander to the mediation room where I spend many hours, I wonder)in fantasy, of course(what would happen if I told a struggling couple, *"Statistically, your marriage is wonderful. You are married the right number of*

years, with the right number of children, with the right number of assets, living in just the right neighborhood. Statistically you are happy.” Huh?! Sorry. Life is not about statistics. Life is about relationships. Life is about what sanctity and dedication we choose to invest it with. Rav Hirsch’s insight is that knowing which day, mathematically speaking, should be Rosh Chodesh, is not the ideal way to practice this Mitzva. We yearn for the time when we will once again be empowered to invest the day with holiness because that is an essential feature of the human being.

The lesson of Kiddush HaChodesh (sanctifying the new month) is that it is up to us. Ideally, each month the Jewish people will get to decide which day shall be Rosh Chodesh and which days shall be infused with the holiness of the holidays. While we are in exile, we have resolved to sanctify Rosh Chodesh based on the mathematical calculations of the Sages. But we yearn for the opportunity to personally infuse time with sanctity.

Because life isn’t about mathematics, statistics, or any form of AI.

Life is about people.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Parshas Bo – The Ten Plagues -- A Lesson In Physics

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

As we near the completion of the Ten Plagues, G-d reiterates to Moshe the purpose of the plagues. G-d tells Moshe, “I have hardened Pharaoh’s heart in order to place these signs of Mine in his midst, and in order that you should tell over in your children’s ears and your grandchildren’s ears that which I have done to Egypt and my signs that I have placed in them and you will know that I am G-d.”)Shemos 10:1(

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the simple reading of the passuk is telling us that through the rebuke and lessons which Hashem taught the Egyptians, the world would learn to recognize and fear G-d. Indeed, we find that a few hundred years later, when the Plishtim captured the Aron holding the Ten Commandments and were experiencing unusual punishments but refused to return the Aron, they were rebuked saying, “*Why do you harden your hearts, as Egypt and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? Did Hashem not do to them and they sent them out and they left?*”)Shmuel I 6:6(

He notes, though, that there is a deeper message to be found in this passuk. The Hebrew word G-d uses for “that which I have done” *his’alalti* – is an unusual word. Many commentaries discuss its usage in this context and what the Torah is telling us by using this word. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the word “*his’alalti*” in this context translates literally as, “*that which I have caused to happen.*” We find this word used to refer to the physical occurrences of this world in other contexts in the Torah, as well. For example, in Tehillim, Dovid Hamelech says, “He made known among the nations that which he caused *alilosav*.”)Tehillim 105:1(Physical occurrences of the world are referred to as causes because everything that happens in this world was caused by something else, and is itself in turn a cause for another event.

Rabbeinu Bechaye says that the Torah is using this word here because the Ten Plagues displayed for all to see that Hashem is the Ultimate Cause, meaning Hashem is the One who is the first cause for everything that exists, and He is the One who orchestrates all of the causes and effects. When the physical realities of the world were altered at Hashem’s Will time and again, this showed clearly to one and all that reality is nothing more than the current Will of Hashem. When Hashem decides that He wants something different, then what was once water could now be blood, dirt could be lice, ice

and fire can co-exist within hail the size of soccer balls and darkness could have substance. Once we understand this, we can recognize that all the rules of physics are simply the manner in which Hashem desires for the world to function. Through this, we can recognize that Hashem is not only the All Powerful Creator. Hashem is much more than that – He is the One Who maintains and determines reality at every moment.

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains further that the details of the plague of darkness highlighted this concept, as well. He says that the plague of darkness began during the morning and was a removal of the light after it began, so that it was clear that Hashem was changing reality and it was not just an unusually long night. He adds that this is also the meaning of the Medrash which tells us that the darkness had substance and the Egyptians could not even move during half of the plague because the physical darkness held them. Hashem was making it clear that the darkness was not simply a lack of light, but rather Hashem changed the nature of the air so that the light waves could no longer pass through the air. Hashem made it clear that He wasn't simply controlling nature – He was changing the laws of physics.)See Rabbeinu Bechaye Shemos 10:21(

He explains that this is the meaning of the phrase, *"and you will know that I am G-d."* G-d is not only the Creator of matter and energy, He is also the Creator and Maintainer of all laws of physics and all of the reality that we know. This was the real message of the Ten Plagues – that reality itself is to be respected as G-d's Will.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Bo

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

]Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Miketz. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Bo

By R. Haim Ovadia

]I did not receive a new Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia. Watch this space for his insights in coming weeks.[

* 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.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

A Refreshing Summer Vacation

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Not only does New Zealand have a lot of wonderful sights, it has a lot of common sense practices. For instance, the idea that everyone takes leave from at least December 24th to January 8th would be a revolutionary idea in America. In America, work happens all the time, all day, every day until an individual decides to use their vacation days. It's an individual choice, not a national, multi-week shutdown.

The disadvantage of the American system is that a lot of Americans don't spend their vacation days or take smaller vacations. We need vacations, time away and adventure, even if we don't know we need it.

Did this not happen to the Jews in Parshat Bo? Were they not yelling at Moshe and Aharon two weeks ago in Parshat Shemot to leave them alone and let them work because it's *"better to serve Egypt than die in the wilderness"*? They were slaves and a slave to their slavery routine and, even in those circumstances, they resisted the call to leave.

But God sent the plagues to Egypt regardless, causing Pharaoh to grant their freedom, forcing them to experience freedom. They left Egypt that week, with joy, having tasted the sweet fruit of something they thought they could do without.

Our jobs tend to be better than Egyptian slavery. But we can still compare and relate to the idea that sometimes we need something even though we don't know we need it. Sometimes then, it takes a good friend, a community, a whole country, or God himself to say to us, "I think it's time you did something different."

I hope everyone has enjoyed their holidays and I hope you manage to take at least another one or two this year.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Moshe Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Kneseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Bo: Donkey-Holiness

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 that 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 brazenness, 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 brazenness 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 HaTehiyah, sec. 45(.

https://ravkooktorah.org/BO_67.htm

Writing My Own Chapter (Bo 578)

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

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.

1(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

2(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

3(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 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.

FOOTNOTES:

[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 Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus*, HarperOne, 2007.

Around the Shabbat Table:

1. Why do you think the Jews have the reputation of being a people who tell stories?
2. Why is it particularly important in Jewish tradition to tell stories to children?
3. What is it about the Exodus story that makes it so critical that the Jewish people remember and retell it?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bo/writing-my-own-chapter/> 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.

On Didactics, Depravity, and Decapitating Donkeys

By Yossi Ives* © Chabad 2024

In commemoration of the smiting of the Egyptian firstborns, which was the final catalyst for the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah¹ instructs that a firstborn animal shall belong to the Lord. In practice, this means that in Temple times the firstborn animal would be given to the Kohanim, the priestly family.

This applies only to kosher animals, with one unique exception: a firstborn donkey.² The firstborn donkey is not given to the kohen, but instead is exchanged for a lamb, which is given to the kohen, and the donkey is kept by its owner.

For more on this, read: *Why Is the Firstborn Donkey Holy?*

Now, if the owner refuses to redeem the firstborn foal with a lamb, the Torah instructs, “*you shall decapitate it.*”³

Rashi explains:

He decapitates it with a cleaver from behind and kills it. He caused the kohen to lose his money [by neglecting to give him the redemption lamb]. Therefore, he must destroy his own money [by decapitating his donkey].⁴

Pay close attention to Rashi’s words and it becomes apparent that this segment addresses two entirely separate issues. The first sentence defines the unusual Hebrew word *va’arafa*, which Rashi explains to mean decapitation from behind. The second sentence explains why this is the appropriate response for refusing to redeem the firstborn donkey.

Why does Rashi combine these two points, as if they are related?

The plot thickens when we consider that Rashi rarely provides reasons for Torah laws.⁵ Rashi considers his commentary an aid to understanding the meaning of the text, and not intended to offer novel reasonings for commandments that the Torah itself sees fit not to explain. Why, then, does Rashi depart from his norm and offer a reason for the decapitation?

Meaningless Meanness

The Rebbe draws a surprising conclusion from these problems: Rashi’s comment is not intended to explain the reason for the decapitation, but to answer a burning question that even a young child would ask: Killing the foal seems so pointless. What possible good could come of it?

If the owner has lost the right to his animal, surely it can be taken from him and put to some better use. Killing the animal seems so unnecessary, such gratuitous destruction.

Moreover, the method of killing – decapitation – seems particularly bloody. Even if there is no other option but slaughtering the foal, can this not be achieved in a more dignified manner? After all, the Torah is very clear about the prohibition of cruelty to animals,⁶ a sentiment that is expressed in a good number of Biblical commandments. Why, then,

are we suddenly ending a donkey's life in such an unusual way? Is it not out of step with so many of the Torah's teachings, for as the Psalmist said: "His mercy is over all His creations."⁷

Driving Home the Lesson

It is highly unlikely that this treatment was ever meted out to a baby donkey in history, for the owner would sooner redeem it for a lamb.

Thus, the Rebbe explains that Rashi simply provides the student of the Torah a response to this impossible-to-ignore conundrum, of why the Torah legislates such an unusual punishment.

His explanation: Indeed such a death is gratuitously unpleasant, but that reflects exactly the mentality of the person who refuses to redeem the foal. The treatment of the donkey was intended to match the misdeed.

Think about it: Why on earth would the foal's owner refuse to redeem it with a lamb? Unless redeemed, the foal is forbidden for any use whatsoever.⁸ Refusing to redeem it only means that now no one can use it – not him, nor the kohen. So, the owner's refusal represents a truly extreme form of selfishness. He prefers to lose his property, just so that someone else won't benefit.

It gets worse. The foal's value is many times greater than the lamb. By redeeming the donkey, the owner only has to forego a small portion of the value and gets to keep the rest. Should he be forced to destroy the foal, he loses everything. The owner would have to be pretty mean and twisted to insist on destroying a valuable foal just so he does not have to share with others.

The Antidote

The Torah sets out this especially dramatic treatment of the foal — which would require a level of such absurdity by the owner, that it's hard to imagine it ever actually happened — as an expression of its deep disgust at such profound narcissism. If the owner is so selfish that he refuses to share his property with others at all costs, let him be ordered to destroy his own property and take full cognizance of what a cruel person he is.

Let us not sugarcoat his decision as if it is simply about him deciding how to use his property, but rather force him to face up to the full extent of his own nastiness.

In all likelihood, for the vast majority of people, just knowing that this recourse was on the books was likely to provide the necessary reminder to redeem the donkey with the lamb, rather than go down the selfish and pointless route of refusal.

Herein lies an important lesson. Generosity is an important virtue in Judaism. Kindness is much praised, while charity is strongly promoted. But whether or not a person reaches the heights of generosity or charity, vindictiveness and extreme selfishness are simply intolerable.

From Judaism's perspective, it is simply unconscionable that a person would be so mean-spirited that they would rather lose out just so someone else won't gain.

The Talmud⁹ says that if one person can gain while the other has nothing to lose, we insist that they share. The reason: why ever not? If another can benefit at no cost to oneself, nothing other than spite could be behind the refusal to do so. And spite is awful; it is a reprehensible character trait.

The Torah shows its horror at such an attitude in the way that it responds to someone who is determined never to be generous. In so doing, it sends out a clear signal to us all that vindictiveness has absolutely no place in civilization. Such an ugly mentality is to be utterly repudiated.

Adapted from *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 36, Parshat Bo III.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 13:12.
2. Talmud, Bechorot 5b.
3. Exodus 13:13.
4. Rashi, Exodus 13:13.
5. See Kelalei Rashi of the Rebbe 3:11.
6. Talmud, Shabbat 117b; Bava Metzia 31a.
7. Psalms 145:9.
8. Talmud Bechorot 9b.
9. Bava Kamma 20a.

* Rabbi of Congregation Ahavas Yisrael of Pomona, N.Y.; also founder and Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that focuses on sharing Israeli expertise with developing countries.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5358325/jewish/On-Didactics-Depravity-and-Decapitating-Donkeys.htm

Bo: The Young Before the Elders?

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Existence, Providence, and Power

Pharaoh agreed to Moses' request to allow the people to go into the desert for three days to offer up sacrifices to G-d, and asked who would be going.

Following Our Children

Moses said, *"We will go with our young people and with our elders; we will go with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and our cattle, for it is a festival of G-d for us."*)Ex. 10:9(

Moses mentioned "our young people" before "our elders" in order to emphasize the primary importance of teaching the youth to develop their relationship with G-d. Pharaoh ridiculed this concern, insisting that only adults need to be involved in spiritual practice and observance.

Moses was vindicated when later, the Jewish children were the first to recognize G-d when the sea was split. Their heightened spiritual sensitivity bore witness to the care that their parents had invested in their education.

Just as the Jewish people's attention to the spiritual growth and development of their children preceded the Exodus from Egypt, so it will be in our times: our dedication to the spiritual growth and development of our children will hasten the final Redemption.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

May G-d grant a swift, miraculous and complete victory over our enemies.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Spiritual Child

The American writer Bruce Feiler recently published a best-selling book entitled *The Secrets of Happy Families*. [1] It's an engaging work that uses research largely drawn from fields like team-building, problem-solving and conflict resolution, showing how management techniques can be used at home also to help make families cohesive units that make space for personal growth.

At the end, however, he makes a very striking and unexpected point: "The single most important thing you can do for your family may be the simplest of all: develop a strong family narrative." He quotes a study from Emory University that the more children know about their family's story, "the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, the more successfully they believe their family functions." [2]

A family narrative connects children to something larger than themselves. It helps them make sense of how they fit into the world that existed before they were born. It gives them the starting-point of an identity. That in turn becomes the basis of confidence. It enables children to say: This is who I am. This is the story of which I am a part. These are the people who came before me and whose descendant I am. These are the roots of which I am the stem reaching upward toward the sun.

Nowhere was this point made more dramatically than by Moses in this week's parsha. The tenth plague is about to strike. Moses knows that this will be the last. Pharaoh will not merely let the people go. He will urge them to leave. So, on God's command, he prepares the people for freedom. But he does so in a way that is unique. He does not talk about liberty. He does not speak about breaking the chains of bondage. He does not even mention the arduous journey that lies ahead. Nor does he enlist their enthusiasm by giving them a glimpse of the destination, the Promised Land that God swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the land of milk and honey.

He talks about children. Three times in the course of the parsha he turns to the theme:

And when your children say to you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' you shall say... Exodus 12:26

On that day you must tell your child, 'This is because of what the Lord did for me when I left Egypt.' Exodus 13:8

And in the future, when your child asks, 'What what is this?' you shall answer... Exodus 13:14

This is wonderfully counterintuitive. He doesn't speak about tomorrow but about the distant future. He does not celebrate the moment of liberation. Instead he wants to ensure that it will form part of the people's memory until the end of time. He wants each generation to pass on the story to the next. He wants Jewish parents to become educators, and Jewish children to be guardians of the past for the sake of the future. Inspired by God, Moses taught the Israelites the lesson arrived at via a different route by the Chinese: If you plan for a year, plant rice. If you plan for a decade, plant a tree. If you plan for a century, educate a child.

Jews became famous throughout the ages for putting education first. Where others built castles and palaces, Jews built schools and houses of study. From this flowed all the familiar achievements in which we take collective pride: the fact that Jews knew their texts even in ages of mass illiteracy; the record of Jewish scholarship and intellect; the astonishing over-representation of Jews among the shapers of the modern mind; the Jewish reputation, sometimes admired, sometimes feared, sometimes caricatured, for mental agility, argument, debate, and the ability to see all sides of a disagreement.

But Moses' point wasn't simply this. God never commanded us: Thou shall win a Nobel Prize. What He wanted us to teach our children was a story. He wanted us to help our children understand who they are, where they came from, what happened to their ancestors to make them the distinctive people they became and what moments in their history shaped their lives and dreams. He wanted us to give our children an identity by turning history into memory, and memory itself into a sense of responsibility. Jews were not summoned to be a nation of intellectuals. They were called on to be actors in a drama of redemption, a people invited by God to bring blessings into the world by the way they lived and sanctified life.

For some time now, along with many others in the West, we have sometimes neglected this deeply spiritual element of education. That is what makes Lisa Miller's recent book *The Spiritual Child*, [3] an important reminder of a forgotten truth. Professor Miller teaches

psychology and education at Columbia University and co-edits the journal *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Her book is not about Judaism or even religion as such, but specifically about the importance of parents encouraging the spirituality of the child.

Children are naturally spiritual. They are fascinated by the vastness of the universe and our place in it. They have the same sense of wonder that we find in some of the greatest of the psalms. They love stories, songs and rituals. They like the shape and structure they give to time, and relationships, and the moral life. To be sure, skeptics and atheists have often derided religion as a child's view of reality, but that only serves to strengthen the corollary, that a child's view of reality is instinctively, intuitively religious. Deprive a child of that by ridiculing faith, abandoning ritual, and focusing instead on academic achievement and other forms of success, and you starve him or her of some of the most important elements of emotional and psychological well-being.

As Professor Miller shows, the research evidence is compelling. Children who grow up in homes where spirituality is part of the atmosphere at home are less likely to succumb to depression, substance abuse, aggression and high-risk behaviours including physical risk-taking and "a sexuality devoid of emotional intimacy". Spirituality plays a part in a child's resilience, physical and mental health and healing. It is a key dimension of adolescence and its intense search for identity and purpose. The teenage years often take the form of a spiritual quest. And when there is a cross-generational bond through which children and parents come to share a sense of connection to something larger, an enormous inner strength is born. Indeed the parent-child relationship, especially in Judaism, mirrors the relationship between God and us.

That is why Moses so often emphasises the role of the question in the process of education: "When your child asks you, saying..." – a feature ritualised at the Seder table in the form of the *Mah nishtanah*. Judaism is a questioning and argumentative faith, in which even the greatest ask questions of God, and in which the rabbis of the Mishnah

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and Midrash constantly disagree. Rigid doctrinal faith that discourages questions, calling instead for blind obedience and submission, is psychologically damaging and fails to prepare a child for the complexity of real life. What is more, the Torah is careful, in the first paragraph of the Shema, to say, “You shall love the Lord your God ...” before saying, “You shall teach these things diligently to your children.” Parenthood works when your children see that you love what you want them to learn.

The long walk to freedom, suggests this week’s parsha, is not just a matter of history and politics, let alone miracles. It has to do with the relationship between parents and children. It is about telling the story and passing it on across the generations. It is about a sense of God’s presence in our lives. It is about making space for transcendence, wonder, gratitude, humility, empathy, love, forgiveness and compassion, ornamented by ritual, song and prayer. These help to give a child confidence, trust and hope, along with a sense of identity, belonging and at-home-ness in the universe.

You cannot build a healthy society out of emotionally unhealthy families and angry and conflicted children. Faith begins in families. Hope is born in the home.

[1] Bruce Feiler, *The Secrets of Happy Families*, New York, William Morrow, 2013.

[2] Ibid., 274. Feiler does not cite the source, but see: Bohanek, Jennifer G., Kelly A. Marin, Robyn Fivush, and Marshall P. Duke. “Family Narrative Interaction and Children’s Sense of Self.” *Family Process* 45.1 (2006), pp. 39-54.

[3] Miller, Lisa. *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*, New York, St Martin’s Press, 2015.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Who Hardened Pharaoh’s Heart?

“And God said unto Moses: ‘Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these My signs in the midst of them.’” [Exodus 10:1]

Why does God declare that He has “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” so that the despot will not change his mind and free the Israelites? Doesn’t this collide head-on with our notion of free will? Is the Torah telling us that God interrupts the ordinary course of human events to introduce His will into the hearts of people, sometimes even preventing them from making the right decision? What about the idea that absolutely nothing must stand in the way of repentance, that no one, not even a righteous person, can stand where a penitent stands?

Rabbi Shlomo Goren gives a novel explanation which was apparently inspired by the miraculous events he experienced with the rise of the State of Israel. There are times, he maintains, when God must introduce His will into the hearts of people, but this is limited to

monarchs, emperors, and Pharaohs. Rabbi Goren cites a verse from Proverbs:

“Like water courses is the king’s heart in the hand of the Lord: He directs it wherever He wishes.” [Proverbs 21:1]

Rabbi Goren suggests that this verse comes to teach that in regard to freedom of choice, we have to distinguish between an individual and the leader of a nation.

Individuals always have free choice. However, since God has a master plan with Israel as the catalyst, the Almighty may sometimes be moved to control the choices of leaders of key nations during critical and fateful historical periods. Such a situation occurred at the very dawn of history with the confrontation between Pharaoh and the Hebrew slaves, and the Almighty had to step in.

Another way of looking at the issue is provided by the Midrash. True, God hardens Pharaoh’s heart, as He declared He would, but we must note that the divine intervention only emerges with the sixth plague. Examining the first five plagues, we find that Pharaoh himself is the one who exercises obstinacy. This formulation is repeated again and again. “Pharaoh became obstinate” (the first plague [Ex. 7:22]); “He [Pharaoh] hardened his heart” (the second plague [Ex. 8:11]); “Pharaoh remained obstinate” (the third plague [Ex. 8:15]); “Pharaoh made himself obstinate” (the fourth plague [Ex. 8:28]); and “Pharaoh remained obstinate” (the fifth plague [Ex. 9:8]). Only when we reach the sixth plague do we arrive at a new formulation: “Now it was God who made Pharaoh obstinate” [Ex. 9:12]. The contrast is so sharp and the division so perfect – five on one side and five on the other – that it is clear that the Torah wants to tell us something.

The obstinacy on the part of Pharaoh provides the Midrash with a means for solving the tension between the notion of free will and God’s initial declaration regarding “hardening his heart.” In the Midrash Raba we read:

“The Holy One, blessed be He, gives someone a chance to repent, and not only one opportunity but several chances: once, twice, three times. But then, if the person still has not repented, God locks the person’s heart altogether, cutting off the possibility of repentance in the future.” [Shemot Raba 13:3]

The Midrash goes on to explain that Pharaoh had already been given five opportunities to repent, five opportunities to hear the voice of God demanding that His people shall be released from slavery – each of the plagues a direct “SMS” from God – and still refused. God is now effectively saying to Pharaoh: “You stiffened your neck, you hardened your heart, now I am going to add stubbornness to your own inner stubbornness.”

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A similar idea is expressed in Maimonides’ “Laws of Repentance.” The great twelfth-century sage and philosopher attacks our problem frontally, dedicating parts of chapter 5 to the question of free will and then coming to the apparent contradiction between the general idea of free will and the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart by God. Maimonides writes:

“Since Pharaoh sinned on his own impulse and mistreated the Israelites who sojourned in his land...justice required that repentance should be withheld from him until retribution had been visited upon him... When the Almighty withholds repentance from the sinner, he cannot return, but will die in his wickedness – wickedness which he had originally committed of his own will.” [Laws of Repentance 5:3]

I would like to take this basic idea of both Maimonides and the Midrash as to how God sometimes cuts off repentance as a punishment for a certain class of sinner, and attempt to understand it in human psychological terms. As both of these classical sources point out, external influence began only after Pharaoh’s own refusal the first five times despite the first five plagues. The result of such obstinacy is that Pharaoh himself became frozen, locked into a conception of how to behave; once that happens, it becomes exceedingly difficult for anyone to change their mind.

We must also remember that Pharaoh was not alone. He was surrounded by advisers, ministers and a corps of publicists. After a clear policy of continued enslavement despite the suffering endured by the Egyptian populace as a result of the first five plagues, how could Pharaoh suddenly change his policy and still save face? Had he been wrong the other times, had his citizenry suffered needlessly? How could a despot who called himself a god admit that his earlier policy had been a mis- taken one? It is almost as if Pharaoh no longer had the real possibility of change; his earlier decisions locked him in.

I would like to suggest a third approach, based on a discussion of repentance near the end of Yoma 86b. The sages alert us to a seeming contradiction in the words of Resh Lakish regarding repentance. The first quote attributed to the master is: “Great is repentance because it results in prior premeditated sins being accounted as errors [shgagot].”

Then the Talmud points out that Resh Lakish also said: “Great is repentance because it results in prior premeditated sins being accounted as merits [zekhuyot].”

The apparent contradiction is resolved by the Talmud by pointing out that the first citation – former sins accounted as errors – is the result of repentance based on fear, the latter citation – penitents’ former sins accounted as merits – is the result of repentance from love.

It seems to me that had Pharaoh come to the conclusion that it was wrong to enslave the Hebrews based on his own new-found convictions about the true God of the universe who guarantees freedom to all, his repentance would have emanated “from love,” and would have been accepted. Since, ironically enough, it would have been his former sinful acts and obstinacy which had led him to such a conclusion, even his prior transgressions could now be seen as merits, according to Resh Lakish. After all, had it not been for them, he would never have switched positions and arrived at his new awareness and religious-ethical consciousness.

This is clearly not the position in which we find Pharaoh. Were he to release the Jews after the fifth plague, it would have nothing to do with a transformed and ennobled moral sensitivity and everything to do with his having been bludgeoned over the head by the power of the plagues. Such repentance out of fear is hardly true repentance, and cannot be accepted by God to atone for previous sins. Since Pharaoh is not truly repenting in any shape or form, God “hardens his heart” to the suffering of the plagues and allows him to continue to do what he really believes in doing: enslaving the Hebrews, who must wait until the Almighty deems it the proper time for redemption.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's
Derashot Ledorot**

The Source of Darkness*

From the very beginning of time, when Adam complained to God of his loneliness, man has regarded his solitude as a painful experience, even a curse. Modern man is especially bothered by loneliness. Despite, or maybe because of, his large cities and giant metropolises, he finds himself terribly alone in the world. He finds the silence of the universe and its indifference to his problems unbearable. He is alone and does not like it.

It is perhaps this feeling of loneliness that was the essence of the ninth plague that God brought upon the Egyptians and of which we read in this morning's sidra. The *hoshekh*, or darkness, imposed a rigid and horrifying isolation upon the Egyptians. The effect of the plague is described by the Torah (Exodus 10:23) as “*lo ra'u ish et ahiv*,” “they did not see one another.” All communication between a man and his friends ceased. He had no family, no friends, no society; he was completely and utterly blacked out of any contact with any other human. How lonely! What a plague!

It is all the more surprising, therefore, to read the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda, recorded in the Midrash on the ninth plague (Exodus Rabba, Bo 14:2). Our Sages asked: “*meihekhan hayah ha'hoshekh hahu*,” “What was the source of that darkness?” Where did it come from? What is the nature and origin of loneliness? Rabbi Nehemiah gave a credible answer,

“*mei'hoshekh shel gehenom*” – the darkness that descended upon Egypt came from the darkness of Gehenom, from the netherworld. Loneliness is a curse, hence its origin is the place of punishment. But Rabbi Yehuda's answer is astonishing, “*mei'hoshekh shel ma'ala, shene'emar 'yashet hoshekh sitro*” – the source of that darkness was from Heaven, for it is written (Psalms 18:12) that “God dwells in secret darkness!” What an unexpected origin for a plague – God's dwelling place! Darkness comes from Heaven!

Astonishing, yes, but in that answer by Rabbi Yehuda we have a new insight into the problem of loneliness and hence into the condition of man as a whole. Darkness, or solitude, can become the curse of loneliness, as it did when it plagued the Egyptians and separated every man from his brother, a loneliness that prevented one from feeling with the other, from sharing his grief and joy, his dreams and his fears. Darkness indeed can be a plague. But the same darkness can be a blessing – it can be worthy of the close presence of God Himself. For solitude means privacy, it means that precious opportunity when a man escapes from the loud brawl of life and the constant claims of society, and in the intimate seclusion of his own heart and soul he gets to know himself and realize that he is made in the image of God. Loneliness can be painful – but it can also be precious. The same *hoshekh* that can spell plague for a man if it seals him off from others by making him blind to the needs of his fellows, this same *hoshekh* becomes Godly when it enables a man to become more than just a social animal, more than just a member of a group, but a full, mature, unique individual in his own right. “*Yosheiv beseter Elyon*” (Psalms 91:1) – God dwells in the highest kind of secrecy or mystery which cannot be penetrated by man. So must every person have an inner life, an internal *seter*, a chamber of blessed *hoshekh*, which, in its privacy, assures him of his uniqueness as a different, individual man. As Longfellow once wrote, “Not in the clamor of the crowded street / Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng / But in ourselves are triumph and defeat.” In ourselves, that is where we can develop that brilliant darkness which has its source in God.

An American scholar recently wrote an article called “The Invasion of Privacy” in which he says that the perfect symbol of the confusion of our times is the “picture window” so typical of our newer houses. The “picture window,” he says, is more a means of letting others look in than for having the owner look out. Modern life, with its perpetual telephone calls and never-ending blare of television, with its round of constant appointments and business and social duties, represents an intrusion upon the privacy of each of us, a deliberate attack upon the citadel of one's personal privacy. And modern man succumbs to this attack – he opens the blinds on the picture window of his heart, seeking to reveal his deepest secrets

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either to an ever-widening circle of friends or to his analyst or to his priest. We are often afraid of the solitude of privacy. We often fail to realize that *hoshekh* is not only a *maka* but also an aspect of Godliness. Educators and parents sometimes go to extremes and are appalled by a child who prefers to play by himself or think independently, and rush to impose “group games” and “doing things together” upon the delicious solitude in which a child seeks to discover himself. For a child realizes that, as with the young prophet Samuel, it is within himself that a man can hear the voice of God. Society may be the stage where the command of God is executed, but the inner solitude of man is the audience-chamber where we hear the command. How can a man be a truly good father, as God requires of him, if he does not have a few moments a day to contemplate in utter loneliness the wonder of children? How can a man be a good husband if he only acts out his role without ever thinking through his relationships in the stillness of his heart? How can someone be a good son or daughter if they never are alone long enough to realize the enormous debt we owe the parents for life and love? “Woe to him who is never alone and cannot bear to be alone.”

Don Isaac Abarbanel, that great fifteenth-century Jew who was the treasurer to the King of Portugal until the exile in 1492, put it in sharper fashion in his comment on the first passage in Avot. We read, “*Moshe kibel Torah miSinai*,” “Moses received the Torah from Mount Sinai.” But, notes Abarbanel, it was not from Sinai that Moses received the Law, it was from God at Sinai. It should have been stated, “*Moshe kibel Torah beSinai*,” or “*min Hashem*.” The reason for “*miSinai*,” he answers, is that the Torah was revealed to Moses only because of his inimitable capacity for creative solitude, only because at Sinai he isolated himself from man and was only with God for forty days and forty nights – because Sinai was the place that “*nigash el ha'arafel*” (Exodus 20:17), that he in his aloneness approached the darkness wherein God dwelt. “*Moshe kibel Torah miSinai*” – Moses received the Torah by virtue of Sinai, because he learned the secret of Godly solitude. So solitude gave birth to Torah. So does it give birth to ideas and to thoughts and to art and to beauty and to the essence of mankind and to all that is noble in life.

I have never known a really creative person who did not precede the creative act with at least a moment of profound, thoughtful solitude. No really great speech or beautiful musical composition is rolled off extemporaneously. It is forged in the silence of the mind when the outside world is shut out by a Godly darkness. No brilliant idea, whether in the sciences or art or business, is born out of the brawl of life – it is hatched out of the stillness of a creative personality. What is inspiration? It is nothing but the product of positive and constructive silence in the

innermost, inviolable chambers of a man's heart. The source of light is in this kind of darkness or solitude. And the source of this darkness is in God. It is the "hoshekh shel ma'ala."

It is therefore of the greatest importance to all of us that even as we seek to banish the plague of loneliness we do not drive away the blessing of privacy. We ought to regard it as sacred and protect our moments of solitude with zeal. If in the conditions of contemporary life it becomes difficult to escape these intrusions upon our privacy to enjoy the "yashet hoshekh sitro," it becomes all the more important to guard it zealously. We ought to seek opportunities for this solitude of contemplation wherever and whenever we can: whether during our vacation periods when we can afford more of this precious and delicious time, or at the beginning of the day in synagogue at minyan when we can wrest from our busy schedule for the sweet silence of solitude. There is a great deal of hoshekh-solitude in the world. The Egyptian makes of it a plague of isolation – "lo ra'u ish et ahiv" – an inability to see his fellow men, a picture window through which others can look at but he is blind to them. The God-like, however, will make of this solitude an atmosphere of holiness, "yashet hoshekh sitro," a creative opportunity to discover themselves and the voice of God that speaks to them, a window which does not allow others to peer within, but enables them to see others and be with them. This kind of hoshekh is not the plague of darkness, it comes from the Most High Source of All Existence. May we learn to make use of that darkness and thus bring great light into the lives of all of us.

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Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Matzah - To Elevate and Conquer Areas of Spiritual Weakness

The Mishna (Pesachim 35a) enumerates the types of grains that can be used for making matzah to fulfill the mitzva of eating matzah on Pesach. The Gemara notes that the five grains listed in the Mishna are an exhaustive list, implying that—for example—rice or millet, which are not mentioned in the Mishna, cannot be used to make matzah. What is wrong with using rice or millet? The Gemara infers a connection between chometz and matzah from the pasuk "You shall not eat upon it chometz, seven days you shall eat upon it matzah, the bread of poverty..." (Devorim 16:3): That which can potentially become chometz (leavened) is the type of grain from which we can make matzah. Rice, millet, and other grains that are not listed in the Mishna can reach the state of sirachon (spoilage) but they cannot reach the state of chimutz (leavened).

This concept may seem counterintuitive. Since we are so particular about preventing matzah

from becoming chometz, shouldn't we go out of our way, when baking our matzah, to specifically use grains which do not leaven? Why do we put ourselves in a situation where, if the dough is not baked quickly enough, it will become chometz? With all the difficult stringencies that are involved in baking matzah, why didn't the Torah sanction the use of a type of grain that will never become chometz? Why does the Torah insist that we use a type of grain which could become chometz, necessitating the baker to zealously guard that it does not so become?

The Tolner Rebbe from Yerushalayim gave several drashas when he was in Los Angeles for Parsha Bo several years ago. In one of his drashas, he commented that in this particular halacha lies a great practical lesson.

Chazal teach that chometz is symbolic of the Yetzer haRah (evil inclination). On the other hand, matzah is symbolic of the Yetzer haTov (good inclination). Chometz rises. It is puffy. It is blown up. This is symbolic of a person's haughtiness and passions. Matzah, which is plain and is flat, does not rise or get blown up. It is not haughty. It represents modesty, humility and the ability to manage with the bare necessities of life. In other words, chometz and matzah are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. Chometz represents negative spiritual character traits, and matzah represents positive spiritual character traits.

The lesson, therefore, is that the Torah wants us to take that very thing that could potentially become chometz and make it into matzah. Extending the analogy of the Yetzer haRah and Yetzer haTov, the Torah wants us to take that which is our Yetzer haRah (our problems, our temptations, and our foibles) and convert it to Yetzer haTov. This means that man's spiritual mission is to try to work on those very personality traits and characteristics that in the past have proven to be his weak points. If a person is mute then he will not receive reward in the World to Come for not speaking lashon haRah (gossip, slander, etc.). That is not his problem. The reason that it is not his problem is because of an unfortunate physical disability. But nevertheless, he will not receive reward for that because there is no challenge.

Likewise, for example, if a person is unfortunately blind, he has no challenge of "shmiras aynayim" (guarding his eyes) from viewing inappropriate matters. That is not his challenge. The avodas ha'adam (man's spiritual challenge) is to take those very things that are areas of spiritual weakness, where perhaps in the past he has fallen short of the Torah's ideals, and to conquer them and elevate them. In fact, perhaps he will even be able to take that very thing and turn it into a dvar mitzvah.

Let the person channel his passions—which have perhaps led him astray in the past—in a positive direction. This is the symbolism of the

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chometz and the matzah. Don't try making matzah out of something that cannot become chometz anyway. That is no great accomplishment! Take something that without careful watching and care can become chometz. That is the very item we turn into a "cheftza d'mitzvah" (an entity with which a positive command is fulfilled).

This halacha regarding the grains with which matzah may be baked is a metaphor for a person's spiritual mission. We must seek out that which has been our Yetzer haRah and turn it into our Yetzer haTov.

We can perhaps relate this idea to a very peculiar Medrash (Yalkut 187) that we have mentioned in the past. A certain Tanna fasted 85 times because he did not understand a particular matter: Dogs are creatures which are called azei nefesh (brazen, insolent) in Yeshaya 56:11. And yet, in Perek Shira, in which each of the animals recites Shira (Song of Praise) to the Ribono shel Olam, the dogs are recorded as saying "Come let us bow down before Hashem our G-d." This Tanna, Rav Yeshaya, the student of Rav Chanina ben Dosa, was very perturbed by this. How could it be that these dogs, which possess the attribute of insolence (azus), are the ones that recite the praise "Come let us bow down before Hashem our G-d?" Therefore, he fasted 85 times to beseech Divine Help in understanding this anomaly.

The Medrash relates that a malach (heavenly angel) came down and revealed "the secret" to him. At the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus), the pasuk says, "But against the Children of Israel a dog will not sharpen its tongue..." (Shemos 11:7). In the merit of this 'action,' the dogs merited to recite the pasuk attributed to them in Perek Shira.

The precise point of this Medrash is the idea mentioned above: Dogs are full of chutzpah by nature. It is a dog's innate nature to bark, especially when it senses that something unusual is transpiring. For the dogs not to bark at such a time demonstrates a tremendous conquest over their normal inclinations. The Ribono shel Olam appreciates that. Thus, the Medrash's point is the following: Despite the fact that dogs are azei nefesh, and in spite of the fact that they normally bark, they were greatly rewarded by virtue of the fact that they conquered this natural inclination and remained silent at the time of the Makas Bechoros (the Plague of the First Born). We learn from dogs to people: People too should strive for kvishas hayetzer (conquering their evil inclination) in service of Hashem.

The Lesson of Sensitivity in Halacha

On that same visit, the Tolner Rebbe shared another practical lesson from a different halacha as well. The halacha is that the Korban Pesach (Paschal Offering) needs to be eaten "b'chaburah" (in groups). If two different chaburahs are eating in proximity—even in the same room—no individual is allowed to leave

his chaburah and go to the other chaburah. They are certainly not allowed to leave the room and go to another room to join a different chaburah.

The Mishna (Pesachim 86a) states that if two groups are eating in one room, one group sitting at one table and the other group sitting at another table, they may not even face one another. Each group must face only the people in their own group. The halacha is that if in fact they do turn around and face the other group, they are no longer allowed to eat the Korban Pesach. That is considered “eating in two different groups,” which is a Biblical prohibition.

The Mishna allows only one exception to this rule: A bride may turn away and eat. The Rambam in fact codifies this law (Hilchos Korban Pesach 9:3-4). The Gemara explains the reason for this leniency (which is also mentioned by the Rambam). It is because the kallah (during the first thirty days after her marriage) is embarrassed. During the first month after her marriage, she is particularly self-conscious and she thinks people are staring at her.

Consider the following: On the night of the Seder, Leil Pesach, everyone is on a different level. We all know the importance of the mitzvos. Unfortunately, today we do not have the Korban Pesach, but we still have a certain seriousness and focus regarding our matzah, marror and daled kosos. We focus on properly fulfilling these mitzvos of the evening. We can only imagine what an elevated state people were in during the time of the Beis HaMikdash when everyone had a Korban Pesach at their table as well.

Do we really think that at such a moment people would be staring at a kallah to see how she looks or how she eats? The answer is no! So why did the kallah think that? It was a figment of her imagination. She is embarrassed because she THINKS people are looking at her. Therefore, she is embarrassed. Nobody is staring at her while they are eating the Korban Pesach!

Do we need to accommodate this figment of her imagination and let her transgress that which would otherwise be a Biblical prohibition? Apparently, yes! Apparently, we acquiesce to her mishugaas (foolishness). Why is that so? What is the lesson?

The lesson is sensitivity. We need to account for a person's sensitivity, even though it may be based on a figment of their imagination. If we need to be so careful and sensitive when there is really nothing there, how much more so must we be careful and sensitive when people ARE justifiably sensitive about certain things.

This is an amazing insight. We let the kallah do something that under normal circumstances

should disqualify her from eating the Korban Pesach, simply because of her embarrassment regarding a non-existent phenomenon.

The Tolner Rebbe added that we see the same principle in another halacha that is more familiar to us. There are five things prohibited on Yom Kippur, one of which is that a person is not allowed to wash any part of his body. There is a dispute among the early commentaries whether anything beyond the prohibition to eat and drink is a Biblical prohibition, but there are those who hold that all five ‘prohibitions’ are Biblical.

If that is the case, why does the Mishna (Yoma 8:1) allow a kallah to wash her face on Yom Kippur? The allowance is made “so that she does not look unseemly to her (new) husband”. Again, do we think a kallah, within thirty days of her chuppah is going to become ‘unseemly to her husband’ because she does not wash her face one day? Will this cause her husband to lose interest in her and think she is not beautiful anymore? Of course not! How do we permit a Biblical prohibition for such a reason?

It is the same answer. Yes, it is a figment of her imagination, but that is the way she thinks and that is the way she is super sensitive. Since in her mind, she is afraid she might lose her husband's adoration, we again make an accommodation for that.

This again is a tremendous lesson in sensitivity. How sensitive must we be to a person's feelings, even when those feelings are not based on reality. How much more so is that the case when we know that people are hurting, for example widows, orphans, or divorced people. These are classic examples of people who are in pain. These are realities of life. People who are in pain or sick or beaten down are very sensitive. If we need to be sensitive to these two kallahs—by the Korban Pesach and on Yom Kippur—al achas kamah v'kamah, we must be sensitive to people whose embarrassment is based on fact and not just fiction.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

It's not just the thought that counts! 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.

Likutei Divrei Torah

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.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Timeless Story of Yetziat Mizrayim Rabbi Marcus and Rebbetzin Lydia Rosenberg

In Parshat Bo, Am Yisrael is given a mitzva that forced them to rise above nature and be superhuman. Not only were they commanded to slaughter an Egyptian deity before their masters' eyes, but Hashem told them to rise above time itself, and they did it. He asks the same of us, and we do it too.

In the depths of Egypt, Hashem not only commanded them to practice the first Seder, but he commanded them to be conscious of the future Sedarim. “You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants. And when you enter the land that God will give you, as promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this rite?’ you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to God, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when smiting the Egyptians, but saved our houses.’ Those assembled then bowed low in homage.”

In the depths of Egypt, Bnei Yisrael rise above time and not only imagine their freedom but embrace a command to remember their time of slavery, amidst their future freedom. Here they rise above their present and transport themselves into the future when they will be looking back on this time, and remembering its lessons.

But, of course, we have the mitzva of remembering the exodus from Egypt once we arrive in the Land of Israel and we have achieved the goal of freedom. Now, having reached the Promised Land, we need to remind ourselves of the value of freedom. Then, in Parashat Ki Tavo, when we find ourselves at the height of our affluence and bring a portion of that to Hashem as Bikkurim (First Fruits) we are transported back in time to an era when we had no wealth and no freedom to create it.

Where at first we were transported forwards from a bleak present to glorious future, giving us hope, we are then transported from our greatness to our insignificance, to instill in us a sense of gratitude and humility.

Today, we need to be transported, once again, forward in time. Although many have returned to Eretz Yisrael, here on shlichut we know all too well the necessity of maintaining the hope of taught to us by Micha, (7:15): "I will show him wondrous deeds, as in the days when you sallied forth from the land of Egypt."

This too can transport us to a future time, not so we can deny the work needed today, but so that we can keep sight of the vision of all of all the Jewish people returned to our homeland, building a home which combines a present of peace and joy, and a past from which we learn the lessons of freedom, gratitude and humility, that help us make sure it lasts into the future. *(Ideas for this Dvar Torah are based on the work of Rav Soloveitchik in Festival of Freedom)*

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

The Strength of Flexibility

During the plague of locusts, swarms of insects consumed everything in their path, including the durable crops that were able to withstand the previous plague of hail, as the pasuk states, "And they will obscure the view of the earth, and no one will be able to see the earth, and they will eat the surviving remnant, which remains for you from the hail, and they will eat all your trees that grow out of the field" (Shemos 10:5). The Torah here is referring to the damage assessment recorded earlier in the wake of the plague of hail, where we are told, "The flax and the barley were broken, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in the stalk, the wheat and the spelt were not broken because they ripen late" (Shemos 9:31-32). The barrage of falling hail cracked and shattered the mature stalks of barley and flax, however, the young and resilient shoots

of wheat and spelt, which bent but did not break, were able to absorb the beating.

According to Rav Sadiah Gaon (cited by the Ramban), the postmortem report following the storm of hail was not told from the perspective of the narrator but rather it was part of Moshe's conversation with Pharaoh. Before discontinuing the plague, Moshe informed Pharaoh that while it was too late to do anything about the ruined barley and flax the wheat and spelt could still be salvaged. Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi (Birchas Mordechai) and Rav Chanoch Ehrentreu (Kometz Haminchah) explain that Pharaoh stubbornly refused to relent because he believed that by being firm and standing his ground, he was demonstrating strength and power. In response, Moshe directed Pharaoh's attention to the stiff stalks of barley and flax which crumbled under the pressure of the hail, as opposed to the wheat and barley whose suppleness ensured their survival. Moshe was suggesting that Pharaoh consider relaxing his hardened stance and recognize that sometimes strength is found in flexibility, not rigidity.

This message is echoed by the Gemara (Taanis 20a) which advises a person to model their personality and temperament after the reed, which is soft and pliable, rather than the cedar tree which is firm and taut. In a torrential downpour, with hail and driving winds, the cedar tree is likely to be uprooted or break in half, whereas the reed is constructed to bow but endure. Indeed, palm trees flourish even in tropical regions that are prone to hurricanes precisely because their trunks are uniquely designed to concede to the wind instead of battling against it. Similarly, in order to weather the inevitable storms of life, to roll with punches and be resilient, a person must recognize that being flexible and forgiving can be a sign of strength not weakness.

Judaism believes that every person possesses bechirah chofshis - the freedom to choose between right and wrong. This is the foundation of human accountability and responsibility and the basis for the entire system of reward and punishment. However, those who work in the bowels of bureaucracy, performing essential but monotonous tasks, often feel robbed of their bechirah chofshis. The only available avenue to reassert some measure of control, and flex their muscles, is by denying requests and saying "no." [1] However, in truth, the decision to be difficult, and the impulse to be inflexible, stem from a place of insecurity. Those who are empowered usually appreciate the strength in being agreeable, because it is more satisfying and productive to say "yes" than "no." This is critical when attempting to establish a robust and sturdy home. One of the miracles that occurred on a daily basis in the Beis Hamikdash was that "when the people stood, they were pressed for space, yet when they bowed down, there was plenty of room" (Avos 5:5). When family members stand their ground

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and refuse to give in, the house quickly becomes a very cramped and uncomfortable place. However, when everyone understands the strength of flexibility and the value of compromise, then there will be ample space for all.

[1] See Rav Hershel Schachter, Freedom of Choice.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

In The End

And this day shall be for you as a memorial, and you shall celebrate it as a festival for HASHEM; throughout your generations, you shall celebrate it as an everlasting statute. (Shemos 12:14)

Now isn't this a curious statement!? The Torah is writing down 3,332 years ago that we will be keeping this day as an everlasting statute, and here we are 3,332 years later munching on Matzos and reviewing the event so the exodus from Egypt on this very same day without fail. Do we persistently keep this day because it is written so or is it written so because it's a fact that we will persistently keep it!? In either case it's a profound fact of life and an undeniable truth that here we are thousands of years later holding on to Pesach with the same ferocious tenacity. Let's appreciate how truly amazing this is.

Cultural trends and fashions come and like the seasons. Some stay a little longer and are deemed classic and others are one hit wonders that fade and disappear like last year's snow. How many songs seemed like they would be sung forever at the time they were popular but they went quietly into the good night and have been forgotten.

What we thought was hip or cool or with it when we were young is not something we would be caught doing later in life. That's how fast things lose their flavor even in the course of a brief lifetime.

How many trends last from generation to generation? How many scientific paradigms have been challenged and reconstructed over the last hundreds of years!? Which system of governance has successfully lasted more than a few hundreds of years!? Who can possibly predict which family or group will be prominent or dominant in 5 or 10 years? How can the Torah spell out with confidence that this is what we will be doing many thousands of years after the events of Yetzias Mitzraim should have become a faint echo!?

The truth is that it may not be as long ago as we think of it and this does not diminish the point. I was thinking recently about something that a friend told me and I was trying to remember when he said it and I was able to anchor it to a date near the birth of one of my children and realized that it was 25 years ago. Then I started thinking that 25 years is a quarter of a century. Four 25-year periods are a whole century. 25 years, to me, is not a long

period of time. The exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah was about 3,330 years ago and that is only One Hundred and Thirty-Three – 25-year periods.

That doesn't sound so impossibly far back, distant, and ancient as perhaps we are used to thinking about it. It's still a long time ago and who in the universe could or would feel confident to write in a book that they hoped would endure, that the people of that book would be as loyal as we have been!?

That is a question worthy of contemplating, I do believe and the answer may be in these words from a very great Torah scholar.

Rabbi Yaakov Emden noted almost three hundred years ago: "Many have tried to injure us or wipe us out. While all the great ancient civilizations have disappeared and been forgotten-The Nation of Israel who clings to HASHEM is alive today! What will the wise historian answer when he examines this phenomenon without prejudice? Was this all purely by chance? By my soul, when I contemplated these great wonders of our continued existence, they took on greater significance than all the miracles and wonders that HASHEM, Blessed Be He, performed for our fathers in Egypt, in the desert, and when they entered the Land of Israel. And the longer this exile extends, the miracle of Jewish existence becomes more obvious to make known G-d's mastery and supervision over nature and history.

Since he penned these words a lot of water has passed over the dam and a lot of blood has been spilled and we are still here and here we will continue to be. The echo of the exodus is not fainter; it is even stronger. How is that possible? Usually as we move further from a physical phenomenon the weaker its influence becomes. Why is it not the case here? One obvious answer is that this is true by a materialistic experience but by a spiritual event the effect is intensified and clarified with time.

One of my teachers once explained to us that when one enters a tunnel he is guided by the light at the mouth of the entrance to the tunnel for a period of time and then the original light will begin to dim and fade. There may be a period of darkness and panic until one finds themselves being drawn and attracted to the light at the end of the tunnel. We are all in a tunnel called history, exile, world. The Exodus and Matan Torah provided the light for the first part of our journey but now we are guided by the light at the end of the tunnel. This passage – narrow bridge, is surrounded by an Endless Light that stands outside of time and space. It is the Light that was present in the beginning of our personal and historical journey and it is still there in the end.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Kindness Begins At Home

How do we impact, influence and change the lives of other people?

There is an unusual pasuk where Hashem says to Moshe to go speak to the Jewish people and tell them to request of the Egyptians – who persecuted them all of these years – vessels of silver and gold to take out of Egypt.

The Vilna Gaon explains that if you read the verses carefully, it wasn't the Jews requesting of the Egyptians, first and foremost – they were requesting of themselves. If each of them would hear the cries of others, share in kindness and charity, open their hearts to others and give each other what they needed, that element of kindness and charity, of opening hearts to each other would cause the hearts of the Egyptians to open, and G-d's heart to open to redeem them from Egypt. Charity and kindness are the impetus for redemption.

The verse says each person should ask for the vessels from their "friends". Since when were the Egyptians and the Jews friends? The word used usually refers to our fellow Jews. The Vilna Gaon says if each Jew asks their fellow Jew and open their hearts to each other, that will have an impact on others. Hence in the next verse it says the Jews will have favor and grace from the Egyptians, despite the distance between them, you will find favor in their hearts when you find favor in each other's hearts.

The way to influence anybody else, counterintuitively, is not to influence them but to influence ourselves. When we change ourselves, open our hearts and give to others, they reflect that back to us.

May we all transform the lives of others, through transforming the lives of ourselves, our spouses and families, as one never knows the ripple effect of an open heart and the impact that it has on others.



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to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Jan 17, 2024, 12:01 PM

subject: Rav Frand - The Importance of Eagerly Anticipating the Geula
Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Bo

The pasuk introducing Makas Choshech (the Plague of Darkness) says, "Moshe stretched forth his hand toward the heavens and there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period." (Shemos 10:22). Rashi explains the reason for Makas Choshech: There were wicked people amongst the Jewish nation who did not want to leave Mitzraim. These people died and were buried during these three days of darkness so that the Mitzrim would not witness their downfall, thus enabling them to claim that the Jews were suffering plagues as well.

Rashi's wording implies that the wickedness of these people was that they did not want to leave Mitzraim. Those who were not me'tzapeh l'geulah (anxiously looking forward to redemption) did not deserve to be redeemed. The Peirush HaRosh al haTorah says the same idea: He asks why did all these people die during the days of darkness, but Dasan and Aviram, who were totally wicked individuals, did not die during that period? The Rosh answers that even though Dasan and Aviram were wicked, they did not lose hope in the promised redemption.

The Medrash Rabbah is even more explicit. The Medrash says that there were Jewish slaves who had Egyptian patrons who gave them wealth and honor. They had it good in Mitzraim and did not want to leave! Hashem said, if He kills these Jews outright, the Mitzrim will say that the Jews are also dying, therefore Hashem brought Makas Choshech, during which these Jews could die without the knowledge of the Mitzrim.

This is something for us in the United States of America to bear in mind. Baruch Hashem, Jews have been able to have wonderful lives here. Torah is flourishing and many people are well off. But we always need to retain this aspiration of "tzeepes l'yeshua" (anxiously anticipating redemption).

When the time comes, we should be anxious and excited to go to Eretz Yisrael. A person who says "What is so bad with staying in America?" is echoing the sentiments of the Jews who were wiped out during Makas Choshech.

This unfortunate phenomenon repeated itself all the way back at the time of Ezra. When Ezra told the Babylonian Jews after seventy years in exile "Okay, Yidden, it's time to go back to Eretz Yisrael" they said "Babylonia is great!" Similarly, the Jews at the time of the Crusades felt their homes in Christian Europe were more than adequate. Their towns were destroyed! We need to keep that in mind as well. Baruch HaShem, we have a great life here but it is still lacking. We need to anticipate the geula, speedily in our days! Additional observation (in 2023): Perhaps this is a silver lining regarding the current situation of the significant increase in antisemitism in the United States and around the world in reaction to the war in Eretz Yisroel. Just maybe this is like a gift from Hashem to remind us not to be too comfortable in galus and to anxiously anticipate the geula.

Precision Punishment

The beginning of the parsha says "Hashem said to Moshe, 'come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst; and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Mitzraim (ais asher his'alalti b'Mitzrayim) and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am Hashem.'" (Shemos 10:1-2). What does the word his'alalti mean? Rashi interprets "see'chakti" (I made fun of them; I mocked them). The Torah uses the same word that it uses by Bilaam complaining to his donkey that he was making a fool out of him (Bamidbar 22:29).

The Tolner Rebbe of Yerushalayim notes that by no other makah, other than here at the beginning of the Parsha by Makas Arbeh (the Plague of Locusts), does it say "you should tell this over to your children and grandchildren." It is as if Hashem is telling Moshe, "I want you to tell your children how I 'played' with Pharaoh, how I made a laughing stock out of him." Why, of all the things that happened during the process of Yetzias Mitzrayim, is this the one thing that Hashem emphasizes for us to tell our children?

The Tolner Rebbe says that Pharaoh is referred to in two ways in the teachings of Chazal. Sometimes he is called Pharaoh the wicked (for example in Sotah 12a). This is certainly a title for which he qualifies, considering his sadism and cruelty as described by Chazal. However, Pharaoh is referred to in another way as well. Shlomo haMelech writes: "letz take..." (You should smite the scoffer...) (Mishlei 19:25). Rashi there says that the letz referenced in this pasuk is Pharaoh, who was smitten by plagues. Pharaoh is described as a person who mocks, who humiliates. That is what letzanus is. Letzanus means to take anything of value and to devalue it. Where do we see the letzanus of Pharaoh? Chazal say that Pharaoh subjected the Jews to "avodas perach" which they interpret as assigning women's work to men and men's work to women. What is the point of that? It is obviously an inefficient waste of the talents and strengths of his workers of both genders! Clearly the arrangement is a joke – just another way to humiliate the slaves. Alternatively, Chazal interpret avodas perach (as in Vayikra 25:43) as pointless labor – commanding slaves to do a hard job and then throwing the output into the garbage. (I did this only to make you work, I was not at all interested in the product you produced).

The whole purpose of Yetzias Mitzrayim, as the Ramban writes at the end of our Parsha, was to demonstrate that the Ribono shel Olam runs the world and He runs it with the principle of "midah k'neged midah" (measure for measure). When the Almighty punishes a person for his aveiros (sins), the punishment will precisely correspond to the aveira. The payback for wickedness occurs exactly the same way the original act of wickedness was performed.

It says in Shiras HaYam that some Mitzrim sank like a rock (Shemos 15:5); some sank like lead (Shemos 15:10), and some like straw (Shemos 15:7). Chazal say that it depended on how bad the individual Mitzrim were. The Mitzrim who were "not too bad" sank like a stone (they died quickly). Those who were crueler, were consumed like straw. Straw doesn't go down very

quickly. They realized they were drowning during a drawn out and terrifying ordeal. Why? It was midah k'neged midah. Each was punished precisely in accordance with their own level of wickedness.

The Ribono shel Olam wants us to tell our children the concept of Hashgacha Pratis (Personal Divine Providence). The Almighty knows everything a person does, and He keeps a record. When the time comes, He is going to give back precisely what is appropriate. "Tell your children how I mocked Mitzraim..." because this is the biggest demonstration of the Hashgacha Pratis – the tailor-made punishment. "Pharaoh made leitzanus from us; I am going to make leitzanus from him!"

The pasuk says, "G-d should take revenge before our eyes for the blood of his servants that has been spilled." (Tehillim 79:10) We look at the last two thousand years of history and see how much pain the non-Jews inflicted upon us, starting from the destruction of the Second Temple, and all the way through. We will witness that revenge, Y"YH, and they will get exactly what they deserve.

I recently read that the United Methodist Church of America, which has seven million members, just came out with a policy that they will not do any business with Israeli banks. This is part of the BDS (Boycott, Divest, and Sanction) movement. Do the Methodists do business with China? Do they do business with Saudi Arabia? Do they do business with all these murderous regimes? Of course! But because in Israel, people live on the "West Bank," they won't do business with us? It is such blatant antisemitism! Why are we held to a standard that nobody else is held to? It is for one simple reason. It is because we are Jews. I just can't wait to see what the Ribono shel Olam is going to do to the Methodists. And what He is going to do to the Nazis and the Germans and the French and the Spanish and the British and the Russians and the Ukrainians and the Poles, and the list goes on and on and on.

Tell your children that we are suffering now, but the day will come when we will see that the Ribono shel Olam will give it to them precisely the way they gave it to us. Pharaoh mocked us, the Almighty mocked him.

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The March of Folly

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There is a fascinating moment in the unfolding story of the plagues that should make us stop and take notice. At the opening of this week's parsha, seven plagues have now struck Egypt. The people are suffering. Several times Pharaoh seems to soften, only to harden his heart again. During the seventh plague, hail, he even seems to admit his mistake.

"Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. "This time I have sinned," he said to them. "The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong."

Ex. 9:27

But as soon as the plague is over, he changes his mind:

"He and his officials" says the Torah, "hardened their hearts."

Ex. 9:34

And now Moses and Aaron have come to warn of a further plague, potentially devastating, a plague of locusts that, they say, will devour all the grain left after the hail as well as the fruit of the trees. And for the first time we hear something we have not heard before.

Pharaoh's own advisors tell him he is making a mistake:

Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us?

Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?"

Ex. 10:7

These words immediately transform the situation. How so?

Back in 1984 the historian Barbara Tuchman published a famous book called The March of Folly. In it, she asked the great question: How is it that

throughout history intelligent people have made foolish decisions that were damaging both to their own position and to that of the people they led?

By this she did not mean, decisions that in retrospect proved to be the wrong ones. Anyone can make that kind of mistake. That is the nature of leadership and of life itself. We are called on to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see where we went wrong, because of factors we did not know about at the time.

What she was talking about were decisions that people could see at the time were the wrong ones. There were warnings and they were ignored. One example she gives is of the legend of the wooden horse of Troy. The Greeks had laid siege to Troy unsuccessfully for ten years. Eventually they appeared to give up and sail away, leaving behind them a giant wooden horse. The Trojans enthusiastically hauled the horse inside the city as a symbol of their victory. As we know, inside the horse were thirty Greek soldiers who, that night, came out of hiding and opened the city gates for the Greek army that had sailed back under cover of night.

It was a brilliant ploy. Laocoön, the Trojan priest, had guessed that it was a plot and warned his people, in the famous words, "I fear the Greeks even when they come bearing gifts." His warning was ignored, and Troy fell.

Another of Tuchman's examples is the papacy in the sixteenth century which had become corrupt, financially and in other ways. There were many calls for reform, but they were all ignored. The Vatican regarded itself, like some financial institutions today, as too big to fail. The result was the reformation and more than a century of religious war throughout Europe.

That is the context in which we should read the story of Pharaoh and his advisers. This is one of the first recorded instances of the march of folly.

How does it happen?

Some years ago, DreamWorks studio made an animated film about Moses and the Exodus story, called The Prince of Egypt. The producer, Jeffrey Katzenberg, invited me to see the film when it was about half complete, to see whether I felt that it was a responsible and sensitive way of telling the story, which I thought it was.

What fascinated me, and perhaps I should have understood this earlier, was that it portrayed Pharaoh not as an evil man but as a deeply conservative one, charged with maintaining what was already the longest-lived empire of the ancient world, and not allowing it, as it were, to be undermined by change. Let slaves go free, and who knows what will happen next? Royal authority will seem to have been defeated. A fracture would appear in the political structure. The seemingly unshakeable edifice of power will be seen to have been shaken. And that, for those who fear change, is the beginning of the end.

Under those circumstances it is possible to see why Pharaoh would refuse to listen to his advisers. In his eyes, they were weak, defeatist, giving in to pressure, and any sign of weakness in leadership only leads to more pressure and more capitulation. Better be strong, and continue to say "No," and simply endure one more plague.

We see Pharaoh as both wicked and foolish, because we have read the book. His advisers could see clearly that he was leading his people to disaster, but he may well have felt that he was being strong while they were merely fearful. Leadership is only easy, and its errors only clearly visible, in retrospect.

Yet Pharaoh remains an enduring symbol of a failure to listen to his own advisers. He could not see that the world had changed, that he was facing something new, that his enslavement of a people was no longer tolerable, that the old magic no longer worked, that the empire over which he presided was growing old, and that the more obstinate he became the closer he was bringing his people to tragedy.

Knowing how to listen to advice, how to respond to change and when to admit you've got it wrong, remain three of the most difficult tasks of leadership. Rejecting advice, refusing to change, and refusing to admit you're wrong, may look like strength to some. But, usually, they are the beginning of yet another march of folly.

Yeshiva University Community Mourns Passing of Rabbi Charlop, Long-Time RIETS Dean Jan 18, 2024 By: heisenman

An extraordinary leader, scholar, educator, and one of the architects of Yeshiva University as we know it today, **Rabbi Zevulun Charlop z"l**, YU '51, RIETS '54, **passed away on Tuesday**, beseiva tovah, at the age of 94. As the Max and Marian Grill Dean of the Rabbi Issac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) for more than 35 years, his impact on YU was deep and profound. Under his stewardship, RIETS experienced enormous growth, graduating thousands of rabbis, educators and Jewish scholars. As Dean of RIETS, Rabbi Charlop left a deep and enduring imprint on YU, becoming a role model for what it means to be a rabbi. "This yeshiva was forever changed, elevated and made great by the religious personality and character of our longtime rebbe," said Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, President of Yeshiva University.

Rabbi Charlop was a grandson of the saintly Yerushalmi Gaon Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop as well as the son of Rabbi Yechiel Michel Charlop, one of the leading rabbonim of the U.S. In leadership capacity at YU and in organizations across the country, he nurtured generations of rabbinic and lay leaders, impacting Jewish communities throughout the world. "My father was a great rabbi, and I wanted to be like him," Rabbi Charlop once said. "I knew I would never reach his heights, but nonetheless that's what I aspired to be. The word rabbi means teach, it's also the community; a man of great compassion and caring, you have to love your people no matter what. It's not always easy." For 54 years, Rav Charlop served as the rov of the Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway in the Bronx — where he spent most of his life. Dedicated to God and to the Jewish people, a scholar of Torah, rabbinic law, and American history, Rabbi Charlop was a role model for rabbinical students, devoting his life to educating future generations of rabbis; his goal was always to create rabbis who could relate to the broadest range of Jews throughout the country and world. With a passion for Judaism and for life, he embodied the ideals of Yeshiva University.

"At the heart of Rabbi Charlop was Yeshiva University, its students, its leadership, its rabbeim," said Yaakov Neuburger, Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS and Rabbi Charlop's son in law. "He was one of the great stewards of Yeshiva University and he believed with the greatest passion in what Yeshiva University accomplishes." "Rabbi Charlop was completely unique individual," said Rabbi Mordechai Willig, Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS. "There was no one like him. He fought the battles of Hashem, for the sake of heaven, without any personal interest whatsoever, without fear, for the sake of the truth." Rabbi Charlop authored numerous scholarly essays, including "The Making of Orthodox Rabbis" in Encyclopedia Judaica and "G-d in History and Halakha from the Perspective of American History." He also was the editor of novellae on Torah and Talmud by his late father and the author of Shefa Yamim, a 470-page collection of his original Torah thoughts. Zevulun Charlop served as president of the American Committee for the United Charities in Israel, General Israel Orphans Home for Girls in Jerusalem, and the National Council of Young Israel rabbis. May Hashem comfort the family with all those who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/interviews-and-profiles/tales-of-rav-kook-ben-gurion-rav-shneur-kotler-and-more-an-interview-with-yus-rabbi-zevulun-charlop/2014/04/14/>

Tales Of Rav Kook, Ben-Gurion, the Chazon Ish, And More: An Interview With YU's Rabbi Zevulun Charlop

By Elliot Resnick - 15 Nisan 5774 – April 14, 2014

Rabbi Zevulun Charlop is a mind rich with fascinating stories and historical anecdotes. The son and grandson of distinguished rabbis, Rabbi Charlop was head of Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) from 1971-2008. He is currently special adviser to YU President Richard Joel on yeshiva affairs and rav of Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway. The financially strapped Bronx congregation – which once boasted hundreds of members – has not davened together since July due to extensive

water damage to its synagogue. But Rabbi Charlop has not entirely given up hope of it meeting once again

The Jewish Press recently met with him in his Washington Heights office. The Jewish Press: What's your background? Rabbi Charlop: I was born in the Bronx, and I think the Yankees and I are the only ones who never left. My father, Rav Yechiel Michel Charlop, was one of the most famous rabbis in the country. He was born in Yerushalayim and studied in some of the finest yeshivas there. He also had a special chavrusah with both Rav Kook and Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and was the conduit between them. Each one used to ask about the other and would send his regards through my father. Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer wrote a kuntrus for my father. I met Rav Shneur Kotler – Rav Meltzer's grandson – and he said, "It's impossible! My grandfather never wrote a kuntrus for anybody." But I found it and showed it to him. When my father left Eretz Yisrael, my grandfather said he never knew anyone who left to America knowing all of Bavli and Yerushalmi be'al peh.... My father wrote three sefarim on one amud of Shas.

When did your father leave to America? In 1920. In America he studied in [RIETS]. In fact, he received the first Rokeach Award. Rokeach, the famous company, was founded by a very religious man who came from Kovno. He's famous for making kosher soap [since soap is usually made with tallow]. Many rabbanim gave heterim because soap is eino ra'ui l'achilas kelev, but Rav Yitzchak Elchanan, the rav of Kovno, felt [soap needed to be kosher]. So he sent a call out to all the chemists, and Yisrael Rokeach made this soap. The bars were blue and red – for milchig and fleishig. It was such a successful business that the Russian government was going to put Rokeach in jail in order to take over his business. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan found out about it and told him to run to America. So he came here and many years later he offered a \$5,000 prize for getting the highest yoreh yoreh, yadin yadin. My father won the first one. Later, my father served as a rabbi in Canton, Ohio and Omaha, Nebraska and, in 1925, he became the rabbi of the Bronx Jewish Center, which was the largest synagogue in the Bronx. The Bronx had close to 700,000 Jews at the time – more than the entire Jewish population in Israel when Israel was created in 1948.

What schools did you attend growing up? Yeshiva Salanter, which was the only yeshiva in the Bronx, TA [Talmudical Academy], Yeshiva College, Columbia University, and RIETS. From there I became the rabbi of the Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway. This year would have been my 60th in that shul.

Is it true that the teachers in Yeshivas Salanter taught in ivris b'ivris? Yes, not ivrit b'ivrit, but ivris b'ivris. I found a remarkable letter signed by all the rebbeim of [RIETS] which was sent to Yeshivas Salanter – I think it was instigated by Rav Moshe Soloveitchik – and it stated that the only way to learn Gemara is in Yiddish. [They stated their opinion] as a halacha. They said Yiddish has been used for centuries, the thinking is in Yiddish, and that Yeshivas Salanter therefore has to teach Gemara in Yiddish, not ivris. The only one who didn't sign the letter was Dr. [Bernard] Revel, and I think it's probably because he didn't approve.

What was the logic behind teaching in ivris and not ivrit? The great Hebraists throughout the world spoke in ivris because it was lashon ashkenazis. That's the way people read Chumash and davened. Many Hebraists felt that was the real Hebrew.

Can you speak a bit about your grandfather, Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop? He was a close student of Rav Kook, correct? My grandfather was a great tzaddik and gaon.... When the state was established, gedolim went to Ben-Gurion and asked him not to draft women and, later, yeshiva bachrim. If you read history books, they'll name all the gedolim who [supposedly convinced Ben-Gurion to leave women and yeshiva bachurim alone]. But the truth of the matter is that he rejected them. It was only because of my grandfather who came to him and cried.

Wasn't it the Chazon Ish who convinced Ben-Gurion? According to a new biography about my grandfather that just came out, the Chazon Ish asked my grandfather to go to Ben-Gurion. It's in the [official record] of the Knesset. When Ben-Gurion said he's making these exemptions, his own party asked,

“What’s going on here?” Ben-Gurion said in the Knesset: “I did it only for Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop.”

Why would he do it for your grandfather? Because my grandfather loved all Jews and was a lover of Eretz Yisrael.

How close was your grandfather to Rav Kook? He was a talmid chaver. He was the only one in the room when Rav Kook died, and he gave an initial hesped when they were metaher Rav Kook’s body.... They wrote amazing letters to each other. Someone once publicly called my zaidie a talmid chaver of Rav Kook, so my zaidie wrote to Rav Kook, saying, “I apologize, I never said to anybody that I’m, chas v’chalilah, your talmid chaver. How could I even dream of being your talmid – let alone your talmid chaver?” And Rav Kook wrote back, “How could I say that you’re my talmid? You’re my chaver.”

How did your grandfather become Rav Kook’s talmid? He was haredi, completely haredi, like all the other Yerushalmim. He was considered a tzaddik when he was 20, 25 years old. His father came to Eretz Yisrael in 1842 or 1843 as part of one of the last waves of [aliyah by] the Vilna Gaon’s students. My great-grandfather was one of the dayanim of Reb Yehoshua Leib Diskin, who was the greatest rav of his time. They say that whenever Rav Chaim Soloveitchik and the Beis HaLevi saw a piece of Torah of Reb Yehoshua Leib, they would begin to shake. We can’t even imagine that today. When my grandfather was a bachur, from the age of 12 and on, he worked with Reb Yehoshua Leib, helping him mesader his writings because Reb Yehoshua Leib was already nearly blind. My grandfather was known as one of the great iluyim of Yerushalayim, maybe the greatest. He got semicha from the Ridvaz, and the Ridvaz said he could be the rabbi in the greatest Jewish cities in the world. This was when my zaidie was in his early 20s. If he was so haredi, how did he become close to Rav Kook? When he was very young, he used to learn so hard that he wasn’t well and the doctor told him to go to Yaffo. So he went. It was the year, or the year after, Rav Kook came from Europe, and they had big signs on the walls of Yaffo that Rav Kook was speaking between Minchah and Ma’ariv. My zaidie debated with himself whether he should go because everybody said Rav Kook was too modern. But he knew that Rav Kook was a great gadol, so he decided to go. He walked into the shul, which was packed, and stood in the back. He listened and was transfixed. He began to stare at Rav Kook, and Rav Kook saw this tall young man fixated on him, and he became fixated on my zaidie. When it was over, Rav Kook looked for him but couldn’t find him. So he went over to the great posek, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, who was also there, and asked him, “Do you know that tall young man who came in?” Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank said, “Yes, that’s Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, one of the iluyim of Yerushalayim.” He said, “I want you to find him and tell him to see me.” The rest is history.

What about Rav Kook so impressed your grandfather? His greatness. He saw that Rav Kook was a gaon olam, even as he was a gaon b’machshavah. My zaidie was very big in machshavah himself. As dean of YU’s rabbinical school for 37 years, you obviously interacted with many interesting rabbanim, such as Rav Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik, Rav Dovid Lifshitz, and Rav Mendel Zaks, the Chofetz Chaim’s son-in-law.

Can you talk a bit about Rav Zaks? Rav Mendel Zaks was the bochen of the yeshiva. He was a gadol and the rosh yeshiva of Radun while the Chofetz Chaim was still alive. I remember at his levayah, Dr. Belkin [YU’s president], who received semicha from the Chofetz Chaim when he was 17, said he knows for a fact that Reb Mendel edited [portions of] the Mishnah Berurah and the Chofetz Chaim accepted all his emendations. Reb Mendel Zaks had a son, Reb Gershon Sacks, who was a gadol olam. He began the Chofetz Chaim yeshivas in Monsey. Reb Gershon gave shiurim and some of the biggest rebbeim here [at YU] went faithfully every week to hear him. What was your relationship with Rav Soloveitchik [popularly called “the Rav”] like? I saw the Rav every week. At the beginning [when I first became dean of RIETS], the Rav would walk into my office several times a year to show that I was like his boss, chas v’chalilah. I was very upset, and later on he didn’t do it. He was a great supporter of mine. At the time, the

relationship between the Rav and Dr. Belkin was very difficult – which was very well known – but they both, for reasons unbeknownst to me, liked me very much and trusted me, and I helped bring them together.

You must have had many interesting encounters with Rav Soloveitchik. Can you share just one? The story that is most interesting and unbelievable is one I told at his tenth yahrzeit. There was a man, a judge in New Jersey, who was married to a cousin of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The couple was married for 11 or 12 years but didn’t have any children, so they decided to adopt. She went to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, her cousin, but the Rebbe was very much opposed to adoption because of the problem of yichud. There are heterim, but the Rebbe was against it. He said, though, that she should go to Rabbi Soloveitchik, and he’ll allow you to do it. Something like that. So the husband came to me and said he wanted to see the Rav. I told the Rav the story, but he got very upset. He said, “The Rebbe sends him to me [implying that the Rav was a meikil]? It’s his cousin and I should pasken.” He was very much opposed. So I told him, “They’re going to get divorced. Also, the Rebbe didn’t say no to them. The Rebbe wanted to save his cousin, but he just couldn’t do it because he publicly came out against adoption.” The Rav was finally assuaged, and because the Rav was the Rav, I couldn’t imagine he wouldn’t give them a heter. After meeting the Rav [and not getting a conclusive answer], they wanted to meet him again. But the Rav backtracked and said he didn’t want to see them. Later he agreed, but when they knocked on his door, he didn’t answer. I called him up and said, “They’re knocking on your door...” He said, “I don’t want...” He was backtracking again. Finally, he opened the door and took them in. Now, I had told the husband that the Rav understands the situation and I’m almost sure he’ll say it’s all right. After the meeting, I spoke to him and he said the Rav was going in that direction but then stopped and said, “Come back in a year. If you don’t have a child in a year, ask me again.” It was a crazy answer. I called the Rav and said, “What happened?” He said, “I was going to do it. But then,” he said, “I told the Eibershter that if You don’t give this woman a child within a year, I’m going to give her the heter.” About four or five months later, the man called me up and said his wife became pregnant for the first time. She gave birth several weeks before the year was up. They wanted the Rav to be the sandek, so I went and spoke to the Rav. He started to laugh. “I’m not a rebbe, chas v’chalilah. I didn’t do it. What did I do?”

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Rabbi Daniel Stein

Take the Egyptian Clothing

On their way out of Mitzrayim, at the behest of Moshe Rabbeinu, the Jewish people "borrowed from the Egyptians silver objects, golden objects, and garments" (Shemos 12:35). Many meforshim wonder how this could have been sanctioned and even endorsed. After all, according to the Medrash (Psikta Zutrasa, Shemos 6:6) a contributing factor to the survival of the Jewish people was their staunch refusal to adopt the Egyptian mode of dress. If the Egyptian clothing was so problematic, why were the Jewish people permitted and encouraged to wear them upon leaving? The Shinever Rebbe (Divrei Yechezkel) suggests that in fact the Egyptian clothing was not meant to be worn as is, but deconstructed and used for its fabric. Alternatively, Rav Baruch ha-Levi Epstein (Tosefes Baracha) submits that the length of the Egyptian clothing caused it to be considered immodest. For this reason, the Jewish people were specifically instructed to "place them on your sons and daughters" (Shemos 3:22) for whom the shorter length might have been suitable and appropriate.

More convincingly, Rav Yosef Sorotzkin (Meged Yosef) proposes that the Egyptian clothing was not actually inherently distasteful or objectionable at all. The effort to maintain a distinctly Jewish wardrobe, and the resistance to conform to the prevailing trends, was part of a coordinated effort to create an embankment against the tide of acculturation and assimilation. By maintaining their native names, language, and style of dress, the Jewish

people hoped to protect and preserve their unique identity and mission from the alluring onslaught of Egyptian culture. However, upon leaving Egypt and entering the desert, the boycott of Egyptian clothing would no longer be relevant. Perpetuating the fierce battle against the local particulars of Egyptian society while removed and residing far away in the desert would be akin to the last stand of Hiroo Onoda and wrestling with the ghosts of the past. To avoid this kind of anachronistic folly, the Jewish people were asked to place the Egyptian clothing, if not on themselves, at least on their children. It might have been too soon or too difficult for the adults to don the very object of their remonstrations, but the children needed to pivot and be poised to confront the challenges that lied ahead.

While the dangers and pitfalls of galus are universal and omnipresent, every iteration comes dressed in a different set of clothing. The Gemara (Menachos 28b) states that almost all the utensils fashioned by Moshe for the Mishkan could be passed down to future generations. Only the chatzosros, the silver trumpets used to gather the people for the purpose of traveling or waging war, needed to be forged anew. Rav Yechezkel Abramsky explains that the utensils represent the performance of the mitzvos and avodas Hashem whose methods, forms, and principles are immutable and eternal. Therefore, the utensils from one generation are equally effective and valid in subsequent generations since the performance and substance of the mitzvos ought to be identical. However, the chatzosros were meant to inspire the people to move and change, and although its call and content was consistent, the vehicle and method used to convey its message must be adapted to the current situation. The leaders in every generation are charged with creating their own set of chatzosros to amplify the timeless values and lessons of the Torah in a way that will resonate and be applicable to the context and constituency of the times.

Indeed, when the proper pitch and chord of the chatzosros is struck the Jewish people are acutely attuned and inclined to listen. The Gemara (Sotah 12a) tells us, "Amram, the father of Moshe was the gadol hador. Once he saw that Pharaoh said: Every son that is born you shall cast into the river and every daughter you shall save alive, he said: We are laboring for nothing by bringing children into the world to be killed. Therefore, he arose and divorced his wife. All others who saw this followed his example and arose and divorced their wives. His daughter, Miriam, said to him: Father, your decree is harsher for the Jewish people than that of Pharaoh, as Pharaoh decreed only regarding the males, but you decreed both on the males and on the females. And now no children will be born. Amram accepted his daughter's words and arose and remarried his wife, and all others who saw this followed his example and arose and brought back their wives."

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein (Ohr Yechezkel) notes the astonishingly deferential way the Jewish people followed Amram's personal example. Without plastering pashkevilim on the walls of the city or dispatching roaming loudspeakers proclaiming the binding nature of his position, the entirety of the Jewish community undertook the drastic step of divorcing and then remarrying their wives without any clarifications, comments, or complaints. We can only imagine what the contemporary reaction would be to such a bold decision and retraction. What accounts for this disparity? Have the temperament and attitude of the Jewish people changed so much?

It seems that the secret to Amram's implicit influence over the Jewish people is hinted to by another detail of the story. After Miriam informed her father that his actions would ultimately cause the demise of the Jewish people, he heard her argument and changed course. But why did he need Miriam to alert him to this eventuality? Could he not foresee independently that the Jewish people would not be viable for very long as a nation of divorced couples and stagnating families?

Perhaps Amram only intended to separate from his wife temporarily as a sign of solidarity. Many families had been shattered by the death of their sons who were forcibly drowned in the Nile. As far as we know, Amram was not impacted personally by this barbaric decree, but he likely felt uncomfortable continuing his normal routine at home, with his family intact, while others were suffering and sacrificing. Much like the sentiment today, for those of us

on the sidelines of the war in Eretz Yisrael, he was desperate to do something to show his support for those who were grieving and anxious, so he suspended his own marriage. Many others presumably felt the same way and therefore, without any prompting, immediately followed suit. However, Miriam observed that this movement was in fact counterproductive. Instead of strengthening the resolve of the families who were directly affected, as intended, it had caused them to become more despondent and hopeless. Amram accepted her assessment and resumed his regular family life in the hopes of restoring their sense of optimism. Once again, the rest of Jewish people also resumed their marriages in a resounding chorus of confidence about the resiliency of the Jewish future.

Amram did not need to give fiery derashos, issue a kol korei, or write a teshuvah to persuade people of his opinion. He had authority because he was speaking to the heart and mood of the people. They intuitively knew that he had hit the mark and therefore they responded in kind. During the uncertainty of a crisis, when the hearts of the Jewish people are broken, they crave rabbinic guidance, they long for it instinctively. But for it to be effective it is essential that it be in tune and in touch with the times. This lesson is already alluded to by the pasuk, "you shall come ... to the judge who will be in those days" (Devarim 17:9). Rashi comments, "and even though he is not as eminent as other judges that have preceded him ... you have none else but the judge that lives in your days." Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz (Sichas Mussar) comments that this directive is not a begrudging obligation to adhere to the rulings of a declining and dwindling selection of judges, since there is no other option, rather it is a glowing endorsement of their credentials. Only leaders who "live in your days" are qualified and equipped to confront the challenges of the times. We are told, "remember the days of old understand the years of generations" (Devarim 32:7). The root "shanah" or "year" is related to the root "shinui" or "difference," because while we are enjoined to revere and remember the teachings of the past we must simultaneously contemplate and be sensitive to the differences that exist between generations.

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Hope and Joy during Wartime

Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The most reasonable solution for Gaza is encouraging the emigration of the residents outside the country's borders * There is room for joy in private matters even during this time, as long as we continue to remember alongside this our soldiers who are fighting, and the fallen and kidnapped * A woman who marries a husband from a different ethnic community should only change her customs regarding practices that were clear in his home; for the rest of the laws, they should follow the simple halachic principles, and not adhere strictly to the ethnic community's customs mentioned in books In these days of war, when hearing about more holy soldiers who gave their lives to protect the nation and land, or were severely injured, a painful feeling of gloom and frustration arises. Why aren't we managing to defeat Hamas? (They prepared for war against us much better than the security establishment estimated). Why did the IDF leaders fall asleep on guard, and why did they prefer containment, instead of a severe attack one hundredfold on any provocation? (There was a mistaken perception regarding the enemy's intentions). Why did the political leadership fail in decisions regarding the withdrawal from Sinai, the Oslo Accords, establishing the terror authority in Judea and Samaria, the withdrawal from Lebanon, and the withdrawal from Gush Katif? (Overall weakness in fulfilling the national vision of settling the Land, and standing up to the enemy).

However, from this week's Torah portion we can find a direction of consolation. We learned that sometimes the process lengthens, and at certain stages, it seems as if the situation is becoming worse; indeed, Pharaoh intensified the enslavement, but in the end, it turns out that this too was for the better, because as a result of this, the Egyptians received more severe plagues, and God and Israel's honor in the world, increased.

Hope

Ultimately, the reasonable solution for the war between us and the Arabs is expulsion of the Arab enemy from the entire Land of Israel. Without this, we will need to continue fighting them again and again, killing thousands and tens of thousands, and sacrificing precious victims.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, internal and external, we have difficulty encouraging emigration of Arabs who want to destroy the State of Israel, and rewarding those who want the Jewish state's wellbeing. The longer the war continues, the Gaza Strip will become a more difficult place to live in, and it will take many years to recover. This situation can encourage the emigration of many Arabs who have received an evil education to hate Israel, and were trained to devote the majority of their efforts to war against us. We must act so that the political and security leadership will always prefer to destroy the enemy's houses and not endanger our soldiers, and remember that the more devastated Gaza is, the more security we will have – and not hinder this goal by hasty discussions about “the day after”. Discussions, that as long as they are not aimed at encouraging emigration of our Arab enemies, are likely to produce hasty failed “solutions”, similar to the previous “solutions”.

Small Joys during Wartime

Question from a youth: Is it proper to be happy during such a time of war and tension and worry for our soldiers? For example, I passed a driving test yesterday. Can I be happy about this, or do I need to restrain happiness in solidarity with the soldiers and mourning families?

A: Regarding questions like these our Sages said “A wise question, is half the answer”. The very posing of the question already points to the solution, for if one is happy while forgetting the soldiers and mourners, then this is indeed problematic happiness, which ignores the challenges and difficulties. But when one remembers the great challenges ahead of us, identifies with the sorrow of the mourners for the holy ones who gave their lives to protect the nation and land, and prays for the soldiers, then one can be happy.

In addition, intend that with the driver's license you will do good deeds, help parents and grandparents, volunteer to drive those who need it, drive on straight paths, and of course, observe all safety rules.

Blessing “Shehecheyanu” for Passing a Driving Test

It is worth mentioning here that our Sages enacted blessing “Shehecheyanu” (a common Jewish blessing to celebrate special occasions) when receiving good news, and this includes one who was notified that he passed a driving test, or received a high grade on a psychometric exam or another important test – if one is very happy about this, he should bless “Shehecheyanu”. And similarly, one who was accepted to a job he wanted, and is happy about this – should bless “Shehecheyanu” (Peninei Halakha: Berachot 17: 8).

Ethnic Customs between Spouses

In a state of war, the great value of Jewish unity is revealed, and here is a question arising from the blessed process of ‘Ingathering of the Exiles’, which is the foundation of unity.

Q: “Rabbi, I will first take this opportunity to thank you for the ‘Peninei Halakha’ books that gave me an entrance to the world of halakha, and learn it in a clear and joyous manner. I will be marrying my beloved in another five months. I come from a family that immigrated from Ashkenaz, and my future bride is from Eastern ethnic communities. I wanted to know if my fiancé needs to change all of her minhagim (customs) and follow Ashkenazic halakhic rulings in an absolute manner, or are there certain things, she can remain with the customs she had at home? And if so, in which situations? I would also appreciate knowing if there is a centralized place where I can learn all of the laws that have differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, according to your rulings.

I will specify questions that have arisen so far:

When we are guests at their home for Passover, can I eat kitniyot (legumes), or at least can my fiancé eat them?

Are we allowed to eat at her parents' home on glass dishes, which they use for both dairy and meat?

Does my fiancé need to receive bridal counseling adapted for Ashkenazi women?

I saw that in ‘Peninei Halakha’ you wrote that the woman needs to change her prayer nusach (version) by the time her children reach education age. Is this a recommendation, or an obligation, to change the nusach?

Answer

In general, the differences between customs are not great, and mainly relate to nusach of prayer. And in halakha, besides the differences not being great, almost always the differences are not between all Ashkenazim, and all Sephardim, but rather, between the majority of Ashkenazim, and a minority of Sephardim, and between the majority of Sephardim, and a minority of Ashkenazim. Therefore, you will not find books that orders the differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, because the topic is fundamentally not orderly, and much more detailed than the general division of Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Therefore, my approach is that in customs known to all from what was seen at one's father's home, it is proper to continue acting in accordance with that custom. And regarding what is not known unless written in books, it is proper to act according to the general halakhic principles, such as safeika d'orita le'chumra (when a person has a doubt on a Biblical command, then we are stringent) and d'Rabanan le'kula (Rabbinic law, we are lenient); halakha follows the majority opinion, and similar principles, as explained in ‘Peninei Halakha’.

Kashrut and Legumes

And from here, to the questions themselves. The Rashbatz (Responsa Tashbetz 3:179) wrote that it is obvious, without any doubt, that it is impossible for a couple to regularly eat at the same table, when some foods are permitted for one, and forbidden for the other. Therefore, a woman needs to follow her husband's customs, since, according to halakha, ishto k'gufo (one's wife is like his own body). And as we have learned that when a Jewish woman marries a Kohen, she has the law of a kohenet and eats terumah, and a Kohen's daughter who married a regular Jew, has the law of a regular Jewess, forbidden from eating terumah.

According to this, a woman from Ashkenazi descendants who married a Sephardic man, eats kitniyot on Passover, and a woman from Sephardic descendants who married an Ashkenazi man, does not eat kitniyot on Passover. However, if they are at her parents' home, and she strongly wishes to eat kitniyot with them, in the first years of their marriage, she can eat them. This is because minhag ha'makom (the local custom) also carries weight, and since she was already accustomed to doing so at their home, she can continue her previous custom of eating with them. But as their children grow older, she should refrain from doing so even at her parents' home, so as not to confuse the children.

Glass Utensils for Meat and Dairy According to Sephardic Customs

Indeed according to Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 451:26), it is permitted to use glass utensils for dairy and meat with washing in between, and many have ruled this way in practice (Prishah, Sdei Chemed, Yabi'a Omer vol. 4, Yoreh De'ah 5; Nitvei Am, Shemesh U'Magen), while the Rema was strict. However, even among Sephardic poskim, there were those who tended to be strict (Kenesset HaGedolah, Olat Zophim, Rabbi Chaim David Halevi), and apparently, in practice, they did not have the custom to be lenient about this. On the other hand, even among Ashkenazi poskim, there were those who were lenient about this (She'elat Ya'avetz, Chamudei Daniel, Yad Yehuda). In practice, it is preferable even for Sephardim not to eat meat and dairy foods using the same glass dishes, since this kula (leniency) contradicts the other accepted separation practices among Jews. However, one whose family custom follows the lenient opinion, may of course continue their custom (see, all of this, in ‘Peninei Halakha: Kashrut’ 32:5, 4).

When Ashkenazim are guests at Sephardim who have the custom to eat meat and dairy in the same glass dishes, they can eat in their dishes without any concern, since it is absolutely clear that there is no intermixing of meat and dairy flavors. All the more, a groom should act this way when he is a guest at his wife's parents' home.

Bridal Counseling

Your fiancé can receive counseling from any bridal counselor, since the differences between ethnic community customs are small. The most

important thing is that the counselor is good, explains the mitzvah of conjugal happiness well, and does not confuse chumrot (stringencies) with halakhot.

Regarding the letter of the law, even though you follow Ashkenazi customs, it is proper for both of you that your fiancé continue the custom of the Shulchan Aruch, who is lenient regarding waiting days, before starting the seven clean days. Incidentally, as with all disputes, this is not a dispute between Sephardic and Ashkenazi customs, since even among Sephardim, there were those poskim who were stricter than Ashkenazim; rather, there was a dispute between Shulchan Aruch, and Rema. And since Shulchan Aruch ruled according to the majority opinion of the vast majority of Rishonim (early authorities), and the stringency here undermines the mitzvah of conjugal duty, it is proper that your wife continue the custom of her family (see, 'Peninei Halakha: Taharat Ha'Mishpacha 4:7).

Changing Prayer Nusach

A woman who marries a husband from a different ethnic community, has the law of one who moves to live in a place where everyone practices differently than what she was used to, that since she intends to live there permanently, she must nullify her previous customs, and practice according to the custom of the people of her new place (based on Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 214:2; Orach Chaim 568:4, Mishnah Berurah 14). And similarly regarding nusach of prayer, it is proper for the woman to pray and bless according to her husband's nusach, so there will not be two different nusach's in the same home.

However if this does not bother her husband, and it is difficult for her to switch to his nusach, regarding what she prays silently – she can continue praying in the nusach of her father's home.

And when their children reach education age, she must educate them to pray and bless according to her husband's nusach. Therefore, even if her husband agreed for her to continue praying and blessing in the nusach she was used to, when their children reach education age, it is good for her to switch to her husband's nusach, so it will be easier for her to educate them in prayer and blessings ('Peninei Halakha: Women's Prayer 24:4). However, sometimes, for Birkat Hamazon, since it is easy to teach the children to bless using the Ashkenazi nusach tune, in many homes, the husband also agrees for them to bless using the Ashkenazi nusach.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/survival-2/2024/01/18/>

The Jewish Press

Survival

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser - 8 Shevat 5784 – January 18, 2024 0

“Against all the Children of Israel, not one dog shall whet its tongue ...” (Shemos 11:7).

The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni (187) tells us that R' Yeshaya, a disciple of R' Chanina ben Dosa fasted 85 days because he could not understand why the dogs, of whom it is said (Yeshaya 56:11), “the dogs are greedy and do not know satiation,” should merit to sing praise to Hashem. An angel came down from Heaven and told him to stop fasting because it was a Heavenly decree, and its secret had only ever been revealed to Chabakuk. However, since he was a disciple of such an illustrious individual the angel would give him an explanation. Simply, since the dogs did not bark or growl, they will merit to sing praise to Hashem in the world-to-come. The angel further said, “Concerning your question, return and do not speak anymore of this, as it says (Mishlei 21:23), ‘One who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles.’”

The concluding words of the angel need an explanation. R' Yeshaya properly asked why the dogs merit to sing the praise of Hashem. He also received an appropriate answer from the angel. Why was it necessary, then, for the angel to caution R' Yeshaya not to pursue any further inquiry?

The Yalkut Shimoni (Chabakuk 563) relates that four individuals arranged prayers that upset Heaven, among them Chabakuk who said (1:3-4), “Why do You allow me to see iniquity ... that is why the Torah is weakened ...”

He saw Chananya, Mishoel and Azaryah enter the burning furnace and emerge unscathed, and he saw R' Chananya ben Tradyon and his colleagues consumed in fire. Chabakuk became upset and cried out, “These are righteous, and these are righteous; these are pure and these are pure; these were saved and these were not.” Hashem appeared to Chabakuk and said, “Isn't it written (Devarim 32:4), ‘a G-d of faith without injustice’ – there are no mistakes?” At that moment, Chabakuk expressed his regret and said (3:1), “A prayer of Chabakuk for erroneous utterances.” Rashi expounds that Chabakuk asked for mercy for challenging the middas hadin (the Attribute of Justice) of Hashem.

The angel's concluding remark to R' Yeshaya is to teach that emunah in Hashem means not asking such questions. The Talmud (Makkos 24a) states that a number of individuals sought to establish the defining foundation(s) of Torah. Dovid HaMelech established the Torah on eleven mitzvos; Yeshaya established it on six mitzvos, and Chabakuk established it on the one mitzvah of emunah, as Hashem told Chabakuk (Chabakuk 2:4), “But the righteous person shall live through his faith.”

Hashem revealed to Chabakuk the foundation of creation that keeps a person strong in any situation. It is our primary exercise and endeavor in the service of Hashem. It is specifically when it is impossible for a person to analyze the guiding philosophy of world events that emunah plays a dominant role. Emunah is an amalgam of hope, anticipation and patience. Emunah is not the ability to calculate the how, the why and the what.

Rav Menashe Reisman observes that the main essence of emunah is believing in Hashem when one could have questions. Emunah is seeing R' Chananya ben Tradyon marched to his death, or R' Akiva's flesh being combed with iron combs and understanding that all that happens is hashgacha (Divine Providence). When Chananya, Mishoel and Azaryah entered the fiery furnace they had no questions or insights on Hashem's conduct. When they emerged unharmed, to the extent that their clothes did not even smell of smoke, Nevuchadnezzar was so affected that he wanted to make them gods and to sing praise to Hashem Himself. Why, then, could not Hashem have saved the Ten Martyrs from their gruesome deaths? It is such circumstances and sequence of events that demand “But the righteous person shall live through his faith.” When one has questions about Hashem's ways that is when he needs to work harder in his service of Hashem and strengthen his emunah.

The great Rosh Yeshiva of Netzach Yisroel, **R' Yisroel Gustman**, lived in Rechavia. Once, when his disciples passed by his house, they saw the Rav in front of his house tending to his garden. Feeling that it was beneath his dignity, they quickly offered to tend to the plants for him, however he demurred. The next time, they came they saw Rav Gustman watering his plants. “Please let me water it for you,” offered one of the students.

“Thank you, but I'd rather do it myself,” said Rav Gustman. When the students came a third time and saw Rav Gustman pulling out weeds from his garden, they could not understand his insistence on doing it himself, and asked him the reason.

He explained that he was once walking in the forest with **R' Chaim Ozer** as they were engaged in a Talmudic discussion. Suddenly R' Chaim Ozer interrupted himself to point out an edible plant that he saw growing in the ground.

As they continued their walk, R' Chaim Ozer interrupted the conversation again to point out a plant that was poisonous.

They continued to walk and talk, but every once in a while, R' Chaim Ozer would stop to point out various plants that were nutritious, or difficult to digest, poisonous, or easily found in the forest.

Rav Gustman admitted to the students that he had been baffled by R' Chaim Ozer's conduct and could not understand why he would take away time from learning to point out all these different plants.

Soon after, World War II broke out and Rav Gustman was forced to escape into the forest. It was difficult to survive without food. However, he suddenly recalled that walk in the forest when R' Chaim Ozer had pointed

out the different plants in the forest that were edible. Rav Gustman sustained himself on these plants for many years and his life was saved.

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Depressing Time, Productive Time, and Redemptive Time Is Time a Storm in Which We Are All Lost?

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

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]

שמות רבה טו, יא: דבר אחר, התנש הזה לכם. הקדא הוא דקתיב (תהלים לג, יב) אשכרי הגוי אשכרי ה' אלהיו, משבסר הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו, קבע בו ראשי חדשים ושנים, וקשבסר ביעקב ובניו קבע בו ראש חדשים של גאולה.

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, 10 Shevat, marks the 74th anniversary of the passing of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950), who passed away on Shabbos morning, Parshas Bo, 10 Shevat, 5710, January 28, 1950. On the same day, one year later, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbem succeeded his father-in-law as the leader of Chabad-Lubavitch. The following insight is characteristic of the profundity and richness of the Rebbe's Torah insights 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 can 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.)

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Parshas Bo

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Z’ev Ben Zion, William Freiman.

The Future Begins Now

That you may tell in the ears of your son, and of your grandson, how I toyed with the Egyptians, and my signs which I have done among them; that you may know that I am Hashem [...] (10:2).

The Torah informs us that one of the purposes of the makkos was to provide us with a tool to explain to our children the greatness of Hashem. This, of course, is the source of the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, relating the events that unfolded in Egypt.

However, the construct of the verse is a little odd; the verse ends with the words “that you may know that I am Hashem.” As the purpose of describing what occurred in Egypt is to relate the greatness of Hashem, would it not seem imperative for the narrator of the story to first know the greatness of Hashem before he tells it over to his children? Why is it only AFTER relating the story that one becomes sensitized to the greatness of Hashem? The Torah is revealing to us a remarkable truism of life. Obviously, one must know the facts of the story before giving them over, but the lesson of the story, and what we learn to do as a result of it, is somewhat fluid. There are many people in possession of facts who make contrary life choices. Whether it’s about quitting smoking, losing weight, or leaving an abusive relationship, people often choose one more cigarette, one more donut, and one more day; knowing full well that the decision is incorrect.

We live in a culture that is often preoccupied with “yichus” — one’s lineage, as in parents and grandparents. However, most fail to recognize that the truly defining element of one’s relationship with Hashem is the yichus of our children and grandchildren. This is the only real yichus that we should be preoccupied with. Why? Because nearly everyone will follow the path their children and grandchildren have chosen — when it comes to choosing between family and religion most people choose family. In other words, if our kids become more religious we make decisions to accommodate them and if, chalilah, they choose otherwise we make decisions to accommodate that choice as well, even if it means compromising our own former value system.

The possuk is teaching us that only AFTER teaching the greatness of Hashem to your children will you “know that I am Hashem.” Remarkably, your relationship with Hashem depends on how well you have taught your children because that will likely define where you end up as well.

Who is a Jew?

[...] at midnight Hashem struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon (12:29).

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the firstborn sons of the captives were killed. After all, they weren’t even citizens of Egypt and had nothing to do with the enslavement of the Jews. Rashi therefore explains it was either because they were rejoicing at how the Jews were being treated (and would have participated had they been given an opportunity — much like the Nazi soldiers who claimed “to only be following orders” but in every picture they are laughing and jeering while terrorizing and abusing the German and Polish Jews) — or so that the captives couldn’t claim it was “their” God who was bringing Makkos Bechoros upon the Egyptians. In other words, according to Rashi, had it not been for those two reasons the children of the captives would not have died.

This is difficult to understand, especially since Moshe instructed the Jews to put the blood of the Korban Pesach on the door posts of their homes so that they would be protected and not affected by the tenth plague. This means that the first born sons of the Jews would have died unless there was blood

on the door posts. How is it possible that Jews would be more susceptible to the plague than the children of the captives in the dungeons?

There seems to be only one possible explanation: there was no decree of death from the plague on foreigners — Makkos Bechoros was only a decree on the Egyptians. That is why the children of the captives would have been excluded. But the Jews faced an existential quandary of self-definition. Are we Egyptian Jews or Jewish Egyptians?

After a year in which the Jews were relieved of their enslavement (slavery ended once the plagues began) and had started to accumulate wealth (because they weren't affected by the plagues they had economic opportunities; they sold water during the plague of blood, etc.) many Jews began to feel like privileged Egyptian citizens. In fact, up to 80% of the Jews died during the plague of darkness (see Rashi 13:18), seemingly because they wouldn't have left Egypt even if given the opportunity to do so (quite alarmingly, in today's day and age the percentage of Jews who would choose to stay in America given similar circumstances might even be higher).

The tenth plague came to differentiate between the Jews and the Egyptians. Those Jews who felt they were Egyptian citizens first were judged as Egyptians. Moshe gave the people the sign on how to define themselves: If you're an Egyptian Jew put the blood of the Korban Pesach on the doorpost; if you're merely a Jewish Egyptian then you will meet the same fate as the Egyptians.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Parshas Bo - Pride and Prejudice

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Master of the Universe does not say "please" often. He commands. Yet this week, in issuing one of the final charges to Moshe during the final days in Egypt he does not command Moshe to do his bidding — He beseeches him. In Exodus 11:2 Hashem asks Moshe to, "please speak in the ears of the people (of Israel): let each man ask his fellow (Egyptian) man and each woman ask her fellow (Egyptian) woman for gold and silver utensils."

The Talmud in Tractate Brachos explains the unusual terminology — "please." Hashem was concerned. He promised Abraham that his children would be enslaved in a foreign land and leave with great wealth. Yet so far only the first half of the promise was fulfilled. Hashem did not want the righteous one (Abraham) to say, "Enslavement you fulfilled, but you did not fulfill the promise of wealth." Therefore, though out of character, Hashem implores Moshe "please speak in the ears of the nation that they ask the Egyptians for gold and silver."

The questions are obvious. First, Hashem must keep His commitment because of His own promise, regardless of Abraham's impending complaints. Second, why must G-d enrich his people by telling them to ask the Egyptians for their due? Couldn't He have showered them with riches from the heavens as He gave them Manna?

Rav Shmuel Shtrashan of Vilna* (1819-1885) was a wealthy banker as well as a renowned Torah scholar. In addition to his commerce, he maintained a free-loan society to provide interest-free loans to the needy. One time he granted a one-year loan of 300 rubles to Reb Zalman the tailor and carefully recorded it in his ledger. One year later, to the date, with 300 rubles in an envelope, Reb Zalman knocked on the door of Rav Shmuel's study. The Rav was in the midst of a deep Talmudic contemplation and hardly interrupted his studies while tucking the money away in one of the volumes he had been using.

A few weeks later, while reviewing his ledgers, Rav Shmuel noticed that Reb Zalman's loan was overdue. He summoned him to his office to inquire about the payment. Of course, Reb Zalman was astonished. He had paid the loan in full on the day it was due! The Rav could not recall payment and insisted that they go together to Beis Din (Rabbinical Court).

Word in town spread rapidly, and people began to shun Reb Zalman. His business declined, and his children and wife were affronted by their peers.

The only recourse the Bais Din had was to have Reb Zalman swear that he had repaid the loan. Rav Shmuel did not want to allow a Jew to swear falsely on his account and decided to forego the procedure by annulling the loan. This latest event brought even more scorn to the tailor, and eventually he felt forced to leave Vilna and establish himself elsewhere.

A year later, Rav Shmuel was analyzing a section of the Talmud and opened a volume he had used sometime in the past. He could not believe his eyes when he saw a thick envelope with Reb Zalman's return address, containing 300 rubles. Quickly, he ran to find the hapless tailor who had been so besmirched. After unsuccessfully searching Vilna, he found that the tailor had moved. Rabbi Shtrashan traveled to Reb Zalman to beg forgiveness. The tailor, a broken man, explained that there was no way that anyone would believe the true story. They would just say that the pious scholar had shown mercy on the unscrupulous tailor. Finally, they decided that the only way to truly atone and give back the tailor his reputation was for the scholar to take Reb Zalman's son as his son-in-law. The shocked town of Vilna rejoiced at the divine union that helped re-establish a reputation.

Hashem understood that after 210 years of hard labor there was hardly a way to give the Jews true wealth. Showering them with miraculous gifts and treasures would in no way compensate for years of degradation. Abraham would not find that reward acceptable. The only way for a slave to gain true wealth is to discard his subservient mentality, knock on his master's door, and proclaim, "I want and deserve your gold and silver!" The Egyptians complied by showering their former captives with an abundance of wealth. The Jews walked out of Egypt with more than just gold. They left with the pride and power to demand what they deserved. They received one of the most important gifts the Jews would treasure throughout their sojourn in exile — their pride. Even Abraham was happy.

*This version of the story was adapted from "The Magid Speaks" by Rabbi Paysach Krohn c1987 Mesorah Publications

Good Shabbos!

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 20 January 2024 / 10 Tevet 5784

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Bo

The Day After Gaza

"And this is how you will eat it..." (12:11)

It seems to me that there is no natural solution to this current military clash in Israel's war of self-defense. One side says they will not settle for a state unless it's from the river to the sea. And Israel isn't going to allow itself to be given a set of water wings and happily paddle out into the Med with Tel Aviv fading into the distance.

This is a war of the clash of ideals. From the messianic ideals of the chalutzim, the Jewish settlers on the so-called West Bank in Judea and Samaria, to the ideals of the Muslim Brotherhood and its scions, Hamas and Hezbollah, who believe in the coming of the final Caliph and the entire world subject to Sharia law.

As a believing Jew, it's clear to me that the only solution to this situation will be the coming of the Mashiach, the Messiah, who we daily hope and wait for. And never in the last seventy years has it been easier to expect his imminent arrival.

"And this is how you will eat it."

Hashem instructed the Jewish People to eat the Korban Pesach, the Pesach offering, with their 'loins girded,' the belts tightened, and ready to go out on the road to exile.

However, Moshe refused Pharaoh's pleas for them to leave at night and they didn't leave till the following morning, so why was it necessary to dress in this manner?

We are taught that the Jewish People were not worthy of a miraculous redemption. They were hovering above the lowest level of spiritual corruption in Egypt, but had they not been redeemed at that moment, they would have been consumed by Egypt's contamination. Their imminent demise was brought home to them by the manner in which they were to eat the offering, to remind them that they were only being redeemed by an extraordinary act of Hashem's mercy. In Nusach Sefard, we say in the Kedusha of Mussaf on Shabbat Morning: "Behold, I have redeemed you at the end as at the beginning to be to you as a G-d."

Right now, do we, the Jewish People, deserve a miraculous rescue from the fury of our enemies? Nobody knows. But we can be sure that just like at the beginning in Egypt, when Hashem redeemed us when we were not worthy, He, in His infinite Mercy, will redeem us again. May it be speedily, in our days!

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha BO

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In this week's parsha the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt reaches one of its most climactic moments. Pharaoh finally succumbs to the pressures of the plagues and to the demands of Moshe and of the God of Israel. The last three plagues that are discussed in detail in this week's parsha are those of the locusts, darkness and the slaying of the firstborn.

These plagues represent not only physical damages inflicted on the Egyptians but also, just as importantly, different psychological pressures that were exerted on Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The plague of locusts destroyed the Egyptian economy, or whatever was left of it after the previous seven plagues. Economic disaster always has far-reaching consequences. Sometimes those results can be very positive, such as the recovery of the United States from the Great Depression. Sometimes they are very negative, as the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s could not have occurred if it were not for the economic crisis that enveloped the Weimar Republic.

Here the economic crisis engendered by the plague of locusts brings Egypt to its knees, so that it is only the unreasoning stubbornness of Pharaoh that keeps the drama going. The next plague of darkness is one that affects the individual. Cooped up in one's home, unable to move about, blinded by darkness unmatched in human experience, the individual Egyptian is forced to come to terms with his or her participation in the enslavement of the Jewish people.

For many people, being alone with one's self is itself a type of plague. It causes one to realize one's mortality and to reassess one's behavior in life. This is not always a pleasant experience. Most of the time it is a very wrenching and painful one.

The final plague of the death of the firstborn Egyptians, aside from the personal pain and tragedy involved, spoke to the future of Egyptian society. Without children no society can endure - and especially children such as the firstborn, who are always meant to replace and carry on the work of their elders and previous generations. We all want to live in eternity and since we cannot do so physically we at least wish it to happen spiritually, emotionally and psychologically.

The plague that destroyed the Egyptian firstborn destroyed the hopes of eternity that were so central to Egyptian society. The tombs of the leaders of Egypt were always equipped with food and material goods to help these dead survive to the future. Even though this was a primitive expression of the hope for eternity it nevertheless powerfully represents to us the Egyptian mindset regarding such eternity.

By destroying the firstborn Egyptians, the Lord sounded the death knell for all of Egyptian society for the foreseeable future. It was this psychological

pressure – which is one of the interpretations of the phrase that there was no house in Egypt that did not suffer from this terrible plague – that forced Pharaoh and his people to come to terms with their unjust enslavement of Israel and to finally succumb to the demands of Moshe and the God of Israel. We should remember that all of these psychological pressures, even though they do not appear in our society as physical plagues, are still present and influential. The trauma of life is never ending.
Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Berel Wein

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PARSHAT BO - Pesach in Sedom

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 "teshuvah". Nonetheless, the miraculous redemption process (b'shem Havaya) continues, for the Sake of His Name (Ezekiel 20:5-10). [See shiurim on Parshiot Shmot & Va'eiyra.]

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 "makkot" (plagues), Bnei Yisrael appear to be 'out of the picture'. From the time that "makkot" (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 makkot 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 "teshuvah" 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 Yetziat 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 Yetziat 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 Eliyah 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 Yetziat 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

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 Rabeinu 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 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'evot 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 the 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 YEHEZKEL

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'as 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 Noah:

"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 Noah 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, Noah 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.

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 Mitzrayim 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 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 I-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

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, Seforno 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 Yoshia 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 Yetziat Mitzrayim.

The Ramban explains that the Torah wished to first record the story of Yetziat 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 yetziat 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 Parashat Vaera, 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 Keshet 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 proof.

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 parasha, 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, "Ehy-eh asher ehy-eh" -- "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 "Ehy-eh" 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 Mateh 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

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'nakh 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 Mosheh 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 Mosheh 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 Mosheh had said to him, and fought with Amalek; and Mosheh, 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 Mosheh 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, Mosheh'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 historiosophy [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'aneach, 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, then 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'nakh 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 dream speak 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'nakh (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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