

Potomac Torah Study Center

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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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the first phase of the agreement continue with the remaining hostages coming home, hostilities ending, and for an era of security and rebuilding for both Israel and all who genuinely seek peace.

[Note: because numerous obligations shortened my preparation time this week, I have repeated some material, including most of this introduction from 5783.]

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

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

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

We always read Bo in the middle of winter, in late January or early February. We therefore read about Paro's anti-Semitism and Hashem's freeing our ancestors from slavery in Egypt around International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which we observe this week (Monday, January 27) on the secular calendar or on Tu B'Shevat (13 Shevat, or February 11

this year) on the Jewish calendar. Countries that observe this event do so to mark the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz - Birkenau murder centers that the Nazis set up in occupied Poland to murder Jews. Paro was the first to try to use excessive hard labor and minimal food to kill Jews. (Thanks to Hashem's intervention, this plan did not succeed.) Hitler took Paro's innovation a step further by combining the work and starvation camps with shootings and gas chambers to make the murders more efficient. Even nearly 80 years after the fact, it is difficult to believe the photos and statements that demonstrate how vicious the Nazi campaign was. Hitler and Paro also share the history that they continued their oppression and killing of Jews rather than diverting their attention to saving their countries and winning the wars against their enemies.

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

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, 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

Haftarat Parsha Bo: Where Everybody Knows Your Name

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

"Egypt is a handsome heifer." This vivid metaphor in this week's Haftarah from Yirmiyahu depicts the Egyptian empire's downfall at the hands of the Babylonians.

Addressing this description of Egypt as a fattened cow, the traditional commentators)Radak, Abarvanel(explain that the kingdom's great wealth had bred complacency and arrogance in its foreign relations – a strategy doomed to fail under the attack of Nebuchadnezzar and his legions.

Ultimately, Egypt's abundance ended up being the kingdom's ruin, as illustrated in the closing chapters of Yirmiyahu.

In truth, this narrative repeats itself throughout Tanach. Egypt is portrayed as a lush and fertile land, sustained by the waters of the Nile)Bereshiet 13:10(. Yet when famine strikes, the palace repeatedly seizes the opportunity to consolidate power at the expense of the vulnerable.

This is also true in the days of Avraham, when Sarah is taken captive; and it occurs once again during the famine foretold by Yosef, when the royal coffers purchase all the real estate in the country from ordinary Egyptians in exchange for bread.

As Shemot begins, we see the Egyptian empire use its power to enslave the Jewish people, compelling them to build enormous architectural projects to glorify Pharaoh. Egypt's great wealth could have been a source of benevolence.

Yet time and again, bounty leads to exploitation and violence. Never do we see the Egyptian empire demonstrate an interest in giving or sharing. Rather, it was entirely focused on self interest, constantly leading to conflict with the neighboring nations – including, as in our Haftarah, with the Babylonians.

I believe this is why – as my wife Ruchie pointed out – unlike other kingdoms and rulers in Tanach we are never given the personal names of Egyptian kings, only the title "Pharaoh." That is not the case with other empires, where the names of the rulers are recorded. In Biblical Egypt, individual identity was unimportant; the focus was solely on reinforcing the power of the monarchy and sustaining the empire's dominance.

Contrast this self-centered outlook with the solidarity our ancestors demonstrated during their time in Egypt. Despite their enslavement, they maintained a caring disposition, even sharing what little bread they had to eat)*Shibbolei HaLeket* on the Haggadah(.

And in our parsha, they unite to ensure that everyone has a portion of the Korban Pesach to partake in as they prepare together to leave Egypt. When there is genuine concern for the individual, names hold meaning and serve a purpose.

This same sense of solidarity – the commitment to valuing each individual and using our resources not for personal gain, but for collective benefit – has been powerfully on display here in Israel for months, and especially during these extraordinarily challenging past few weeks.

As we witness the release of hostages, we hold our breath and pray that they will all come home. Emily, Romi, Doron, Liri,

Karina, Daniella, Naama.

Everyone knows their names. Despite the high price, their liberation has brought collective joy, as their freedom is also our shared salvation. This ethos of solidarity and sensitivity rather than selfishness forms the backbone of our shared identity, and it is the wellspring of strength that enables us to persevere.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Bo: A Jolt of Oy Gevalt!
By Rabbi Label Lam © 2007 (5767)

And HASHEM hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not send out the Children of Israel.
)Shemos 10:20(

At first, *"And Pharaoh's heart hardened"*)Shemos 8:15(and in the end *"And HASHEM hardened the heart of Pharaoh."* Why is that so? That is according to what Reish Lakish says, *"He who comes to contaminate is opened up for..." Once a person desires badness he is tripped up from heaven.*)Pesikta Zuta(

Why did HASHEM harden Pharaoh's heart? Doesn't that interfere with his free will? Now we know why HASHEM did so. Pharaoh hardened his own heart and therefore HASHEM hardened it for him. By giving up control and abusing his free will he was made to lose control and he was denied free will. It was really all a testimony to Pharaoh's terminal stubbornness. He was perhaps the biggest denier of HASHEM that ever walked the good earth.

The Kotzker Rebbe ztl. sardonically said that the *"free thinkers"* of these days believe that they are authentic scoffers, but their actions don't always support their claim. They are really deceiving themselves and others. Whenever they are visited by the slightest of tragedies or illness they immediately run to pray and petition G-d. Pharaoh, on the other hand, was a real scoffer. Nine plagues had already landed on the heads of Egypt and each with a clear warning with precise detail as to how it would unfold being fulfilled. Still Pharaoh not only refused to yield but he resisted in believing. The Torah tells us:

"And it was at midnight and HASHEM smote every first born in the Land of Egypt from the first born of Pharaoh that sits on the throne until the first born of the captive who was in the dungeon and all the first born animals. And Pharaoh got up that night)from his bed: Rashi(and all his servants and all of Egypt and there was a great outcry throughout all of the Land of Egypt and there was no house in which there was not there a death. He called to Moshe and Aaron at night and said, "Rise up, go out from among my people, even you, even the Children of Israel; Go and serve HASHEM as you have spoken!"")Shemos 12:29-31(

The Kotzker takes note that Pharaoh himself was a first born and he had heard directly all of Moshe's warnings for the first nine plagues and amazingly the verse testifies *"and Pharaoh got up..."* – that means that he went to sleep as if nothing unusual would be happening that night. This demonstrates that he was a real scoffer. He saw the truth staring him in the face and yet he remained unaffected.

On the flip side the sages tell us, *"One who comes to purify gets help!"* As opposed to the one who seeks impurity who finds an open door, the one who truly desires holiness gets wind in his sails. Avraham Avinu after nine increasingly difficult tests is faced with the ultimate. He is asked to bring his son Yitzchok as a burnt offering. It was Yitzchok he waited for till one hundred years of age and in whom he had sewn wisdom for thirty-seven years. There too the Torah tells us, *"And Avraham arose in the morning..."*)Breishis 22:3(That implies also that he went to sleep the night before the fateful

journey. That too is amazing! With increasing clarity and intensity he learned over the course of a lifetime to look truth in the face and embrace it. Therefore he accepted his destiny with perfect calm.

Oddly, from the outside, the Baal Bitachon – the Master of Trusting G-d, and the bum can look hauntingly similar. Both are sleeping peacefully. What's the real difference? One goes to sleep comforted by truth while the other is sedated, in a fantasy – a bubble, at risk of being awakened by **a jolt of oy gevalt!**

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5769-bo/>

Bo: Don't Leave the People Behind

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015

Nine plagues were proclaimed. Nine plagues befell Pharaoh and the Egyptians. With each passing plague, Pharaoh was one step closer to freeing the Children of Israel. Until this point, he had offered to release them all save the cattle. Even this Moshe refuses, and Pharaoh orders him out telling him never to return. Moshe, at this last moment, tells Pharaoh of the final plague, the slaying of the firstborn. It is then, says Moshe, that you and all your servants will come to me begging us to leave, and it is only then that we will go.

The entire story, since the beginning of last week's parasha, has been building up to this point. And yet, right in the middle of this showdown with Pharaoh, immediately after Pharaoh orders Moshe out, and right before Moshe proclaims the coming of the final plague, the story breaks, and God issues Moshe a seemingly out-of-place command:

And the Lord said to Moshe, one more plague will I bring upon the Egyptians... Speak, please in the ears of the people and let each man borrow from his neighbor and each woman from hers, objects of silver and objects of gold.)11:1-2(.

What is the point of this interruption? What, we may ask, is the point of this entire request?

To answer this, we must go back to last week's parasha and an unexpected interruption that occurs there as well. There, immediately before the ten plagues begin, and after Moshe has complained to God that Bnei Yisrael has not listened to him, the narrative is interrupted:

These are the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuven...)6:14(.

All of a sudden, we are treated to an extensive list of the genealogies of the tribes of Israel, for many verses, from Reuven, to Shimon, to Levi, until we finally get to Moshe and Aharon, great-grandchildren of Levi, Aharon's wives, his children, his children's wives, until finally we resume:

These are that Aharon and Moshe, to whom the Lord said, Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies. These are they which spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt: these are that Moshe and Aharon.)6:26-27(.

What is this genealogical list doing here?

The answer, I believe, is clear. It is coming to situate Moshe and Aharon clearly and firmly as part of the families of and the people of Bnei Yisrael. This could not be taken for granted. Moshe had come to Bnei Yisrael with a message of redemption. The people initially believed him. But then he appeared before Pharaoh, and the people were not behind him. It was only he and Aharon that stood there, all alone. Where were the people? Where were the elders? Rashi says that they slowly dropped off, one by one, until there was no one left when they finally arrived at Pharaoh's house. Their

courage and their will were not strong enough for the task. Or perhaps it was Moshe who realized that this would be too much to ask from them at this stage. Either way, it was Moshe and Aharon speaking on behalf of the people, but not with the participation of the people.

And it only got worse after that. After the first meeting with Pharaoh, things only got harder for the people. It was then that the people really turned on Moshe. They were not ready for the hardship and the upheaval that comes in the wake of change, even change for the better. Remember, these were the same people who, when they faced hardship and privation in the Wilderness, would readily turn on Moshe and Aharon, yearning for the pots of meat and vegetables that had been provided to them in Egypt. Never mind that they were slaves. Never mind that they had no choice, no freedom. Never mind the back-breaking work. What was important was that their life was predictable, it was structured, it was familiar. That's what they craved. They couldn't handle the responsibility that comes with freedom. They couldn't handle the change and disruption that comes with making one's life better.

So Moshe complains to God that the people have abandoned him. And what is God's response?

And Moshe spoke before the Lord, saying, Behold, the Children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?

And the Lord spoke unto Moshe and unto Aharon, and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel, and unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.)6:12-13(.

They won't listen to you? Fine. Ignore them. Just go speak to Pharaoh. Worry about him. Speak on the people's behalf even if they are not behind you.

The exodus would have to be forced not just on Pharaoh, but on Bnei Yisrael as well. God's "*strong hand*" was necessary not just to force Pharaoh to send them out, but to hold on to their hands and to drag them out as well. [And maybe some refused even then; hence the famous midrash that 80% died in the plague of darkness...]

Indeed, during the entire period of the ten plagues, we do not hear from B'nei Yisrael at all. The entire drama is a showdown between Moshe and Pharaoh. In fact, we hear more from the Egyptians than we do from the Israelites. At least Pharaoh's advisers voiced their opinions and applied some pressure. But Bnei Yisrael are invisible. They are spoken about, spoken for, but are not actually speaking themselves. They are the objects of the redemption, not its subjects. [emphasis added]

Sometimes this is necessary. Sometimes it is the job of a leader to understand the vision of the people and help them actualize it. Sometimes it is the job of a leader to inspire the people with his vision and have them embrace his vision as their own. And sometimes a leader might need to force his vision on people if they cannot even realize what is best for them. But if the latter is the case, he'd better make darn sure that he is really speaking for the deepest needs of the people, that he is truly one of them, not some outsider who thinks he knows best, fighting his own fights for his own reasons.

Hence, at the moment that God tells Moshe to ignore the people and go confront Pharaoh, the Torah reminds us that this Moshe and Aharon are not some outsiders – a child of privilege who grew up in Pharaoh's house, an elite member of the priestly class – no, they are the Moshe and Aharon who are deeply entrenched in Bnei Yisrael, connected with all their family ties, their parents, their children, their siblings. These are who came before Pharaoh. Speaking for the people, as a part of the people. Going to Pharaoh not because of their own agenda, but because God had commanded them, because this was the leadership that was necessary.

And hence the interruption in our parasha. For you can only speak unilaterally on the people's behalf for so long. There comes a time in the process where the people must take part in their own redemption. But you have to meet the people where they are at. Mindsets do not change overnight. Slavery is still familiar, freedom is anxiety provoking. So how to get

the people's buy in? Give them what they want. Focus them on the immediate material benefits that will result. Have them borrow gold and silver. And as a result, they will be taking an active part in the exodus. They will be sending themselves a message that they are invested in this process, they believe in this process, they are part of this process. Through this, you will turn)unwilling, unappreciative(beneficiaries into stakeholders and participants.

It is this turning point that enables them to achieve in greater investment: "*This month is for you the beginning of months... Speak to the congregation of Israel, and you shall take each person a sheep according to their father's house, a sheep for each house.*")12:1-2(. The participation is now ratcheted up. It is not just the self-interest of the gold and silver. Now you will own the process, reordering the calendar, being in control, and actively showing your fidelity to God. Take a lamb, engage in this ritual, put the blood on the doorposts so you become a part of your own redemption. And do it by household, not just as individuals, but as families, as members of a community, as an entire nation.

You will own your redemption so fully so that you will continue this practice in future generations. And then,

It shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? That you shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's pesach, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when the Lord smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.)12:25-26(.

It will become your story, what you tell over to your children. You will be the participants in the story and in its future retelling.

Consider then this final contrast. When Moshe first came to the people, we read:

And the people believed: and when they heard that the Lord had visited the Children of Israel, and that the Lord had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped. And afterward Moses and Aharon went in, and told Pharaoh...)4:31-5:1(.

The people prostrated and gave thanks, but then it was Moshe and Aharon who went and did.

But now the people have been engaged. Now, however much is needed to be forced on them before they are finally ready to buy in and to become a part of their own redemption. It is now that we read:

And the people bowed the head and worshiped. And the Children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.)12:27-28(.

Their prostration is followed with their doing. Moshe and Aharon had started following God's orders and acting on behalf of the people. That type of leadership is necessary at times. But to succeed, it has to end with the people following God's orders. It has to end with the people acting on behalf of the people.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rosh HaYeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

From my archives

Strictly, Major, Extremely, Legendary, Iconic: How Words Lose their Meaning

A blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Some words get overused, misused and abused. The words become degraded so that they no longer can be taken at

face value.

The word “kosher” is an example of a word that has become compromised.

The packaging on kosher foods reflects the problem. The word “kosher,” by itself, seems no longer to indicate that a product is actually kosher. Much packaging states that the product is under “strict rabbinic supervision,” or that it is “strictly kosher”; apparently, without the words “strict” or “strictly” we couldn’t trust its kashruth. Some packaging now states that the product is under the “strictest rabbinic supervision,” implying that just being “strict” or “strictly kosher” isn’t kosher enough. Only “strictest” should be trusted.

To complicate matters, we often find products that are under multiple rabbinic supervisions...as many as four or five different hashgahot per item. Does having multiple hashgahot make the product more kosher? Are those items with only one or even two hashgahot not kosher enough?

The word “kosher” has been degraded; many people apparently don’t trust the word unless it is accompanied by “strict,” “strictly” or “strictest”; or unless it is authenticated by multiple hashgahot. This may be the fault of manufacturers, or of kashruth agencies, or of consumers...but the result is to downgrade the word “kosher” and to confuse the public.

The word “major” is another example of a compromised word.

We receive notices from various congregations and organizations announcing lectures, shiurim, and a variety of programs. Apparently, it is felt that just announcing the topic is inadequate to gain people’s attention. So we are told that the upcoming lecture/shiur/program is “important.” But since everything seems to be “important” these days, the announcements inform us that the upcoming event is “special.” Recently, I’ve begun receiving notices for upcoming lectures/shiurim that are “major.” But if these lectures/shiurim are “major,” does that imply that they are more significant than if they were just “special” or “important?” And does that imply that all “non-major” lectures, shiurim/programs are “minor”? When hyping events as “major,” the result is to downgrade all other “non-major” events...and ultimately to downgrade “major” itself.

Another phrase that has been popping up is “extremely brilliant.” It seems that just being smart, intelligent or even brilliant is no longer enough; one needs to be “extremely brilliant.” Yet, if so many people are upgraded to being “extremely brilliant,” then the phrase loses its significance. If you really want to stand out, you’ll need to find a phrase that goes higher than “extremely brilliant.” But then, many others will adopt that new phrase too, in a never-ending effort to outdo others. The more hyperbole we use, the less the words really mean.

The latest hyperboles include “legendary” and “iconic.” Newcasters and sportscasters increasingly describe outstanding individuals as being legendary. Noteworthy institutions aren’t just noteworthy – they are now iconic. By using such superlatives so freely, the result is to degrade the terms. If so many people are legendary and so many institutions are iconic, then these terms don’t really reflect the absolutely best and unique few.

One of my pet peeves is referring to rabbis as “HaGaon”...even if they are simply fine rabbis but not extraordinary geniuses worthy of the title “gaon.” Indeed, the very word “rabbi” has been so degraded and compromised that many rabbis (at least in the Orthodox world) prefer the title of Rav. But “Rav” may soon also be not enough, so that other grander phrases (such as gaon) will become more prevalent.

Wouldn’t it be nice if people used words carefully, without need for hyperbole? It would be a very strictly, major, and extremely brilliant thing to do! It would be a legendary, iconic step forward, worthy of a gaon!!

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/strictly-major-extremely-legendary-iconic-how-words-lose-their-meaning-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

A Rock and a Verse: Thoughts for Parashat Bo

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"But against any of the children of Israel not a dog shall move its tongue..." (Shemot 11:7).

When I was a little boy growing up in Seattle, I would sometimes be confronted by a barking dog in the neighborhood. I told my Uncle, Rabbi Solomon Maimon, of my dread of this dog, and he gave me advice. He told me to recite a verse *ulekhol yisrael lo yeherats kelev leshono* (Shemot 11:7) and that would calm the dog down.

The verse refers to the Torah's statement that when the Israelites were leaving Egypt, the dogs remained entirely silent. This was a sign of the miraculous nature of the exodus. Even the dogs were awe-struck by the multitude of Israelites on their way to freedom.

I memorized the verse and recited it often. I am not sure if the menacing dog was impressed, but the verse gave me confidence to walk past the dog without fear. So all in all, it was an effective solution to my problem.

There's a story in Sephardic folklore about a little boy who also was afraid of a barking dog in his neighborhood. He asked his rabbi for advice and the rabbi — like my Uncle Solomon — told him to recite the verse. The next day the boy came running to the rabbi: *"the dog barked at me, I recited the verse, but the dog kept barking and chased me down the block."* The rabbi asked: *"when you recited the verse, did you have a rock in your hand?"* The boy said he didn't have a rock in his hand. The rabbi then said: *"when you recite the verse you need to have a big rock in your hand. Then the dog will get the message and leave you alone."* This story was memorialized in a proverb: *"piedra y pasuk,"* a rock and a verse.

This strategy is not only relevant when dealing with barking dogs. It also relates to dealing with dangerous human beings. Theodore Roosevelt was fond of a West African proverb: *"Speak softly and carry a big stick."* It's important to have the right words, but it's also important to demonstrate the strength to back up the words.

When confronting those who wish to harm us, we need to offer words of peace and understanding. We need to seek to defuse antagonism by engaging in reasonable conversation. But at the same time, we need to be strong and courageous. We need the antagonists to know that we are ready and able to defend ourselves.

In Psalm 29:11 we read: *"The Lord will give strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace."* We pray not only for physical strength but for the spiritual strength to achieve peace. We need the *piedra* and the *pasuk*, the rock and the verse...and the courage to utilize both effectively.

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

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Bo -- Self Care

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The Exodus from Mitzrayim was imminent. Hashem gave Moshe the final instructions so that the Jewish people would be prepared for their departure. Amid the instructions, Hashem tells Moshe to take note, *"You are leaving in the Spring."* There is apparently something significant about the fact that the Exodus occurred in the Spring.

The Jewish calendar is in fact bound to the requirement that Pesach be observed in the Spring. Although the Jewish calendar is fundamentally a lunar calendar, we are required to make adjustments to ensure that the holiday of Pesach which commemorates the Exodus occurs in the Spring.

In fact, this gives rise to an astounding body of literature in Jewish tradition in which we keep track and correlate the solar calendar (which is based on the seasons which occur in a cycle of approximately 365 days), and the lunar calendar (in which every twelve-month unit has approximately 354 days). What was so significant about the Exodus occurring in the Spring that we must note it, and ensure to commemorate the Spring aspect of the Exodus for all generations?

In Shir HaShirim, we read of the love story between Hashem and the Jewish people. The second chapter deals with the Exodus and tells us why it occurred during Spring. The Jewish people recount, *"My Beloved called to me and said, 'Arise, and step forward. For the rainy season is passed, the buds are appearing on the trees, and the birds are chirping pleasantly.'"* Rashi explains that in the Spring the ground has dried, and the buds and chirping birds make it pleasant to travel. The significance of Spring is that it is the season in which we can enjoy the Exodus most. The journey would be easier, and the sounds and pleasant views compatible with the joy of redemption, so that we should enjoy it most.

Often in life we focus on tasks and productivity and lose track of how we are experiencing life. By being mindful, as Hashem was, of the logistics of the journey and the sounds and the sights, we can enjoy the blessings of life so much better. Resting ourselves appropriately, eating and providing self-care enables us to live life to the fullest.

Interestingly, the Targum on Shir HaShirim (1:9) writes that when Hashem split the sea for the Jewish people, it was His intent to leave some wetness. *"The wicked among them exclaimed, 'He can split the sea, but he can't get rid of the mud?!'"* The result is that Hashem did dry the seabed totally in a majestic display of His control over creation. But we wonder: Why did Hashem initially intend to leave some moisture and mud?

It seems to me that He wanted to teach us that even in the most provided-for state there will still be some inconveniences, some issues that we will need to navigate. We should not expect life to be perfect. As calculated as the Exodus was, and as much as Hashem wished to provide for us *"just so,"* because self-care is important, the way the world works is such that we should expect things still not to be perfect. The perfect Exodus experience, in Hashem's view, included a moist seabed that they would have to navigate. Happiness is to be ours by making the choice to focus on the good, not because life is perfect. It was only because the complaints might have soured the experience, that Hashem dried the seabed entirely.

The Talmud tells us that Shalom Bayis is as difficult as splitting the sea. Perhaps an insight is that our own attitude towards imperfections affects the value we perceive in the gift. Ideally, the splitting of the sea would have had a bit of a muddy *"imperfection"* to leave the people with the choice to focus on the good and enjoy it. Similarly in a healthy marriage, expect some imperfections. Hashem wants it that way so that happiness is the result of our choice.

There are many aspects to healthy self-care. Most have to do with being reasonably provided for. But one aspect of self-care has to do with maintaining a positive attitude in life even when there are imperfections and things we wish were different. We can choose to notice the many gifts Hashem gives us and live in the mind-frame of blessing that Hashem wishes for us. Hashem says, *“Remember that the Exodus was in the Spring.”* Remember how I cared for you. Focus on the blessings and treasure them.

With heartfelt blessings 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.**

Bo – The Power of Trust

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

Throughout the plagues in Egypt, G-d provided clear demonstrations of His love for the Jewish people. Perhaps the clearest demonstration was during the final plague, the death of the firstborn. In one moment, every single Egyptian household suffered a loss, some losing more than one family member. It is beyond us to imagine the sound of anguish that must have torn through the land of Egypt at that moment. Yet, in the Jewish section of Egypt, all was peaceful and there was absolute silence. As Moshe tells Pharaoh:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Parashat Bo: Your Exodus, Now!

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The Exodus is an axis around which most of our awareness as a nation seems to revolve. Egypt is the melting pot, the furnace that turned scattered family members into a nation. It has taught us to value freedom and to cherish the Image of God imbedded in every human. Meeting Shifrah and Puah, simple midwives at the helm of the first civil disobedience, Yocheved and Miriam, the mother and sister who would fight to the bitter end for the life of an innocent newborn, and Pharaoh's daughter, who defied her father and brought his nemesis into his palace, we are awestruck, enabled to believe in the ultimate kindness of mankind)or maybe womankind(.

We understand that a process was necessary not only for Pharaoh but for his people as well to "Let the People Go," anticipating future atrocities in which tyrants succeeded in their devilish schemes only because of the help of civilian collaborators. With the lessons learned and the defining qualities of the Exodus, there is little wonder that it features so prominently in our prayers and rituals. But I still wonder at times: why does the Torah go into such detail in describing the plagues? Would it not suffice to mention that God took us out of Egypt, defeating the tyrant and teaching humanity spirituality and mutual respect? True, it provides a source of endless fun to toddlers and elementary school teachers who embellish the Biblical narrative with Midrashic help, but it seems a little voyeuristic, not unlike rubbernecking in order to witness the crumpled metal and injuries of others.

I would like to suggest, therefore, that the story of the Ten Plagues could be understood as a parable with applicable lessons to all humans at all times. It is the story of redemption on the individual level, manifested by the ability to bring to fruition ones talents and potential. It is a search for meaning and identity which yields fruits and lets us enjoy a sense of fulfillment. It is the journey between the opposing poles of Pharaoh, whose name is derived from the Hebrew verb for wild, unruly, and between Israel which connotes control, straightforwardness and a sense of purpose.

In our struggle to set meaningful goals and achieve them while maintaining a fine balance among self, society, family and work, we turn to Self Help books, gurus and established religions, but here, before the birth of Judaism at Mount Sinai, the Torah offers a synopsis of life gone wrong and recommends that we do something about it before it is too late.

The exchange between Moses and Pharaoh is a reminder of how to avoid the plagues which represent the negative attributes and character traits that we might have. Moses' argument is that by thinking of others and not only yourself, by being sensitive, spiritual and close to the Divine, whose quintessential commandment is "Love the other as you love yourself," you will be able to autocorrect your course and use your potential to the maximum, thus achieving personal redemption. Pharaoh's path, conversely, is riddled by obstacles and distractions. He pursues false goals and wakes up when it is too late.

The symbolism of the plagues, as archetypes of negative behavior is as follows:

Blood - being temperamental and hot headed. Saying or doing things in the heat of the moment and then regretting them.

Frogs - using words and not actions, being officious and bossy without extending a hand to help. The vociferous amphibian could also represent destructive gossip and calumny which are so hard to avoid, unless you are engaged in positive altruistic work, having no time or need to see the negative in others.

Lice - letting little things irritate you. While too thick of a skin is not recommended, one must maintain a balanced approach and care only about things which are really important.

Wild beasts - the feeling of being out of control and apologizing later *"I don't know what got into me,"* to which the listener would mutter politely *"who let the dogs out?"* Behaving responsibly and considering future repercussions helps us put ourselves, when necessary, on a virtual leash.

Pestilence - having a lethargic, fatalist attitude to life, as if it has nothing good to offer and all one wants to do is die.

Boils - opening old wounds, dwelling on the past instead of looking forward. We don't have to forget the past; on the contrary, awareness of past mistakes will help us avoid them later on, but there is no need to make the gloomy swamps of the past our permanent residence.

Hail - the only plague in which an option was given to the Egyptians to save their property by bringing their flocks indoors, which the majority ignored. Hail represents the unwillingness to take actions in face of great challenges, especially the forces of nature, a shortcoming which has become more accentuated in recent years with climate change looming ever more dangerously.

Locust - the swarms of locust covered the sun and threw the world into destructive darkness as they consumed all sprouting plants. This plague symbolizes pessimism which obfuscates the sun's rays of hope and in turn suffocates growth and prosperity.

Darkness - the last stages in our lives are compared by Ecclesiastes to darkness. At the end of the road, when we look back and try to take stock of our lives, what will we find? Will it be a life of fulfillment and happiness, imbued with spirituality, generosity and altruism?

Or will it be the last plague, that of the **Firstborn**? The firstborn represents our best qualities, talents and potential. For one to look back and realize that those qualities and talents were wasted is tantamount to the loss of the firstborn.

Moses' admonition should reverberate for modern humanity as well: do not wait for darkness, for nightfall, to find out that opportunities were missed.

Rather, he says: *"Let My People go!"* Now! Use your talents, fight your plagues, and achieve your personal Exodus, your own redemption, today and every day.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Bo: The Honour and Responsibilities of the First Born

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

As a second-born child, I think being a firstborn might be overrated. There exists a certain family honour for the first born, who becomes a de factor leader of the children. But it also carries a responsibility. You are the one who must be the first to answer the riddle of how you will continue the legacy of your family while imprinting your unique stamp on it. The parents and the rest of the kids have their eyes focused on you, to see what you will do.

It's a lot of pressure to be this type of a trend-setter. I prefer to be the second-born. You still get honour and respect from your siblings, but at least you have an example in front of you to emulate and/or ignore at your own choice.

In my opinion, this is why firstborns get so much respect in the Jewish culture. They wear the mantle of the family. According to Biblical law, they were the ones bound to serve in the Temple)until the Golden Calf at least(, and they receive a double inheritance portion. With great power comes great responsibility, and with great responsibility comes great honor.

This is why when G-d sought to punish Egypt for its enslaving the Jews, He attacked the firstborn. These were the carriers of the family, and those that would either forge a new path or, in this case, continue the path of the old torturous system of enslavement. This was the only way to bring Egypt to its knees so the Jews could be freed. G-d differentiated them from the Jewish firstborn as a way of saying that freedom was the way of the future.

A new year has started. As New Zealand holiday time grinds to a halt, we begin our firstborn year of 2025 and continue our firstborn journey on this Remuera site. In Israel, the hostages are, thank G-d, coming home, and a set of firstborn challenges await us as Israel steps into a new political and security situation. We need the strength of the firstborn now more than ever to herald a new path through this new reality. May G-d make all of us successful Jewish firstborns as he did for the Jews so many years ago.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

Rav Kook Torah **Bo: The Special Pesach Offering**

The offering brought for the Passover holiday, the korban pesach, has special laws how it is to be cooked and eaten:

“They will eat the meat on that night ... Do not eat it raw, or cooked in water, but only roasted over fire.” Ex. 12:8-9

Why may the korban pesach only be eaten at the nighttime? And why must it be roasted?

National Holiness in Each Individual

All Temple offerings fall into two categories. Some are korbanot yachid, personal offerings brought by an individual; while others are korbanot tzibur, communal offerings brought in the name of the entire nation. An individual brings a korban yachid for private reasons — to atone for a particular sin or express gratitude for a personal deliverance. The Jewish nation as a whole, on the other hand, is represented by communal offerings which commemorate national events and holidays.

Of all the Temple offerings, the korban Pesach is unique, since it combines characteristics of both types of offerings. It commemorates a national historic event; and yet the obligation to bring this offering is not on the nation but on the individual. Why is it not like other communal offerings?

This unusual offering teaches us an important lesson about the Jewish people. The korban pesach reveals the quality of national holiness that resides in the soul of every Jew. Our ties to Knesset Yisrael are so deep that each individual's pesach offering is like a korban tzibur representing the entire nation. And this special connection of each individual to the nation is reflected in the laws regulating how the korban pesach is to be eaten.

The Unity of Israel

Our daytime activities are characterized by extensive social interaction, while at night we retire to our homes and private lives. By stipulating that the Passover offering be eaten at night, the Torah is emphasizing that our connection to the Jewish people is not based on some form of social contract, a utilitarian agreement to band together due to common interests. Rather, our ties to the Jewish people reflect a unique shared commonality that binds together all of Israel. These national ties persist even at night, a time when each individual retreats to the privacy of his home.

The manner in which the offering is cooked is similarly instructive. Were it boiled in water or cooked together with other foods, the taste of the korban would spread outside of the meat. Roasting, on the other hand, prevents the flavor from dispersing to other foods. This ensures that the offering's qualities of holiness remain concentrated inside the korban pesach. Why should this experience be so intense?

The mitzvah of eating the roasted offering has the power to uplift each individual with an intensity of pure holiness, a powerful quality rooted in the national soul of Israel. This concentrated holiness deepens our awareness of the singular unity of Israel, a result of the communal holiness that resides within each and every individual, in all of his being.

)Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 163-164. Adapted from *Olat Re'iyah* vol. I, pp. 178-179.

<https://ravkooktorah.org/BO63.htm>

Bo: Freedom's Defence (5767, 5773)

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

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

It was the moment for which they had been waiting for more than two hundred years. The Israelites, slaves in Egypt, were about to go free. Ten plagues had struck the country. The people were the first to understand; Pharaoh was the last. God was on the side of freedom and human dignity. You cannot build a nation, however strong your police and army, by enslaving some for the benefit of others. History will turn against you, as it has against every tyranny known to mankind.

And now the time had arrived. The Israelites were on the brink of their release. Moses, their leader, gathered them together and prepared to address them. What would he speak about at this fateful juncture, the birth of a people? He could have spoken about many things. He might have talked about liberty, the breaking of their chains, and the end of slavery. He might have talked about the destination to which they were about to travel, the *"land flowing with milk and honey."* Or he might have chosen a more sombre theme: the journey that lay ahead, the dangers they would face: what Nelson Mandela called *"the long walk to freedom."* Any one of these would have been the speech of a great leader sensing an historic moment in the destiny of Israel.

Moses did none of these things. Instead he spoke about children, and the distant future, and the duty to pass on memory to generations yet unborn. Three times in this week's sedra he turns to the theme:

And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say... Ex. 12:26-27

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

And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall answer... Ex. 13:14

About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators. That is what made Moses not just a great leader, but a unique one. What the Torah is teaching is that freedom is won, not on the battlefield, nor in the political arena, nor in the courts, national or international, but in the human imagination and will. To defend a country you need an army. But to defend a free society you need schools. You need families and an educational system in which ideals are passed on from one generation to the next, and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. So Jews became the people whose passion was education, whose citadels were schools and whose heroes were teachers.

The result was that by the time the Second Temple was destroyed, Jews had constructed the world's first system of universal compulsory education, paid for by public funds:

Remember for good the man Joshua ben Gamla, because were it not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. At first a child was taught by a father, and as a result orphans were left uneducated. It was then resolved that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem, and a father)who lived outside the city(would bring his child there and have him taught, but the orphan was still left without tuition. Then it was resolved to appoint teachers in each district, and boys of the age of sixteen and seventeen were placed under them; but when the teacher was angry with a pupil, he would rebel and leave. Finally Joshua ben Gamla came and instituted that teachers be appointed in every province and every city, and children from the age of six or seven were placed under their charge. Baba Batra 21a

By contrast, England did not institute universal compulsory education until 1870. The seriousness the Sages attached to

education can be measured by the following two passages:

If a city has made no provision for the education of the young, its inhabitants are placed under a ban, until teachers have been engaged. If they persistently neglect this duty, the city is excommunicated, for the world only survives by the merit of the breath of schoolchildren.
Maimonides, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* 2:1

Rabbi Judah the Prince sent R. Chiyya and R. Issi and R. Ami on a mission through the towns of Israel to establish teachers in every place. They came to a town where there were no teachers. They said to the inhabitants, "Bring us the defenders of the town." They brought them the military guard. The Rabbis said, "These are not the protectors of the town but its destroyers." "Who then are the protectors?" asked the inhabitants. They answered, "The teachers." Yerushalmi Haggigah 1:6

No other faith has attached a higher value to study. None has given it a higher position in the scale of communal priorities. From the very outset, Israel knew that freedom cannot be created by legislation, nor can it be sustained by political structures alone. As the American justice Judge Learned Hand put it: *"Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it."* That is the truth epitomized in a remarkable exegesis given by the Sages. They based it on the following verse about the tablets Moses received at Sinai:

The Tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the Tablets.
Ex. 32:16

They reinterpreted it as follows:

Read not charut, engraved, but cherut, freedom, for there is none so free as one who occupies himself with the study of Torah. Mishnah Avot 6:2

What they meant was that if the law is engraved on the hearts of the people, it does not need to be enforced by police. True freedom – cherut – is the ability to control oneself without having to be controlled by others. Without accepting voluntarily a code of moral and ethical restraints, liberty becomes license and society itself a battleground of warring instincts and desires.

This idea, fateful in its implications, was first articulated by Moses in this week's sedra, in his words to the assembled Israelites. He was telling them that freedom is more than a moment of political triumph. It is a constant endeavour, throughout the ages, to teach those who come after us the battles our ancestors fought, and why, so that my freedom is never sacrificed to yours, or purchased at the cost of someone else's. That is why, to this day, on Passover we eat matzah, the unleavened bread of affliction, and taste maror, the bitter herbs of slavery, to remember the sharp taste of affliction and never be tempted to afflict others.

The oldest and most tragic phenomenon in history is that empires, which once bestrode the narrow world like a colossus, eventually decline and disappear. Freedom becomes individualism)*"each doing what was right in his own eyes"*, Judges 21:25(, individualism becomes chaos, chaos becomes the search for order, and the search for order becomes a new tyranny imposing its will by the use of force. What, thanks to Torah, Jews never forgot is that freedom is a never-ending effort of education in which parents, teachers, homes and schools are all partners in the dialogue between the generations.

Learning, *Talmud Torah*, is the very foundation of Judaism, the guardian of our heritage and hope. That is why, when tradition conferred on Moses the greatest honour, it did not call him 'our hero,' 'our Prophet' or 'our King.' It called him, simply, *Moshe Rabbeinu*, Moses our teacher. For it is in the arena of education that the battle for the good society is lost or won.

* Footnotes are not available for this Dvar Torah.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bo/freedoms-defence/>

Why the Rush to Leave Egypt?

By Yossi Goldman * © Chabad 2023

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

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

Indeed, they left Egypt in haste.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So the question remains, why the rush?

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

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

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

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

here in Egypt?

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

* President, South African Rabbinial Association and Life Rabbi Emeritus of the Sydenham Shul.

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

Bo: The Fiery Life by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

Bo:

G-d commanded Moses and Aaron to tell the people to offer up the Passover sacrifice annually on 14 Nissan.

The Fiery Life

"Do not eat any of it half-cooked or cooked in water, but only roasted over the fire, together with its head, its legs, and its internal organs.")Ex. 12:9(

The four verbs in this passage allude to four ascending levels in our relationship with G-d:

Allegorically, the “head,” “legs,” and “internal organs” of the Passover offering signify the three dimensions of spiritual life. The “head” is the study of the Torah; the “legs,” i.e. the limbs of action, are the active performance of the commandments; and the “internal organs” refer to prayer, the inner life of the soul. All three must be totally permeated by the “fire” of holiness -- the warmth and enthusiasm for G-d.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va'eira from our *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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and Naomi's father, Isaac Baum, z"l (Yaakov Yitzchak ben Elimelech)

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Shabbat Parashat Bo

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The March of Folly

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 advisors. 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 advisors 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 advisors. 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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Message of the Moon

"God said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: This

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month shall be unto you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year to you.” (Exodus 12:1–2)

The sanctification of the new moon, the first commandment which the Jews receive as a people, should not be seen as a commandment which just happens to be the first. Nothing in the Torah just happens to be. The firstborn commandment of God’s firstborn people inevitably reveals basic truths about the Jewish psyche. The more we examine the nature of this commandment, the more we understand who the Jews are as a people.

According to the Midrash, this commandment is so important that God himself guides Moses’ gaze across the sky to familiarize him with the different phases of the moon so that he can recognize exactly what the moon should look like when it is to be sanctified.

Halakhically, we can see the significance of this commandment because, prior to Hillel the Elder’s fixing of the calendar for all subsequent generations in the third century of the Common Era, the new moon was established on the basis of witnesses’ testimony in court. The halakha even allowed these witnesses to desecrate Shabbat if necessary in order to get to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem without wasting one minute. When their testimony was finally accepted after rigorous examination, the Sanhedrin declared: “The month is sanctified, the month is sanctified.”

Even today, when first-hand testimony of the sighting of the moon has not been required for many centuries, the Sabbath before a new month takes on a special character and is known as Shabbat Mevarkhim, the Sabbath of the blessing of the new moon. A special prayer requesting a month of life, peace and sundry blessings (composed by the first-generation Amora Rav and found in Berakhot 16b) is chanted by a respected member of the congregation, and the time of the moon’s exact appearance to a fraction of a second is announced.

The day before the new moon appears, when the sky is pitch black, is called “Yom Kippur Katan,” and is maintained by the very pious as a fast day. The first day of the month (or the last day of the previous month and the first day of the new month, if the previous month has thirty days) is a minor festival called Rosh Chodesh. On this day (or these days), half of Hallel is chanted during the morning service and the special prayer Ya’ale VeYavo is added during the Amida and in the Grace after Meals. There is an additional scriptural reading, just as on any festival, and we recite the additional Musaf prayer, a reminder of the extra sacrifice in the Temple. General custom dictates that

women are freed from certain domestic tasks, and fasting and eulogizing are forbidden.

During the first half of the new month, generally on Saturday night after Shabbat, and preferably between the third and eleventh day of the month, the congregation leaves the synagogue, stands outside gazing up at the new moon, and recites the Kiddush Levana (the prayer for the sanctification of the moon). If the clouds are thick, the special prayers to be recited are delayed until the first clear night on the closest Saturday night. One New York-based Hassidic group (Bobov) rents a helicopter for the Rebbe and his most respected aides to make sure that they will actually see the moon and recite the appropriate prayers. In most cities in the Diaspora, neighbors and passers-by are mystified by these Jews gathered together in prayer, singing and dancing as they look up at the moon.

Why this fascination with the moon?

In the portion of Bo, as in a number of adjacent portions, the Jews find themselves in Egypt, a land where the calendar followed the sun. The Maharal of Prague points out that when the Jews were given this first commandment, they were actually given more than just a law telling them to start counting months according to lunar cycles; they were given a whole new way of life that would stand in sharp contrast to that of the Egyptians.

The sun is symbolic of constancy and power – the very image of Egypt. Discounting dark clouds (not too many in Egypt), every day the sun’s warmth and light reaches someone in the world – 365 days a year we trust the sun to rise and set. “There is nothing new under the sun,” writes the author of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), because the sun is a symbol of constancy. The sun sees and oversees everything in an unchanging fashion. Under the moon there is something new at least twelve times a year. The moon is forever changing, going through its phases, getting smaller and smaller and then, when it seems to have disappeared completely, there is a sudden turnaround and rebirth in the heavens. To the ancient imagination, the permutation of the moon in its twenty-eight-day journey was a constant source of speculation, wonder and mystery – and a ray of optimistic faith that from the depths of darkness and disappearance will re-emerge light and rebirth.

The Zohar compares the Jewish people to the moon because both the moon and the people of Israel go through phases, disappearing little by little until it seems that it is the end, but nevertheless, stubbornly insisting upon being born again. After each Temple destruction, even after a centuries-long exile climaxing in Europe’s death factories – a new moon is

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suddenly sighted and the messengers run to Jerusalem.

The repetition of a monthly cycle – this law of change and rebirth – firmly established within the Jewish psyche the constant quest for renewal. Our sanctity as a nation is tied to our potential for national renewal. Our history attests to the phenomenon that when a Jewish civilization in one part of the world finds itself facing destruction, almost simultaneously a new culture emerges to replace it. The year 1492, for example, signaled the destruction of Spanish Jewry as well as the birth of an American haven.

The commandment of sanctifying the new moon is given when it is clear that Pharaoh himself, master under the Egyptian sun, will not change. After nine terrifying plagues, we might expect him to have a change of heart, but the leader of Egypt does not – cannot – relent. Despite all that he has witnessed, he refuses to let the Jews go.

All of the nay-sayers were certain that the Egyptian social hierarchy would never change. The Israelites were doomed to remain slaves in Egypt forever.

The message of this first commandment is that in contrast to the Egyptians, the Jews can and do change, emerging again and again as survivors from the fangs of evil. World society, individual nations and specific people can and will change, often for the better. “Chodesh” is the Hebrew word for month, “chadash” is the Hebrew word for new, and “chidush” is the Hebrew word for a brilliant, novel insight or invention as well as the word for renewal. Our optimistic scanning of the black-blue skies for the first sliver of the new moon is our testimony to the possibility of growth, change and development, and we must learn to sanctify that change. In the immortal words of Rabbi A.Y. Kook, the old must experience renewal, and the new must be sanctified (ha-yashan yitchadesh, ve-hachadash yitkadash).

There is yet another significance to our fascination with the moon. The most fundamental human sin – jealousy – is reflected in the phases (“imperfection”) of the moon. Initially, records the Midrash, the moon and the sun were to have been equal in size, co-rulers over the hosts of heaven and earth. After all, the Bible records: “And the Lord made two great lights...” (Gen. 1:16). It is only in the continuation of the verse that we read: “the greater light to rule by day and the lesser light to rule by night” (ibid). What happened? Rashi explains:

“[The lights] were created equal in size, but the moon was lessened when it complained,

saying that it was impossible for two rulers to share one crown.” (Rashi ad loc.)

The moon expected God to remove some of the glory of the sun, but as punishment for greed and envy, it was the moon who had to suffer imperfection. It is this jealousy and greed, perhaps built into the very fabric of human nature, which caused Cain to kill Abel, the brothers to sell Joseph. Similarly, the Second Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred (sinat hinam) The new moon, with its promise of wholeness and perfection, symbolizes our faith that we will overcome jealousy and envy, that humanity will redeem itself and that messianic peace is within reach. Our prayers during the ceremony of the sanctification of the new moon are for the moon to become free of her imperfection and for David – King of Israel, Messiah and redeemer. Our greeting to one another in the midst of these prayers is Shalom Aleikhem – peace and wholeness. Kiddush Levana closes with these words:

“May it be Your will...to readjust the deficiency of the moon so that it may no longer be reduced in size. May the light of the moon be again as the light of the sun, as it was during the first seven days of creation, before it was reduced...”

This prayer brings us full circle. Ultimately, when redemption finally arrives, the moon will return to its former glory and jealousy will no longer exist – neither between the lights in the sky nor between the lights down on earth, the human lights. Redemption will only happen when we humans join God in helping to make it happen – by sanctifying the moon, by sanctifying life, by sanctifying ourselves. The sanctification of the new moon is the first commandment: Our dream of renewal and redemption is our highest priority.
Postscript

Maimonides brings his crowning proof for Jewish faithful optimism in a more glorious future of world peace and harmony in defining the commandment to mark the new moon at the beginning of each month (Book of Commandments, Positive Commandment 153). He reminds us that our calendar was established by Hillel and that we could not maintain it today were the rabbis of our generation not considered the agents of that generation in Israel, which initially intercalated the months.

In addition, if a time ever came when there would cease to be a Jewish community in the Land of Israel or a religious court there, the agency could not be effective, because Torah (and therefore the calendar) can only come forth from Zion! But God would never allow such a possibility, since the Almighty guaranteed that “the Jewish community in

Israel will never be erased...” (ibid.). Maimonides is telling us that built into our Hebrew calendar is the unshakeable belief that there will eternally be a Jewish community and a Jewish religious court in the Land of Israel!

Remember that Maimonides expressed such an awesome and stirring faith despite the fact that he was chased from pillar to post in his lifetime by the marauding Moslem Almohads, and he lived at the time of the European Christian Crusades. It is especially significant that Maimonides expresses his eternal faith in the command to mark the new moon. And what more reason have we to be optimistic about the Jewish future, since our generation has witnessed the miraculous return to Jewish national sovereignty in Israel after almost two thousand years of exile!

May the Merciful Lord lead us to our land and enable us to walk on our land proudly and uprightly.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Importance of Eagerly Anticipating the Geula

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.

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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 Yisrael. 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 takeh...” (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 crueller, 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, IY”H, 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.

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Was Moshe coming or going? In the beginning of Parshat Bo, Hashem gives him a command, ‘Bo el-par’oh’, which means ‘come to Pharaoh’.

Hashem was actually instructing Moshe to go to Pharaoh. So why did he say ‘bo’?

You will notice that the whole Sedra is named after this term. The Kotzker Rebbe gives a beautiful explanation. He says that Hashem could sense that Moshe was feeling alone. After all, he was going to confront Pharaoh, King of Egypt, in his palace. He had the entire Egyptian nation pitted against him and he also knew that his own people weren’t passionately in support of him.

Hashem wanted Moshe to know that Hashem was with him.

At the burning bush Moshe asked Hashem, ‘Mi anochi ki elech el-par’oh’ – ‘who am I that

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I should go to Pharaoh?” And God’s answer was ‘ki-ehyeh immach’ – ‘I will be with you’.

Indeed, the Mekhilta, the Midrash, tells us that at the time when Moshe was speaking to Pharaoh, he felt the voice of Hashem coming out of his mouth. Such was the palpable presence of the Almighty with Moshe at that time.

And that’s why Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Bo el-par’oh’, come Moshe, come be with me, when the two of us will stand before Pharaoh.

In Psalm 23 we declare ‘Lo-ira ra ki-attah immadi’, ‘we will not fear any evil because God You are with us in times of trouble’.

Indeed, when the Jewish people has a sense that we are alone in this world, Hashem reassures us and He says no, I am with you.

Sometimes Hashem walks alongside us, sometimes he carries us in his arms. But he is with us in the midst of deep challenges.

And that is exactly the situation right now, at a time when we are filled with anxiety and worry for the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

We know that Hashem is with us and he will always be.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Power of Community

Rabbanit Shira Marili Mirvis

One of the greatest blessings in our personal family is that we have been fortunate to live in an extraordinary community and neighborhood. As a child, I always dreamed of living close to my siblings. Yet, as we grew older and each of us married and settled down, we found ourselves scattered across five different locations in Israel. In daily life—through joys and hardships—the people immediately by our side are not our family by blood but our neighbors, our community.

Much like all of the Jewish People, we have felt the importance of community more deeply since October 7. During the difficult days of the war, when thousands of families were forced to leave their homes in the south and north, tens of thousands of soldiers were called to reserve duty and daily life was completely disrupted, the strength of the community became evident. We saw this in how communities welcomed displaced families, supported soldiers’ families, prayed for the success of our troops, mobilized impressively to prepare packages and equipment for soldiers, and provided emotional support that became an integral part of our lives.

One of the first things that caught my attention when reading the parsha was the special commandment concerning the Korban Pesach. God calls to Moshe and Aharon on the first of Nissan and instructs them to command the Israelites to take a lamb for each household on the tenth of Nissan. On the fourteenth of Nissan, before sunset, they were to slaughter the lamb, and on the night of the fifteenth, each family would eat its lamb. They were to mark their doorposts with its blood and eat the offering while dressed and ready to leave Egypt.

Two details in the verses stood out to me:

“Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying: In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man 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 who is closest to his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man’s eating ye shall make your count for the lamb... And ye shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at dusk.” (Shemot 12:3–6)

The first question that came to mind regarding the commandments of the Korban Pesach was the distinction between familial bonds and geographical proximity. If my family is unable to consume an entire lamb in one night, my natural instinct would be to reach out to my sister and invite her family to join us. Yet the Torah explicitly instructs me to turn to my neighbor instead. Does geographical closeness hold greater significance than blood ties?

The second detail that caught my attention is how the Israelites are addressed. When Moshe and Aharon are commanded to speak to the people, they are referred to as “the congregation of Israel” [“adat Yisrael”]. Later, when the Israelites are instructed to slaughter the Korban Pesach, we encounter the phrase “the assembly of the congregation of Israel” [“kehal adat Yisrael”] for the first time in the Torah.

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap, in his work *Mei Marom* (5: 212, 214), explains the difference between “congregation” (edah) and “assembly” (kahal). The term edah [עדה] stems from the word עד (witness) and thus reflecting the essence of Israel as witnesses to the Divine presence in the world. Even if this testimony is not always outwardly visible, it exists internally, as Rabbi Charlap states: “The unique quality of Israel never wavers.”

In contrast, kahal refers to a seemingly random gathering of people who happen to live in the same place at the same time, without a unifying purpose. “He and his neighbor who is

closest to his house”—a neighbor might appear to be the epitome of a kahal, someone who happens to live nearby by chance. On the surface, there seems to be no connection between the families. However, the essence of the Exodus from Egypt was to reveal that we are an edah.

We may have perceived ourselves as a kahal—a collection of slaves seeking to escape Egypt. But in truth, we are an edah. It is precisely through the bond with our neighbors, which outwardly seems like a coincidental association, that we come to realize we are an edah. In fact, it is precisely this connection that embodies the real essence of an edah.

When we consider that if a nuclear family cannot consume the entire Korban, we do not turn to extended family—even though that would seem logical because of the familial bond—but instead join with our neighbor, we uncover a profound message. Even when it outwardly appears that we are merely a kahal, in reality, we are an edah.

“And the entire assembly of the congregation of Israel shall slaughter it.”

During the current war, we have witnessed how what might seem like a kahal—an arbitrary collection of neighbors—can reveal itself as a true edah, a unified community bound by deep mutual responsibility. Whether supporting soldiers’ families, aiding the injured in their recovery, or comforting bereaved families, the connections among neighbors have proven to be much more than geographic proximity.

Just as in the days of Yetziat Mitzrayim, so too today, we see that it is in times of crisis that the true strength of a community is revealed. What outwardly appears as a random gathering of people transforms into a living testimony to the unity and mutual care of the Jewish people. The bond between neighbors, which might seem coincidental, reflects our deeper identity as an edah.

May we merit to continue strengthening these communal bonds in times of peace as well, learning to be neighbors who are like family and a community that is like one united nation. May we soon see peace, the return of all the hostages, and complete healing for all the injured. May we hear good tidings only, and merit salvation and comfort for the entire people of Israel.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

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

Likutei Divrei Torah

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 mitzvot 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 pashkevlim 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.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Reality of Realities

HASHEM said to Moshe: "Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, in order that I may place these signs of Mine in his midst, and in order that you tell into the ears of your son and your son's son how I made a mockery of the Egyptians, and My signs that I placed in them, and you will know that I am HASHEM." (Shemos 10:1-2)

HASHEM is explaining to Moshe the reason for this whole giant play, with the Makos, the ten plagues landing on Egypt. It is in order that for all generations we should be able to explain to our children that HASHEM took up our cause and brought the super power of the world, easily, to its knees, and also that it should be known, "you will know that I am HASHEM". Who is that phrase referring to, "you will know" referring to?

The Kuzari asks an important question. Why did HASHEM make such a small and diminutive claim when introducing Himself to the Jewish People and the world on Mount Sinai? Why does He say, "I am HASHEM Who took you out from the land of Egypt"? HASHEM could have made a much greater claim. I am HASHEM Who made Heaven and Earth." The Possuk in Iyov may be answering this question with the words, "Where were you when the world was created?" Nobody was there to witness that event. It predated the existence of people and the possibility of the presence of witnesses, obviously. The ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, and the entire miraculous episode of the Exodus was experienced by 600,000 adult males between the age of 20 and 60, perhaps in total 3,000,000 people. It was not a hysterical revolution but rather a historical revelation. HASHEM is now known for all time.

It was a Sunday morning. My wife and I had just spent a glorious Shabbos in Boston. We had two little boys in tow. We decided to travel north to visit Newburyport Mass. where my great grandfather lived most of his adult life and where I remember visiting him. Entering the city, we found only strip malls. I was sure they had already "paved paradise and put up a parking lot". Then like out of a time warp, there it was; the cobblestone street, the lake, the old court house, and a civil war cannon.

As we stood there surveying the area a gentleman approached us and asked, "Are you people-Chassidim?" I told him, "No! We're just ordinary folk." He persisted, "Is there a convention going on?" I thought to myself, "Four Jews is a convention. Five would be an incursion, and six would already be an

occupation.” I told him, “No! My great grandfather lived here after coming from Russia. He built that Synagogue down the block and his house is there across the street. I’m here to show my children where their great-great grandfather lived, worked, and prayed.” The man stood at attention. Real tears streamed down his cheeks and with a quivering voice he declared, “When I see how you people keep your traditions from generation to generation you are truly G-d’s chosen people.” He backed up respectfully into the day and disappeared. We were stunned. My wife asked in wonderment, “What was that about?”

We reasoned that this fellow just came out from one of those Sunday services where they were reading the Bible which is all about the Jews. However, when they look at the news, they are surprised to find out how often those who seem to be the descendants of the ones mentioned in “the book” represent causes that countermand the values of “the book”. Something’s wrong with this picture! Behold, onto the Mall in Newburyport, Mass. strides a family looking hauntingly authentic, with Yarmulkas, and Tsitsis, and other signs. I’m not saying that I am the paragon of virtue but something must have struck him. The “People of the Book” suddenly appear with a loyalty to “the book” and all is confirmed true. Our sages tell us that HASHEM and the Torah testify about the Jewish People. Hashem and the Jewish People certify the Torah. The Torah and the Jewish People testify about HASHEM. We just walked out of the Bible, and it is as if we stepped down from Mt. Sinai, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, witnesses to the giving of the Torah and all of human history. So, it is written, “You are my witnesses, says HASHEM” (Isaiah 43:10)

Generation after generation, and throughout the year, and each week that is crowned with a Shabbos, and every moment of our Torah lives is a living testament to the fact – the knowledge that HASHEM is indeed the reality of realities.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Israel on the World Stage

By Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Parashat Bo begins with Hashem’s message to Moshe concerning Pharaoh and the Egyptians, whereas the rest of the parasha focuses on instructions particular for Am Yisrael. Here we find a turning point in history. Until now the history of Am Yisrael has been presented together with that of the world at large. At the eve of their redemption, it is imperative that they see themselves as separate and distinct from the nation around them. The haftarah selected for this week (Yirmiyahu 46:13–28) is one of the first prophecies delivered by the prophet to other nations, and like the parasha,

contains both universal and particular themes. The first part of Yirmiyahu’s prophecy (v. 13–26) is universally addressed to Egypt and the entire world, while the concluding two pesukim contain a special message concerning the destiny of Am Yisrael: “...For I am with you, for I shall make an end of all the nations... but I will not make an end of you.” This echoes the contrast Hashem made during the plagues of darkness and death of the firstborn “–in order that you shall know that G-d separates between Egypt and Israel” (Shemot 11:7).

As opposed to the parasha which focuses on the distinction of Am Yisrael, the haftarah teaches that Hashem, as the G-d of the entire world, continues to deliver messages to all the nations throughout history. This time, on the eve of destruction and exile, Yirmiyahu the prophet must come and prepare the nation for their new reality of dispersion amidst the nations. The haftarah serves as contrasting parshanut for the parasha; yetziat Mitzrayim is being reversed as Am Yisrael return to a state of exile. Am Yisrael must be reminded that they have a role to play among the nations, i.e. the spreading of G-d’s name. The haftarah therefore, focuses on the universal component as found in the beginning of Parashat Bo.

Although the haftarah contains similar themes, the plagues described by Yirmiyahu that will befall Egypt come from the nation of the north and not directly from Hashem as described in the parasha. Nonetheless, the prophet warns that the warriors of Egypt will not be able to withstand their invaders “because G-d thrust him down” (15). Here we once again find parshanut on the parasha: When Pharaoh declared “I do not know G-d’s name,” Hashem sent direct and overt plagues so that the nations would universally recognize G-d’s “outstretched arm” and His guidance of the world. Yirmiyahu’s prophecy indicates that by his time, G-d’s name is already known and His hand may be detected even through natural phenomena and human actions.

The concluding pesukim of the haftarah emphasize that even amidst the prophecies concerning the nations and the universalistic trend which they represent, the uniqueness of Am Yisrael will be maintained. Anticipating the fears of the nation on the eve of exile, the prophet promises: “And you, My servant Ya’akov, do not be afraid, and do not fear, O Israel, for I will save you from afar and your seed from the land of their captivity. And Ya’akov shall return and shall be quiet and at ease, with none to make him afraid. And you, My servant Ya’akov, do not fear, says the L-rd, for I am with you, for I shall make an end of all the nations where I have driven you, but I will not make an end of you...” (v. 27–28)

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Rabbi Hershel Schachter

When Minhag and Din Clash

The Rambam describes that the korban Pesach must be broiled in order to remove the blood which is found in the animal's capillaries. Additionally, the larger arteries and veins must be removed before the korban is broiled, to avoid the blood they contain being absorbed into the flesh and rendering it treif. After the korban is broiled, the gid hanosheh, which may not be eaten, is removed. The Raavad, in his satirical style, writes, "if I would be in the Beis Hamikdash when this man (the Rambam) brought his korban, I would throw it on the floor and tell him that he is not permitted to eat it because the gid hanosheh makes all of the flesh of the korban treif." Rav Yosef Caro (in his commentary Kesef Mishneh) comes to the defense of the Rambam and explains his position, as follows: the accepted view in the Gemorah (Chulin 99) is that the gid hanosheh does not have enough taste to make the rest of the korban treif. Normally we would certainly recommend removing the gid hanosheh before cooking or broiling meat with it; but in the case of the korban Pesach there is a special din that one is supposed to broil the entire animal intact and slice it up after the broiling. Since b'dieved the gid hanosheh does not make other food treif, we leave it in when we broil the korban Pesach in order to fulfill the mitzvah of broiling the korban when the entire animal intact. Regarding the veins and the arteries, however, we have no choice but to remove them, since having them in place when the korban is broiled would render the entire korban treif.

Rav Yosef Caro raises an objection to this defense. The gemorah tells us that although the fat which is on top of the gid hanosheh is biblically permitted, "the holy Jewish people have the practice of not eating it". As such, one cannot say that the fats on top of the gid hanosheh don't have any flavor, and therefore if one broils the entire korban Pesach when it is all intact the flavor of these fats will spread into the flesh and everything will become treif. Rav Yosef Caro himself responds that from the gemorah it would appear the even the fat on top of the gid hanosheh is permissible not only biblically but even m'dirabbonon, and the practice of not eating this fat is only a minhag. In this halacha the Rambam is teaching us that whenever there is a conflict between a real din and a minhag, we must observe the real din. Therefore, once a year on seder night, all the Jews in Jerusalem would be violating the minhag of not eating the shuman ha'gid because removing this fat would be a violation of the din of broiling the korban Pesach when it is all intact.

Rav Yisroel Gustman was a great goan who survived the Nazi Holocaust. At the end of his sefer on Kiddushin, which is full of chiddushim on the gemorah, he included a teshuva halacha l'maaseh on a contemporary issue, the thrust of which is that, as Rav Yosef Caro pointed out, whenever a minhag is in conflict with the real halacha, the halacha certainly takes precedence.]

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to: ravfrand@torah.org

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bo

Parents & Grandparents Brought Back to Witness the Results of Even Their Intentions

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1322 Chodesh Issues: Women and Kiddush Levana; Getting Married in Last Half of Chodesh? Good Shabbos!

At the beginning of Parshas Bo, Moshe and Aharon tell Pharaoh "...For if you refuse to send forth My people, behold, tomorrow I shall bring arbeh (a locust swarm) into your border. It will cover the eye of the land so that he will not be able to see the land; and it will consume the remaining residue that was left to you by the hail, and it will consume all the trees that grow for you from the field. They will fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all Egypt, such as your fathers and your grandfathers have not seen from the day they came onto the earth until this day." (Shemos 10:4-6).

The Sefas Emes derives an inference from this last pasuk: The pasuk says that the parents and grandparents of the Egyptians never saw such a plague of locust until this day. The Sefas Emes says that the Ribono shel Olam brought back their parents and grandparents who already died, in order that they should be able to witness the plague of arbeh. They never saw such a locust plague until this day, but today they did see such a plague!

We thus have an instance of techiyas hameisim (resurrection of the dead), not for tzadikim (righteous people), but for resha'im (wicked people), in order that they witness this terrible plague that befell their children and grandchildren. The Sefas Emes further references an oft-quoted passage from the Zohar in Parshas Pinchas which states that when a person makes a simcha (e.g. – a chassanah, a bar mitzvah, etc.), the neshamos (souls) of the parents and grandparents who are no longer in this world, come, in some sense, to the simcha to witness and 'participate in' the joyous family occasion.

The Sefas Emes makes the interesting observation: The Ribono shel Olam takes the neshamos of the parents and grandparents of Yiden from Gan Eden and brings them to the simcha so that they should be able to witness the joyous event of their descendants. On the other hand, the Ribono shel Olam took the resha'im – the parents and grandparents of the Egyptians, who also made Klal Yisrael suffer so much, not in order that they should see and enjoy the simcha of their children and grandchildren, but so that they should see and 'participate in' the suffering of their children and grandchildren.

The Sefas Emes explains "how this works": Regarding Klal Yisrael, the Almighty is "metzaref machshava tova l'maaseh." (Hashem links our good intentions with actions.) He considers a good thought as having been consummated, even though in reality, it was never accomplished. However, with the goyim, Hashem is "metzaref" their "machshava ra'ah l'maaseh". He holds them responsible for having acted wickedly, even for their evil plans that were never executed.

The Sefas Emes says: When a person makes a chassanah and he takes his children down to the chuppah k'das Moshe v'Yisroel (according to Jewish law and custom) and the parents are good and the children are good – part of the credit is due to the 'machshavos tovos' (good thoughts) that the parents and the grandparents invested into their children. The Ribono shel Olam says "They have a part in this chassanah. The reason this next generation is able to bring their dear children down to the chuppah is because of all of the 'machshavos tovos' that the parents and grandparents implanted in their children. Even if those thoughts and aspirations were not all fully fulfilled, the "machshava tova" was there, HaKadosh Baruch Hu joins a "machshava tova" to action even if the action was never fully consummated.

The reverse is true regarding the goyim. The Egyptians and their ancestors were all part of this evil plot to destroy Klal Yisrael. Their "machshava ra'ah" (evil thought) was a cause of this suffering. The Ribono shel Olam says: You caused this to happen? You implanted these wicked tendencies in your children? You are going to see the "nachs" of them suffering from the arbeh.

File This Away For Your Next Seder

I saw the following thought in Rav Avraham Buxbaum's sefer. This is a beautiful insight and something to remember for the Pesach Seder. In describing the instructions given to Bnei Yisrael to be carried out during their last night in Mitzrayim, the pasuk says: "You shall take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel

and the two doorposts with some of the blood that is in the basin, and as for you, you shall not leave the entrance of the house until morning.” (Shemos 12:22). No one was allowed to leave their house the entire night, not until the next morning.

Our Seder is basically a reenactment of Yetzias Mitzrayim. We try to do everything like they did the night before they left Mitzrayim. However, there is one anomaly. We do one thing at our Seder that was not done at that first Seder! When we say the paragraph “Sh’foch chamoscha...” (Pour out your wrath upon the nations who did not know you), we open the door.

Why do we open the door if we are trying to re-enact the first Pesach Seder? We should say “Don’t open the door! Keep that door closed. Nobody leaves here until morning!”

Rav Buxbaum says that we know from many different sources that Klal Yisrael was not worthy of leaving Mitzraim based on their own zechus (merit). “These people worship Avodah Zarah and these people worship Avodah Zarah!” The reason the Ribono shel Olam brought about Yetzias Mitzrayim was in the zechus of the Avos and in the zechus of Moshe and Aharon – but not in the zechus of the Jewish masses.

The Zohar writes that when Lot and his family were saved from the city of S’dom, they were warned: “Don’t look back!” The reason they were not permitted to look back is because when the midas hadin (attribute of judgement) is rampant, only people who are righteous and are therefore “zoche ba’din” (merit salvation based on judgment) are saved. However, even though Lot was the best of the people of S’dom, Chazal say that he was guilty of many of the same moral shortcomings as the other inhabitants of S’dom. The Angels warned him not to look back because if he would look back, he would be caught up in the decree of judgment along with everyone else. In fact, the Zohar lists three times in Chumash when people were not supposed to look because they were not zoche ba’din: (1) Noach in the teivah was told to not look out; (2) Lot could not look back at the destruction of S’dom, and (3) the Jews in Mitzrayim could not go out during the night of Makas Bechoros (the Plague of the First-Born Sons). Klal Yisrael were not permitted to go out that night because they too lacked the personal zechus to escape that decree. The midas hadin ruled in Mitzrayim that night and undeserving Jewish firstborns could have been killed as well had they “looked.”

A person who is not worthy of a miracle or salvation should not look. The reason why we open the door during our Seder is in the hope that, G-d Willing, we will be zoche to salvation ba’din during the future geulah (redemption)! Therefore, when we conduct our Seder, we anticipate being zoche to personally witness the Divine wrath poured out upon the goyim. The Sefas Emes in fact says that in the pasuk “And you shall not go out from the doorway of your homes ad boker” (until morning), the term ad boker is an allusion to the future redemption, when we will hopefully be fully zoche to witness that salvation.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350]

Home Weekly Parsha BO

Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

The great moment of freedom and redemption has finally arrived. The faith of the people of Israel in Moshe and Aharon has been vindicated. The Lord’s plagues have finally brought down the arrogance and stubbornness of Pharaoh. If this was an old-fashioned movie script, we would write “and then they lived happily after.”

But we are all aware that this parsha only represents the beginning of a long and arduous story plot that has yet to reach its eventual happy

conclusion. The new situation of freedom from actual physical slavery, as heady and triumphant as it is, presents only new challenges.

Life itself resembles a series of doors. Upon successfully opening one door, it is discovered that there are now different doors – even a series of doors - behind the original one. The challenges of being a free person are, to a great extent, even more challenging than those of being locked into servitude.

We are witness to the Torah’s recording of forty years in the desert until there arises a generation of Jews that is able to meet the challenge of establishing itself as a functioning national entity in its promised land of Israel. The word “bo” which serves as the headline of this week’s parsha indicates “coming” – a beginning - not a sense of finality and end.

The Torah wishes to indicate to us that “the arrows are always yet ahead of us” to find and deal with. And there are many miracles involved in being freed from slavery but the road from there to true independence and accomplishment requires hard work, human persistence and unflagging spirit and high morale. In our world of changing eras and bewildering uncertainties we can only reflect upon the enormous challenges facing us. The Diaspora, as Jewry knew it to be for many centuries on end, is no longer. The tremendous accomplishment of the creation of the State of Israel and its sustenance is behind us.

This process was fraught with many plagues and concurrent miracles. The faith of Israel has sustained us through these times of ordeal and difficulties. But now there are new and perhaps even more difficult challenges that face us. The task of nation-building is a long and arduous one, not given to easy solutions and pat sloganeering. It is measured not in years but in decades - if not even in centuries. It requires faith and tenacity and a long view of things. That is what God meant when he told Moshe at the beginning of the redemption process that Israel would accept the Torah at Sinai and that He would eventually bring them to the land that he promised to their forefathers. Why bother Moshe with those promises when the people are under the lash of slavery?

But God informs Moshe that freedom from slavery is only the beginning of the story, not its culmination. Our modern story of Israel does not end in 1948 or 1967. The realization of this stark truth can fire us to greater understanding and firmer belief and behavior in the justice of our cause and its eventual triumph.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Necessity of Asking Questions

Bo

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It is no accident that Parshat Bo, the section that deals with the culminating plagues and the Exodus, should turn three times to the subject of children and the duty of parents to educate them.

As Jews we believe that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need education. Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted. Unless parents hand on their memories and ideals to the next generation – the story of how they won their freedom and the battles they had to fight along the way – the long journey falters and we lose our way.

What is fascinating, though, is the way the Torah emphasises the fact that children must ask questions. Two of the three passages in our Parsha speak of this:

And 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

In days to come, when your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’

Ex. 13:14

There is another passage later in the Torah that also speaks of a question asked by a child:

In the future, when your child asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?” tell him: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Deut. 6:20-21

The other passage in today’s Parsha, the only one that does not mention a question, is:

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

These four passages have become famous because of their appearance in the Haggadah on Pesach. They are the four children: one wise, one wicked or rebellious, one simple and “one who does not know how to ask.” Reading them together, the Sages came to the conclusion that [1] children should ask questions, [2] the Pesach narrative must be constructed in response to, and begin with, questions asked by a child, [3] it is the duty of a parent to encourage his or her children to ask questions, and the child who does not yet know how to ask should be taught to ask.

There is nothing natural about this at all. To the contrary, it goes dramatically against the grain of history. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey. “Children should be seen, not heard,” goes the old English proverb. “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord,” says a famous Christian text. Socrates, who spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young. In Judaism, the opposite is the case. It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

Judaism is the rarest of phenomena: a faith based on asking questions, sometimes deep and difficult ones that seem to shake the very foundations of faith itself. “Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?” asked Abraham. “Why, Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people?” asked Moses. “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” asked Jeremiah. The book of Job is largely constructed out of questions, and God’s answer consists of four chapters of yet deeper questions: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? ... Can you catch Leviathan with a hook? ... Will it make an agreement with you and let you take it as your slave for life?”

In yeshiva, the highest accolade is to ask a good question: Du fregst a gutte kashe. Rabbi Abraham Twersky, a deeply religious psychiatrist, tells of how when he was young, his teacher would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English, he would say, “You right! You 100 Prozent right! Now I show you where you wrong.”

Isadore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, “My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, ‘What did you learn today?’ But my mother used to ask: ‘Izzy, did you ask a good question today?’ That made the difference. Asking good questions made me a scientist.”

Judaism is not a religion of blind obedience. Indeed, astonishingly in a religion of 613 commandments, there is no Hebrew word that means “to obey”. When Hebrew was revived as a living language in the nineteenth century, and there was need for a verb meaning “to obey,” it had to be borrowed from the Aramaic: le-tsayet. Instead of a word meaning “to obey,” the Torah uses the verb shema, untranslatable into English because it means [1] to listen, [2] to hear, [3] to understand, [4] to internalise, and [5] to respond. Written into the very structure of Hebraic consciousness is the idea that our highest duty is to seek to understand the will of God, not just to obey blindly.

Tennyson’s verse, “Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die,” is as far from a Jewish mindset as it is possible to be. Why? Because we believe that intelligence is God’s greatest gift to humanity. Rashi understands the phrase that God made man “in His image, after His likeness,” to mean that God gave us the ability “to understand and discern.” The very first of our requests in the weekday Amidah is for

“knowledge, understanding, and discernment.” One of the most breathtakingly bold of the rabbis’ institutions was to coin a blessing to be said on seeing a great non-Jewish scholar. Not only did they see wisdom in cultures other than their own, they thanked God for it. How far this is from the narrow-mindedness than has so often demeaned and diminished religions, past and present.

The historian Paul Johnson once wrote that rabbinic Judaism was “an ancient and highly efficient social machine for the production of intellectuals.” Much of that had, and still has, to do with the absolute priority Jews have always placed on education, schools, the Beit Midrash, religious study as an act even higher than prayer, learning as a life-long engagement, and teaching as the highest vocation of the religious life.

But much, too, has to do with how one studies and how we teach our children. The Torah indicates this at the most powerful and poignant juncture in Jewish history: just as the Israelites are about to leave Egypt and begin their life as a free people under the sovereignty of God. Hand on the memory of this moment to your children, says Moses. But do not do so in an authoritarian way. Encourage your children to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyse, explore. Liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Those who are confident of their faith need fear no question. It is only those who lack confidence, who have secret and suppressed doubts, who are afraid.

The one essential, though, is to know and to teach this to our children, that not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest. Darwin never knew what a gene was. Even the great Newton, founder of modern science, understood how little he understood, and put it beautifully: “I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

In teaching its children to ask and keep asking, Judaism honoured what Maimonides called the “active intellect” and saw it as the gift of God. No faith has honoured human intelligence more.

Parshat Bo: The Message of the Moon

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

“God said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: This month shall be unto you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year to you.” (Exodus 12:1–2)

The sanctification of the new moon, the first commandment which the Jews receive as a people, should not be seen as a commandment which just happens to be the first. Nothing in the Torah just happens to be. The firstborn commandment of God’s firstborn people inevitably reveals basic truths about the Jewish psyche. The more we examine the nature of this commandment, the more we understand who the Jews are as a people.

According to the Midrash, this commandment is so important that God himself guides Moses’ gaze across the sky to familiarize him with the different phases of the moon so that he can recognize exactly what the moon should look like when it is to be sanctified.

Halakhically, we can see the significance of this commandment because, prior to Hillel the Elder’s fixing of the calendar for all subsequent generations in the third century of the Common Era, the new moon was established on the basis of witnesses’ testimony in court. The halakha even allowed these witnesses to desecrate Shabbat if necessary in order to get to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem without wasting one minute. When their testimony was finally accepted after rigorous examination, the Sanhedrin declared: “The month is sanctified, the month is sanctified.”

Even today, when first-hand testimony of the sighting of the moon has not been required for many centuries, the Sabbath before a new month takes on a special character and is known as Shabbat Mevarkhim, the

Sabbath of the blessing of the new moon. A special prayer requesting a month of life, peace and sundry blessings (composed by the first-generation Amora Rav and found in Berakhot 16b) is chanted by a respected member of the congregation, and the time of the moon's exact appearance to a fraction of a second is announced.

The day before the new moon appears, when the sky is pitch black, is called "Yom Kippur Katan," and is maintained by the very pious as a fast day. The first day of the month (or the last day of the previous month and the first day of the new month, if the previous month has thirty days) is a minor festival called Rosh Chodesh. On this day (or these days), half of Hallel is chanted during the morning service and the special prayer Ya'ale VeYavo is added during the Amida and in the Grace after Meals. There is an additional scriptural reading, just as on any festival, and we recite the additional Musaf prayer, a reminder of the extra sacrifice in the Temple. General custom dictates that women are freed from certain domestic tasks, and fasting and eulogizing are forbidden.

During the first half of the new month, generally on Saturday night after Shabbat, and preferably between the third and eleventh day of the month, the congregation leaves the synagogue, stands outside gazing up at the new moon, and recites the Kiddush Levana (the prayer for the sanctification of the moon). If the clouds are thick, the special prayers to be recited are delayed until the first clear night on the closest Saturday night. One New York-based Hassidic group (Bobov) rents a helicopter for the Rebbe and his most respected aides to make sure that they will actually see the moon and recite the appropriate prayers. In most cities in the Diaspora, neighbors and passers-by are mystified by these Jews gathered together in prayer, singing and dancing as they look up at the moon.

Why this fascination with the moon?

In the portion of Bo, as in a number of adjacent portions, the Jews find themselves in Egypt, a land where the calendar followed the sun. The Maharal of Prague points out that when the Jews were given this first commandment, they were actually given more than just a law telling them to start counting months according to lunar cycles; they were given a whole new way of life that would stand in sharp contrast to that of the Egyptians.

The sun is symbolic of constancy and power – the very image of Egypt. Discounting dark clouds (not too many in Egypt), every day the sun's warmth and light reaches someone in the world – 365 days a year we trust the sun to rise and set. "There is nothing new under the sun," writes the author of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), because the sun is a symbol of constancy. The sun sees and oversees everything in an unchanging fashion. Under the moon there is something new at least twelve times a year. The moon is forever changing, going through its phases, getting smaller and smaller and then, when it seems to have disappeared completely, there is a sudden turnaround and rebirth in the heavens. To the ancient imagination, the permutation of the moon in its twenty-eight-day journey was a constant source of speculation, wonder and mystery – and a ray of optimistic faith that from the depths of darkness and disappearance will re-emerge light and rebirth.

The Zohar compares the Jewish people to the moon because both the moon and the people of Israel go through phases, disappearing little by little until it seems that it is the end, but nevertheless, stubbornly insisting upon being born again. After each Temple destruction, even after a centuries-long exile climaxing in Europe's death factories – a new moon is suddenly sighted and the messengers run to Jerusalem.

The repetition of a monthly cycle – this law of change and rebirth – firmly established within the Jewish psyche the constant quest for renewal. Our sanctity as a nation is tied to our potential for national renewal. Our history attests to the phenomenon that when a Jewish civilization in one part of the world finds itself facing destruction, almost simultaneously a new culture emerges to replace it. The year 1492, for example, signaled the destruction of Spanish Jewry as well as the birth of an American haven.

The commandment of sanctifying the new moon is given when it is clear that Pharaoh himself, master under the Egyptian sun, will not change.

After nine terrifying plagues, we might expect him to have a change of heart, but the leader of Egypt does not – cannot – relent. Despite all that he has witnessed, he refuses to let the Jews go.

All of the nay-sayers were certain that the Egyptian social hierarchy would never change. The Israelites were doomed to remain slaves in Egypt forever.

The message of this first commandment is that in contrast to the Egyptians, the Jews can and do change, emerging again and again as survivors from the fangs of evil. World society, individual nations and specific people can and will change, often for the better. "Chodesh" is the Hebrew word for month, "chadash" is the Hebrew word for new, and "chidush" is the Hebrew word for a brilliant, novel insight or invention as well as the word for renewal. Our optimistic scanning of the black-blue skies for the first sliver of the new moon is our testimony to the possibility of growth, change and development, and we must learn to sanctify that change. In the immortal words of Rabbi A.Y. Kook, the old must experience renewal, and the new must be sanctified (ha-yashan yitchadesh, ve-hachadash yitkadash).

There is yet another significance to our fascination with the moon. The most fundamental human sin – jealousy – is reflected in the phases ("imperfection") of the moon. Initially, records the Midrash, the moon and the sun were to have been equal in size, co-rulers over the hosts of heaven and earth. After all, the Bible records: "And the Lord made two great lights..." (Gen. 1:16). It is only in the continuation of the verse that we read: "the greater light to rule by day and the lesser light to rule by night" (ibid). What happened? Rashi explains:

"[The lights] were created equal in size, but the moon was lessened when it complained, saying that it was impossible for two rulers to share one crown." (Rashi ad loc.)

The moon expected God to remove some of the glory of the sun, but as punishment for greed and envy, it was the moon who had to suffer imperfection. It is this jealousy and greed, perhaps built into the very fabric of human nature, which caused Cain to kill Abel, the brothers to sell Joseph. Similarly, the Second Temple was destroyed due to baseless hatred (sinat hinam). The new moon, with its promise of wholeness and perfection, symbolizes our faith that we will overcome jealousy and envy, that humanity will redeem itself and that messianic peace is within reach. Our prayers during the ceremony of the sanctification of the new moon are for the moon to become free of her imperfection and for David – King of Israel, Messiah and redeemer. Our greeting to one another in the midst of these prayers is Shalom Aleikhem – peace and wholeness. Kiddush Levana closes with these words:

"May it be Your will...to readjust the deficiency of the moon so that it may no longer be reduced in size. May the light of the moon be again as the light of the sun, as it was during the first seven days of creation, before it was reduced..."

This prayer brings us full circle. Ultimately, when redemption finally arrives, the moon will return to its former glory and jealousy will no longer exist – neither between the lights in the sky nor between the lights down on earth, the human lights. Redemption will only happen when we humans join God in helping to make it happen – by sanctifying the moon, by sanctifying life, by sanctifying ourselves. The sanctification of the new moon is the first commandment: Our dream of renewal and redemption is our highest priority.

Postscript

Maimonides brings his crowning proof for Jewish faithful optimism in a more glorious future of world peace and harmony in defining the commandment to mark the new moon at the beginning of each month (Book of Commandments, Positive Commandment 153). He reminds us that our calendar was established by Hillel and that we could not maintain it today were the rabbis of our generation not considered the agents of that generation in Israel, which initially intercalated the months.

In addition, if a time ever came when there would cease to be a Jewish community in the Land of Israel or a religious court there, the agency could not be effective, because Torah (and therefore the calendar) can only come forth from Zion! But God would never allow such a

possibility, since the Almighty guaranteed that “the Jewish community in Israel will never be erased...” (ibid.). Maimonides is telling us that built into our Hebrew calendar is the unshakeable belief that there will eternally be a Jewish community and a Jewish religious court in the Land of Israel!

Remember that Maimonides expressed such an awesome and stirring faith despite the fact that he was chased from pillar to post in his lifetime by the marauding Moslem Almohads, and he lived at the time of the European Christian Crusades. It is especially significant that Maimonides expresses his eternal faith in the command to mark the new moon. And what more reason have we to be optimistic about the Jewish future, since our generation has witnessed the miraculous return to Jewish national sovereignty in Israel after almost two thousand years of exile!

May the Merciful Lord lead us to our land and enable us to walk on our land proudly and uprightly.

Shabbat Shalom

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Bo

The Perfect Day

This week we read the parsha of Bo, containing the final three plagues followed by Bnei Yisroel's {the Children of Israel's} exodus from Mitzrayim {Egypt}.

“And it was in the midst of this day, Hashem took Bnei Yisroel out of the land of Mitzrayim... And Moshe said to the nation: Remember this day that you left Mitzrayim, from the house of bondage... On this day you are going out, in the month of the Aviv (spring). [12:51,13:3-4]”

Rashi explains by bringing the Medrash. “Didn't they know in which month they left Mitzrayim? Rather Moshe was telling them to focus on the kindness that Hashem had showed them by choosing a good month for taking them out—not too hot, not too cold, no rains.”

What is the significance of Moshe specifying that on this day you are going out?

The S'forno writes that on that particular year, the lunar month during which they left Mitzrayim came out in the springtime. Moshe was telling them to guard and maintain the character of that day. Make the necessary leap years to ensure that this lunar month will always come out in the spring.

The Jewish year is counted according to the lunar months. With each month consisting of a touch more than twenty-nine and a half days, the twelve-month year comes out to approximately three hundred and fifty four days. The solar year consists of three hundred and sixty five days. As such, the lunar month runs at an annual eleven-day deficit. It is interesting to note that the Moslems, who also go according to the lunar year, don't compensate for these eleven days. As a result, their holidays gradually work their way through the different seasons, falling eleven days earlier (according to the solar cycle) each year.

As we learned in the passuk {verse} above, we are commanded to adjust our calendar, keeping it synchronized with the solar year, thereby ensuring that each holiday will always fall out in the same season. This is done in the following manner: Every nineteen years, the lunar year would fall behind two hundred and nine days (nineteen [years] x eleven [days] = two hundred and nine). Therefore, within every nineteen-year cycle we have seven leap years. A Jewish leap year has an additional thirty-day month. Seven out of every nineteen years we have thirteen instead of twelve months in the year. That keeps us even with the solar year and its seasons. (These seven years x thirty days actually makes up two hundred and ten days. That extra day is accounted for by the fact that neither the lunar nor the solar years are perfectly even numbers.)

What is the underlying concept making it so crucial to maintain the holidays in their proper seasons?

Rav Eli Meir Bloch zt"l explained that there is a common misconception. People often think that after the world had been arranged with different seasons—planting, growing, ripening, harvesting, gathering—the holidays then fell out in the properly corresponding time.

Pesach, {Passover} the holiday of freedom, fell out in the spring. Shavuot, the holiday of the Torah being given, fell out in harvest time.

The truth, however, is actually very different. In the highest spiritual realms, there is a 'time' that is particularly suited and conducive for freedom. This is called Aviv. It is a time of renewal and birth. A time suited for a fresh start that will enable growth and development toward a far loftier aspiration. Freedom was not an end in and of itself but rather served as a means. It served to plant seeds for the nation. The fruits, born from those seeds, were only harvested seven weeks later when we stood at the foot of Sinai and received the Torah.

Being that there was this Divine Will of Aviv, this concept pierced its way down through the spiritual worlds, ultimately manifesting itself in our coarse, physical world as the season that we call spring. A time of planting, a time of things only beginning to develop and ripen. But the source and purpose behind this season is the freedom that it manifests.

The cold, barren inactivity of winter is a reflection of the spiritual freeze we were subjected to during the enslavement. The Aviv broke through the cold with the warming rays of the sun and the delicate seedlings peeking their heads out from the thawing earth. That physical manifestation of Aviv heralded the arrival of the Divinely designated time for freedom. We left Mitzrayim but immediately began counting the days toward Sinai. The harvest time, reflecting the Divinely designated time of generous bounty-giving, is the course exterior containing within the most precious bounty ever presented to mankind—the Torah.

“On this day you are going out, in the month of the Aviv. [13:4]” Maintain that day. Maintain the totality of the opportunity and the experience. Use it to the maximum every year.

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Bo

Oy Vey!

“Don't get mad,” said the philosophers of the eighties, “get even.”

I am not sure if the objective of the ten plagues was for the Almighty to get even with the nation that had enslaved His people. Certainly there are Midrashic sources that correlate the ten plagues as direct punishment for Egyptian crimes against the Jewish people. (Tana D'bei Eliyahu Chapter 7) So perhaps we might say that the Jewish people got even.

There is, however, no scriptural reference to the fact that they got mad. In fact, each time Moshe went to Pharaoh a serene and calculated negotiation occurred. “Let My people serve Me,” Moshe commanded. When Pharaoh refused his obstinence was met with a clear and calculated threat. “If you refuse to allow the people to leave, I will send the following plague in your land.” And so it went. Sometimes a plague immediately followed a warning, other times plagues came with no warning at all. When Pharaoh found Moshe and arranged for a cessation of the scourge, Pharaoh reneged on his commitment soon after. Moshe became frustrated, perhaps he even became impatient, but there was no anger until the final plague. Then, he not only got even, he got mad.

Moshe warned Pharaoh with the words of Hashem, “At about midnight, I will go out in the midst of Egypt and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die.” (Exodus 11:4) Though Moshe detailed the ramifications of the plague he was greeted with an apathetic response.

Finally the Torah tells us, that “Moshe left Pharaoh in burning anger” (Exodus 11:8) Why, only then did Moshe storm out in a rage? Was he not accustomed to the callous recklessness of the Egyptian leader? What irked him during the last encounter more than any of the previous ones?

The great physicist Albert Einstein escaped the Nazi inferno to find a haven in the United States. During World War II his letter to President Roosevelt initiated the effort that spurred the creation of the atomic bomb. His theory of relativity was a prime factor in its development, and Einstein knew the destructive power that his ideas could potentially release. When Einstein heard in an August 6, 1945, radio broadcast that an atomic device was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, he reacted with

stunned silence. After a moment of somber reflection he only found two words to say. “Oy vey!”

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (d.1994) explains that Moshe had patience with Pharaoh up to a point. Throughout the ordeal, the reckless king’s obstinate decisions caused a great amount of discomfort to his people. Even when his advisors pleaded, “How long will this man [Moshe] be an obstacle, let them [the Jews] serve their G-d,” Pharaoh refused. His recalcitrance brought plagues of pestilence, boils, locust, and darkness — in addition to blood, frogs, and lice. All of these afflictions were vastly uncomfortable — but not fatal. Even the fiery hail did not harm the G-d-fearing Egyptians that sought shelter.

The last, the Plague of the First Born, had the most devastating ramifications. It meant the deaths of thousands of Egyptians “from the firstborn son of Pharaoh to those of the maidservant who was behind the millstone.” It was devastation so powerful that the Torah says that “such has never been and will never be again.” (Exodus 11:6) Pharaoh was able to stop the imminent destruction with one simple word — “Go.” Yet he chose to remain steadfast in his denial, bringing the downfall of his people and the death of innocents. And that callous and reckless behavior infuriated Moshe, whose compassion for the simplest of beings earned him the right to be the leader of the Jewish nation. The stark contrast displayed by his nemesis appalled him to the point of rage. The Torah commands us, “do not to hate the Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land.” (Deuteronomy 23:8) The Torah’s attitude toward a nation that held us captive is even more compassionate than that of its own leaders. Barbaric leaders egging on many simple people throughout the world, to act in a self-destructive manner are reminiscent of the Pharaoh who destroyed his own family to save his ego. It’s enough to make anybody — even the most humble man who ever lived — very angry.

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

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: דָּבָר אֶחָד, הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֵם. הָיָא הוּא דְּכַתִּיב (תהלים לג, יב) אֲשֶׁרִי הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהָיו, מִשְׁבָּחַר הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, קָבַע בּוֹ רִאשֵׁי חֳדָשִׁים וְשָׁנִים, וּכְשֶׁבָחַר בִּינְיָקָב וּבְנָיו קָבַע בּוֹ רִאשֵׁי חֳדָשִׁים שָׁל אֲזָלָה.

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.

(The following Shabbos 10 Shevat, Feb. 8, marks the 75th 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 Rebbe 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.)

Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon and the Taryag Mitzvos

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Most Important

What is the most important mitzvah of the Torah?

Question #2: Once, Twice, or Thrice?

The prohibition against mixing milk and meat is mentioned three times in the Torah. How many times is it counted in the 613 mitzvos?

Question #3: Counter Encounter

What are some practical halachic implications of different countings of the Taryag mitzvos?

Foreword:

Since this week includes the first mitzvos that Kelal Yisrael is commanded, we have an opportunity to return to a topic we have studied in the past – the counting of the Taryag Mitzvos.

Today, the most commonly used count of the 613 is that of the Rambam and the Sefer Hachinuch. However, there are numerous other counters of the Taryag Mitzvos -- beginning from the era of the geonim, through the rishonim and until the current day who count the Taryag Mitzvos. At the time of the Rambam, most followed the approach of the Baal Halachos Gedolos (usually abbreviated as Behag) in counting the Taryag mitzvos. The Rambam, who strongly disputed this approach, provided a system with rules to determine what qualifies as one of the 613 mitzvos.

Subsequent to the Rambam writing his Sefer Hamitzvos, his major work on this topic, most other authorities followed the Rambam's general approach to counting the mitzvos, although the major writers on the topic, such as the Ra'avad, the Semag, the Ramban, the Tashbeitz, the Sefer Hachinuch, the Semaq and the Maharam Shick, all disagree occasionally with the Rambam on the details. Some, like the Sefer Hachinuch accepted almost all the Rambam's count (he disagrees with only one mitzvah), whereas others, such as the Ramban, disagreed with many dozens of mitzvos, in which the Rambam counted something as a mitzvah and the Ramban disagreed, and vice versa. For example, whereas the Rambam does not count settling and living in Eretz Yisrael as one of the 613 mitzvos, the Ramban does.

Introduction:

This article will not focus on the Rambam's counting of the mitzvos, but on an earlier counting of the mitzvos done by Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon. Whereas the Rambam wrote an entire sefer explaining the rules for counting the 613 mitzvos and then enumerated them, Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon left us with a couple of poems, written at different times of his life, in which he enumerates the mitzvos in a brief, poetic style. To the best of my knowledge, Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon's approach to the enumeration of the 613 mitzvos was left without serious study until Rav Yehudah

Yeruchem Fishel Perla, one of the greatest gedolim of early 20th century Poland, made studying and explaining Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon's work his life's ambition. Rav Perla, who was born in Warsaw in 1846, devoted forty years to this study and writing up his conclusions, at times going for years without even leaving his home so that he could proceed undisturbed. During those years he relied on an opening between his home and a nearby shul through which he fulfilled the mitzvos of hearing kerias hatorah and shofar.

Many of the details of Rav Perla's life are shrouded in secrecy, and the brief biographies I have seen about his life, including those in recognized encyclopedia, notoriously contain many obvious factual errors. For example, in some of these biographies it is claimed that Rav Perla was a disciple of Rav Chayim Soloveichik at the time that Rav Chayim was the rav of Brisk. This is obviously impossible for several reasons:

1. Rav Chayim was seven years younger than Rav Perla.
2. Rav Chayim did not move to Brisk until 1892. Until that time, he had been a rosh yeshiva in Volozhin and he moved to Brisk (where his father, the Beis Halevi, was rav) when the Volozhin yeshiva was closed. In 1892, Rav Perla was already 46 years old, and had returned to Warsaw, his birthplace, more than twenty years before. He was married and had a family.

It is reported, probably reliably, that Rav Perla studied under Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin when the latter was the rav of Lomza. (This is before Rav Diskin assumed the positions as rav in Mezeritch, Kovno, Shklov, and Brisk, and eventually moved to Eretz Yisrael in 1877. It was then that the Beis Halevi, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik, was asked to assume the rabbonus of Brisk in Rav Diskin's stead, a position that the Beis Halevi held for the last fourteen years of his life. When he passed on, he was succeeded by his son, Rav Chayim, who became known to history as Rav Chayim Brisker.)

Rav Perla, whose family name was also sometimes spelled "Perlow" or "Perlman," was offered to be the rav of the best paying and most prestigious rabbinic positions in Poland of his era, but he refused them all to be completely devoted to learning and writing his seforim. His financial support was from the rental income of real estate that he had received from his father, a very righteous and wealthy Polish businessman. (It appears that Rav Perla's rebbitzen managed his real estate investments and collected the rents.)

Rav Perla specialized in early authors whose works had never had thorough commentaries written on them. He wrote very extensive works on the Ra'avan and the Kaftor Vaferech, but his magnum opus is his work on the counting of the mitzvos done by Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon.

Rav Perla's insights are brilliant and often very original. For example, in one place he resolves a dispute between the Ramban and the Rambam concerning an opinion of the Behag by demonstrating that they had in front of them two different and conflicting versions of what that gaon had written. In another instance, he unravels a baffling comment of the Ketzos Hachoshen by correcting the text printed in our editions.

Rav Perla's work elucidating the count of the mitzvos according to Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon and explaining in great depth the differences between the approaches of all the early counters of the Taryag Mitzvos was published in three volumes between the years 1913 and 1917. When we realize that the last volumes were published in the middle of what was then called "The Great War," when many of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, and particularly those ruled by the Czar's Empire, were destroyed, we can only begin to appreciate the monumental undertaking to which Rav Perla devoted himself. His commentary on Rav Sa'adiyah's enumeration of the commandments totals 1600 pages. Rav Yeruchem Perla examines thoroughly Rav Sa'adiyah's choice of words and deduces from this Rav Sa'adiyah's understanding of each mitzvah and the halachic consequences that result. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, with whom Rav Perla had begun a correspondence before the war, is reputed to have said: "Without the hasmadah of forty years of devotion to Torah study, no human being would have been able to author such a work."

Rav Perla owned a massive library and added thousands of comments to his personal copies of these seforim. Quite clearly, Rav Perla intended for the glosses in the seforim in his personal library to be printed at some future time to benefit Klal Yisrael. Many of these comments were eventually published in the annual Noam and numerous other rabbinic journals. Periodically, one of the auction houses specializing in Judaica sells a sefer that Rav Perla once owned. The seforim are rarely in top condition. They show wear from frequent and constant use; yet his copies still fetch high prices at auction. To quote one such auction announcement: "Dozens of important marginalia [some long], in the fine tiny handwriting of the renowned Torah scholar Rabbi Yerucham Fishel Perla. Signatures and various stamps: 'Yerucham Fishel Perla,' 'Yerucham Fishel Perlman,' and: 'Juda Perla – Warschau.'" I have no idea why Rav Perla used different stamps, with different spellings of his name, or why he stamped his seforim multiple times.

In the 1920's Rav Perla was widowed, and his children lived far from Warsaw. As an eighty-year-old veteran gadol, he moved to Eretz Yisrael, where he continued his studying and writing. At this point in his life, the rebbitzen of Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank brought meals to Rav Perla daily, while the octogenarian scholar continued his work, particularly an extensive commentary on the Kaftor Vaferech, a three-volume work on the mitzvos of Eretz Yisrael written by one of the rishonim. Rav Perla also contributed numerous profound essays to various rabbinic journals.

Having completed our lengthy introduction, I will now share several places where Rav Perla explains the brief poetic words of Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon to demonstrate that he disagreed with other mitzvah counters.

Most important

Let me begin by addressing our opening question: "What is the most important mitzvah of the Torah?"

While no one will say that the Torah has a specific mitzvah that is more important than any other, according to the Rambam, one of the most important of the 613 mitzvos is vehalachta bidrachav, to walk in the ways of Hashem. At great length and in several places, the Rambam explains that this involves evaluating one's personality and adjusting it and behaving so that it develops in the direction that the Torah wants. This mitzvah forms the foundation of the Rambam's work Shemoneh Perakim, a lengthy essay that is part of his commentary to the Mishnah as an introduction to Mesechta Avos. It also forms the basis of Hilchos Dei'os, which is the second section of the Rambam's magnum opus, the Mishneh Torah.

Notwithstanding that many halachic authorities consider vehalachta bidrachav to be perhaps the most important of the 613 mitzvos, Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon does not even count this as one of the 613 mitzvos! This unusual fact is not ignored by Rav Perla, who has a lengthy essay explaining Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon's opinion. Rav Perla demonstrates that Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon did not count this as one of the 613 mitzvos because, in his opinion, there is no specific commandment in the Torah to evaluate and adjust one's personality. The sources that the Rambam cites as basis for this mitzvah were viewed by Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon to be asmachos, meaning, in this context, concepts of which a person should always be conscious, but not part of the Torah's structure of commandments. As far as the words vehalachta bidrachav, Rav Perla presumes that Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon understood this as a general commandment to follow Hashem's instructions on how to live one's life that is not counted as one of the 613 mitzvos. We can compare this to the road sign that instructs us to "Keep Right," a message with both safety and ethical value, but should not be counted as one of the 613 mitzvos.

Thus, whereas many authorities contend that the most important mitzvah of the Torah may be developing one's character, according to Rav Sa'adiyah, this is not even one of the Torah's 613 mitzvos.

Basar bechalav

Here is another instance in which Rav Perla analyzes the words of Rav Sa'adiyah Gaon and the other mitzvah counters and reaches a fascinating conclusion. The Torah mentions the prohibition against mixing milk and meat in three different places, each time with the exact same five words, lo sevasheil gedi bachaleiv imo, "Do not cook a kid in

the milk of its mother.” Chazal explain that the Torah repeats this mitzvah three times to teach that there are three prohibitions min haTorah:

- (1) To cook meat and milk together.
- (2) To eat the mixture of meat and milk cooked together.
- (3) To benefit from such a mixture.

Rav Yeruchem Perla notes that there is a three-way machlokes among the rishonim whether this counts in the listing of Taryag Mitzvos as one mitzvah (Behag; Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon), two mitzvos (Rambam; Sefer Hachinuch) or three (Zohar Harakia of the Tashbeitz). Although most of the laws of basar bechalav will not be affected by this dispute, there are several ramifications that do result, particularly regarding the validity as a witness of someone who violates some of these laws intentionally, but observes the others. An example of this would be someone who benefits from a cooked mixture comprising meat and milk, such as by selling such a product as a salesman, but who does not eat or cook it. According to all opinions, he is violating a Torah prohibition. However, for reasons beyond the scope of this article, being invalidated as a witness is dependent on how many mitzvos are counted here.

Another counter encounter

Here is another example of a practical halachic dispute that results from two opinions whether a mitzvah is counted in the 613. The Gemara states that someone who frees a Canaanite slave violates a lo sa’aseh of the Torah, referred to as le’olam bahem ta’avodu. Among the rishonim, there is discussion about this law, since the Gemara notes instances when great Torah scholars did emancipate their Canaanite slaves. Rav Perla demonstrates that Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon never counts le’olam bahem ta’avodu as one of the Torah’s 613 prohibitions, and reasons that the gaon considered this to be a rabbinic prohibition. In a mammoth essay on the topic, he demonstrates numerous halachic ramifications that result from this dispute.

Mitzvas peru urvu

Rav Yeruchem Perla notes that there is a three-way dispute between Rav Sa’adiyah, the Rambam and the Rosh (Kesubos 1:12) whether kiddushin, getting married, and having children are one mitzvah (Rav Sa’adiyah), two separate mitzvos (Rambam) or whether the mitzvah is having children (Rosh). There are several very fundamental results of this dispute, but explaining them takes us very far afield from our topic.

Lo sikom

Here is an example of Rav Perla’s analyses that is not about whether a mitzvah is in the count of 613 but about the nature of a mitzvah. In parshas Kedoshim, the Torah teaches that we are not to take revenge nor are we to bear a grudge against a fellow Jew. To clarify the difference between the two prohibitions, Chazal explain that someone violates lo sikom, “Do not take revenge” when they ask a neighbor to borrow a tool and are turned down, and then subsequently refuse to lend their neighbor an item because they are angry and want to “get back” at him. (Should you have a valid reason not to lend him the item, such as, you think he will not take good care of it or he may not return it, you are not required to lend it.) The second prohibition, mentioned in the same pasuk, is lo sitor, “Do not bear a grudge!” Chazal explain that one violates this prohibition when, instead of refusing to lend the item to your neighbor, you lend it to him, but tell him, “See -- I am not like you. I am lending you an item, even though you refused to lend me your item previously.”

With his skillful analysis, Rav Yeruchem Perla demonstrates that the rishonim dispute whether the prohibition is the action, or whether it is the emotion, and harboring a vengeful feeling or a grudge against someone violates the Torah’s prohibition. According to Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon and most rishonim, the violation is the action -- refusing to lend him an item or reminding him that previously he did not lend you. However, Rav Perla proves that the Rambam and others contend that the violation is for the emotion, the mindset, not the action (Rav Perla’s commentary to the Sefer Hamitzvos of Rav Sa’adiyah Gaon, Asei 19). In the Rambam’s opinion, if you are angry at the person who did not lend you to the extent that you are not prepared to lend him something, you have violated lo sikom. Alternatively, if you are prepared to lend it

to him together with a piece of your mind about how nasty and selfish he is, you have already violated the prohibition of lo sitor.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that much halachic literature is devoted to counting and understanding the various counts of the 613 mitzvos. Some people have the practice of reviewing the mitzvos that are included in the week’s Torah reading at the Shabbos table, a praiseworthy minhag.

Rav Kook Torah

Bo: The Special Pesach Offering

The offering brought for the Passover holiday, the korban pesach, has special laws how it is to be cooked and eaten: “They will eat the meat on that night ... Do not eat it raw, or cooked in water, but only roasted over fire.” (Exodus 12:8-9)

Why may the korban pesach only be eaten at the nighttime? And why must it be roasted?

National Holiness in Each Individual

All Temple offerings fall into two categories. Some are korbanot yachid, personal offerings brought by an individual; while others are korbanot tzibur, communal offerings brought in the name of the entire nation. An individual brings a korban yachid for private reasons — to atone for a particular sin or express gratitude for a personal deliverance. The Jewish nation as a whole, on the other hand, is represented by communal offerings which commemorate national events and holidays.

Of all the Temple offerings, the korban Pesach is unique, since it combines characteristics of both types of offerings. It commemorates a national historic event; and yet the obligation to bring this offering is not on the nation but on the individual. Why is it not like other communal offerings?

This unusual offering teaches us an important lesson about the Jewish people. The korban pesach reveals the quality of national holiness that resides in the soul of every Jew. Our ties to Knesset Yisrael are so deep that each individual’s pesach offering is like a korban tzibur representing the entire nation. And this special connection of each individual to the nation is reflected in the laws regulating how the korban pesach is to be eaten.

The Unity of Israel

Our daytime activities are characterized by extensive social interaction, while at night we retire to our homes and private lives. By stipulating that the Passover offering be eaten at night, the Torah is emphasizing that our connection to the Jewish people is not based on some form of social contract, a utilitarian agreement to band together due to common interests. Rather, our ties to the Jewish people reflect a unique shared commonality that binds together all of Israel. These national ties persist even at night, a time when each individual retreats to the privacy of his home.

The manner in which the offering is cooked is similarly instructive. Were it boiled in water or cooked together with other foods, the taste of the korban would spread outside of the meat. Roasting, on the other hand, prevents the flavor from dispersing to other foods. This ensures that the offering’s qualities of holiness remain concentrated inside the korban pesach. Why should this experience be so intense?

The mitzvah of eating the roasted offering has the power to uplift each individual with an intensity of pure holiness, a powerful quality rooted in the national soul of Israel. This concentrated holiness deepens our awareness of the singular unity of Israel, a result of the communal holiness that resides within each and every individual, in all of his being.

Parshas Bo

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Hachaver Avraham Ben Meir, Arnold Meyer. “May his Neshama have an Aliya!”

Seeing is Believing

And Bnei Yisroel went and did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did (12:28).

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly repetitious conclusion of the possuk. In other words, the beginning of the verse clearly states that

Bnei Yisroel did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon; so why did the Torah find it necessary to conclude with the words “so they did”? Rashi explains that the words “so they did” is referring to Moshe and Aharon: they too, did the mitzvah of Korban Pesach.

Maharal in the Gur Aryeh (Shemos 12:28) wonders; why is it assumed that Moshe and Aharon would not have had to bring a Korban Pesach thus making it necessary for the Torah to tell us otherwise?

Additionally, if the Torah meant to tell us that “so they did” is referring to Moshe and Aharon, then why doesn’t the Torah state it expressly and leave no room for confusion?

Very often, when telling our children to do something that we feel will improve their lives greatly (e.g. they should commit to studying Torah an hour a night), they silently wonder (and sometimes not so silently) why we ourselves are not modeling that very same behavior.

Of course they don’t realize all the obligations that we are under (work, business meetings, school board meetings, home repairs, etc.), so how can they possibly understand why we aren’t able to make that very same commitment to Torah study?

But, in fact, our kids are actually right. Certainly, there are myriads of excuses we can make as to why we ourselves don’t do what we are asking our kids to do, but that’s exactly what they are – excuses. When one has many responsibilities there are conflicts that cannot be avoided. But our kids aren’t fooled; they know when we are serious about an ideal and when we are merely paying lip service to one. Our kids also know that we have unavoidable conflicts, but they will absolutely judge what we consider to be important in our lives by how we choose to spend our free time.

Leadership follows some of the same rules. Obviously, a leader has many responsibilities and obligations, after all, that is what leadership is all about – taking responsibility to get things done. Yet some leaders see themselves as above following certain laws that everyone else must adhere to. They forget that they too have a responsibility to follow the rules.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about what kind of leaders Moshe and Aharon were. On the night that Bnei Yisroel left Egypt, undoubtedly, there were a multitude of things to do and Moshe and Aharon could have easily been forgiven for not fulfilling the mitzvah of Korban Pesach. But that’s not the type of leaders they were; they led by example and did exactly what everyone else was supposed to do. That’s what the Torah is telling us by not mentioning their names: They fulfilled the Korban Pesach like everyone else – as ordinary members of Bnei Yisroel about to leave Egypt.

Contend or Pretend?

And you shall guard the matzos [...] (12:17).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that guarding the matzos entails being very meticulous in their preparation in order to prevent them from becoming chometz (leavened). Rashi goes on to quote the Mechilta (Bo, parsha 9), “R’ YOSHIA says – Do not read the word ‘matzos’ rather read it ‘mitzvos’ (although vowelized differently, the word matzos is spelled exactly the same as mitzvos) – just as people do not allow the matzos to become chometz (by delaying the process to completion), so too they shouldn’t allow mitzvos to become “leavened.” Rather, if an opportunity to do a mitzvah presents itself, do it immediately.”

In other words, just as we have to be meticulous in our process preparing dough to become matzo (eliminating all unnecessary delay), so too we must have the same attitude of immediacy toward fulfilling mitzvos.

Yet the analogy seems flawed; if one delays doing a mitzvah, he can do it a little later or, at the very worst, he lost an opportunity. But if one fails to prepare the dough for matzos properly, he has created a far worse situation: he now has chometz on his hands, which on Pesach is a serious transgression. How are these two ideas analogous?

Generally, people delay or push off doing things they wish to avoid doing. Procrastination is usually not a problem of time management or of planning. People simply delay doing things they don’t want to do. If we ask our children to clean up their room, even if they finally acquiesce, getting them to actually do it is often a battle. Imagine if after finally getting them to pick up their room we now ask them to set the

table, and then clear and wash the dishes. Pretty soon they will resent doing things we make them do and begin to object.

Unfortunately, doing mitzvos can fall into the same rut. If one doesn’t perceive mitzvos as opportunities, but rather as onerous obligations, one will begin to resent doing them. Pretty soon one will delay and push off fulfilling them. Eventually, those delays will become noncompliance, which leads to nonobservance. When we force our children to get up, wash their hands, daven, make brachos, and the like, we are actually well on our way of getting them to resent doing mitzvos. That is to say, we are on the derech of getting them “off the derech.”

We must slowly educate our children that mitzvos are really opportunities. Chazal tell us exactly how to do this; give them incentives every step of the way. Show them that learning Torah and doing mitzvos can be rewarding. When it comes to doing things like studying Torah and mitzvot the Gemara (Pesachim 50b) teaches, “Metoch shelo lishma ba lishma – if one begins by doing things for a selfish reason he will eventually come to do it for the proper reason.”

After a while a person begins to realize how meaningful it is to begin the day off with a conversation with Hashem, or how intellectually stimulating and enjoyable studying Torah can be. There are very few mitzvos that aren’t accessible to the emotions or intellect.

This is what Chazal mean by we should not delay fulfilling mitzvos. We should perceive every mitzvah as an opportunity for ourselves; not merely as something we have to do.

What Our Shuls and Communities can Learn from Disney

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

With my youngest child approaching his teenage years I thought my Disney days were over, but when my grandchildren came to me asking, “Zayda, can you come with us to Disney,” I couldn’t say no. And so, I spent two days this week at the Magic Kingdom and Epcot. As usual, I brought a baseball cap so that nobody would be able to tell that I am Jewish.

As we pulled into the park, though, I decided not to wear it. In a time when too many are trying to scare us, attempting to intimidate us into removing our symbols, hiding our practices or being ashamed of our identity, it is more important than ever to proudly wear our yarmulkas, show our tzitzis, or necklaces displaying Jewish stars, maps of Israel, or solidarity with hostages, and not cower from practices that are appropriate in public.

A woman and her family came over to me at one of the parks to say how happy she was to see Jewish people not afraid to wear their yarmulka in public. When I asked if she was Jewish, she told me she was and that she went to a Jewish school in Minneapolis as a child. A man walking by stopped to say, “Shalom.” I responded “Shalom” and asked if he was Jewish. He told me he is a pastor from Alabama and that he and his congregation regularly pray for Israel and the Jewish people. His wife quickly added, “and we have been praying constantly for the hostages.”

We got a “boker tov” from one of the Disney employees and a few more “shaloms” and, I’m happy to report, no negativity or hostility. The truth is, I would expect nothing more at the “Happiest Place on Earth.” It is hard to think of another place where such a large quantity of people all seem so courteous, kind, pleasant, and polite.

Generally speaking, one doesn’t find pushing or shoving, short tempers, a culture of criticism, or impolite and impatient people at Disney, despite having to wait on long lines, pay large fees, endure the hot sun, and spend hours on one’s feet.

As we observed the throngs of people with smiles on their faces and extraordinary consideration towards one another, I couldn’t help but think, wouldn’t it be amazing if our shuls were like Disney? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if people thought of our campuses and communities as the happiest places on Earth, places that even if they had to stand for long periods, sometimes wait on lines, endure imperfect temperatures, it would not only be well worth it, they would be clamoring and counting down to coming back.

How does Disney do it and what could we learn regarding creating a culture of happiness? Many years ago, I participated in a behind-the-

scenes tour of Disney to explore that very question. The design and layouts of the parks, the placement of vendors, and the timing of the shows are all meticulously and brilliantly strategized and arranged. But what struck me most from the tour was the culture and how the attitude of the Disney's tens of thousands of workers impacts each and every one of their guests.

In every employee only area, there are signs highlighting the Disney credo, including: "I project a positive image and energy. I am courteous and respectful to all guests including children. I go above and beyond." Disney understands a fundamental psychological principle supported by extensive research – happiness and joy are contagious. Just as if one person yawns others will follow suit, so too, if a person smiles, others around him will start smiling as well. A happy disposition, a positive spirit, and a pleasant countenance are quite literally contagious.

Whose responsibility is it to spread the smiles? Whose job is it to maintain the happiness effect? There are roughly 77,000 employees at Disney World in Orlando. All members of the staff, from custodial and maintenance, to the ride operators and people who wear the Mickey costumes, are all referred to as "cast members." How many of the 77,000 cast members do you think are responsible for picking up the garbage? The answer is all 77,000. How many are responsible for helping someone with directions or return a lost child to their parents? 77,000. How many are required to smile and spread the happiness? That's right, all 77,000. At Disney, the cast members know that they each have different tasks, but they are taught that they all have the same purpose: spreading happiness.

Disney has a regular contest among the employees to identify and reward "great service fanatics." These individuals are nominated by their peers and are celebrated for going above and beyond in being kind, helpful, and spreading happiness and joy.

How do we go from a culture of complaining and criticism to creating the happiest place on Earth? Perhaps we can create a culture in which every single Jew, every participant of the community is a member of the "cast." We must go from consumers, from members with entitlements and privileges, to stakeholders, cast members who feel a sense of personal responsibility, duty and obligation.

If we want to be a place that attracts all, that inspires non-observant and disaffected Jews, that makes teens and youth excited about their Judaism, we ALL need to be leaders in making happiness, joy and meaning contagious in our institutions and homes.

When speaking with a child, Disney cast members are trained to bend down and meet them at eye level. I saw firsthand the subtle but powerful impact of speaking to someone, even a child, at eye level instead of making them look up at you while feeling small. We need to speak to all the members and participants in our community at their eye level. Sometimes that will mean bending down, ensuring nobody feels small, no matter what their Jewish education or level of observance.

In complimenting and blessing Yehuda, Yaakov says, "His teeth are whiter than milk." Of all virtues, why is Yaakov highlighting Yehuda's teeth? The Talmud (Kesubos 111b) explains that Yaakov saw a quality in Yehuda he greatly admired and benefited from. Yehuda had a habit of smiling, of flashing the white of his teeth when seeing others. Indeed, the Talmud concludes when a person shows the white of his teeth to another by smiling widely, it is more beneficial than giving a cup of milk to drink. Why the comparison to milk?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe explains that milk nourishes and nurtures growth. What milk does for the body, a smile does for the heart and soul. He writes that just as plants require sunshine to live, converting the rays of the sun into nutrients, people convert smiles into energy and strength, and without it they wilt and perish. Dogs and cats can't smile. Smiling at one another is part of what differentiates us as humans.

Make an effort to always have a smile. Let's all be active members of the Jewish people's cast and convert our shuls and communities into the happiest places on Earth.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Bo

Valerie and I have just returned from Poland, where we had the privilege of accompanying His Majesty King Charles on a visit to Auschwitz for the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the camp.

As I stood on that ground, the place where the most horrific evil was perpetrated, I was comforted when I reflected on the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, which we will read this coming Shabbat in the haftara for the Parshah of Bo.

The prophet comments on the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt and some subsequent tragedies that befell our people, and then he brings these words of encouragement in the name of Hashem: "Ve'attah al-tira avdi Ya'akov ve'al techat Yisra'el" — do not fear my servant, Jacob; there is no need to be distressed, O Israel.

"Veshav Ya'akov veshakat vesh'a'anan ve'ein macharid" — Jacob will, at long last, be able to rest; there will be a period of quiet. Jacob will be at ease, and Israel will have no reason to fear. The prophet then goes on to talk about Jewish dispersion and says, "E'eseh challah bechol-haggoyim" — I will put an end to those nations who seek to put an end to the Jewish people.

"Otecha lo-e'eseh challah" — but I will never put an end to the Jewish people; the Jewish people will always continue to live on. Here we have echoes of the promise of Hashem to the founder of our faith, Abraham, in the Parshah of Lech Lecha, when Hashem said, "Those who bless you, I will bless, and those who curse you, I will curse, and all the families on earth will be blessed through you." If we reflect on the past few millennia, we will see how accurate and true those words have become.

The nations amongst whom we have lived — some of the most powerful on earth — who have sought to destroy the Jewish people, have in turn been destroyed. And those who have been well disposed towards us have been blessed, and tiny Am Yisrael has continued, always. Not just to live on, but also to thrive.

So, following our commemorations for the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, we can be certain, perhaps more than at any other time before, of the truth that Am Yisrael Chai. The Jewish people will always live on, thrive, and be blessed.

Shabbat Shalom.

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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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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

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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'evat Mitzrayim' [an abomination to the Egyptians] in Egypt, would they not be stoned? (See Shmot 8:22.)

From that interchange, it becomes quite clear that offering a 'lamb' would be antithetical to Egyptian culture. Rashi's commentary on this pasuk seems to imply that a 'lamb' was considered a type of a god to the Egyptians, and hence offering a 'lamb' in Egypt would be a desecration in their eyes. [Sort of like burning someone's national flag. See Ramban 12:3!]

[Note Ibn Ezra (on Shmot 8:22) quotes a Kaarite who explained that a 'lamb' was the symbol of the god who controls their land. He himself argues that it was not just a lamb, but any type of animal, for he claims that the Egyptians were vegetarians.]

[One could also suggest an 'astrological' explanation that relates to the fact that the Nile (Egypt's source of water) reaches its highest level in the spring during the zodiac of 'taleh' [a lamb, see Nile mosaic in Tzipori!] See also a

similar explanation in Sefer Ha-toda'a by Eliyahu Ki-tov, re: Nisan (page 14).]

Therefore, burning a lamb, complete with its head, and legs and entrails, etc. on an open spit (see Shmot 12:9), and then eating it, would serve as a sign to Bnei Yisrael that they are now free from Egyptian culture, and its gods.

MATZA & MAROR

As we explained, the primary reason for eating matza would be no different than having rolls at a cook-out. But eating specifically matza could be considered once again symbolic. The simplest reason would be simply to remind Bnei Yisrael that on this evening God is taking them out of slavery. As 'matza' is the typical bread of a poor-man, or a slave, it would be most fitting to eat the meat together with this style of bread.

[This would reflect our statement of "ha lachma anya" that we say at the beginning of the Haggada.]

This doesn't mean that a poor-man's bread tastes bad. It is merely a simple style of bread that can actually taste good!

However, one could also suggest that 'chametz' itself may have been a symbol of Egyptian culture. It is well-known among historians that the art of making leaven was first developed in Egypt, and it was the Egyptians who perfected the process of 'bread-making'.

[See 'On Food and Cooking - 'The Science and Lore of the Kitchen' - by Harold McGee / Page 275 - based on archeological evidence, raised bread began in Egypt around 4000 BCE. On page 280 - then beer froth was eventually used as first yeast. And page 615 - bread-making became refined with invention of ovens around 3000 BCE in Egypt.]

Similarly, eating bitter herbs with the korban certainly makes the meat 'tastier' - but why specifically **bitter** herbs rather than sweet ones? Like matza, one could suggest that the reason would be to remind us on this evening of the bitterness of the slavery that we are now leaving. In fact, this is exactly what we explain in the Haggada in the section "MAROR - AL SHUM MA".

[One could also explain that the reason for eating the korban 'well dressed' and in hurriedness (even though Bnei Yisrael would not be leaving until the next morning) was to emphasize the need be 'ready & eager' for their redemption.]

In this manner, all of the mitzvot relating to Pesach Mitzrayim can relate to both the need to make this a memorable evening, with a formal family dinner etc.; but at the same time, every action also carried a symbolic function as well. This evening was to leave a lasting impression on its participants, in order that they would pass on this memory to their children and grandchildren. It had to be special!

In summary, we have shown how there may be two totally independent reasons for eating matza on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan:

- One matza - 'lechem oni', poor man's bread - is to be eaten with the korban Pesach, in order to make this korban tasty, but at the same time to remind us to thank God for being saved from Makkat Bechorot & slavery.
- The second matza - "bread that was made in haste", 'chipazon' - is an integral part of the mitzva of chag ha-matzot (eating matza for seven days) which we eat in order that we remember the events of how God took us out of Egypt.

In Part Two we will search for a deeper connection between these two reasons for eating matza.

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PART II / FROM PESACH MITZRAIM TO PESACH DOROT

INTRODUCTION

In Part One, we offered two reasons for eating matza with the Korban Pesach: Either to remind us of the hardships of slavery (similar to the reason for why we eat 'maror'); or to remind us of the need to reject Egyptian culture as a pre-requisite for redemption (similar to the reason for why we sacrifice a lamb).

If the following shiur, we will pursue this second line of reasoning, and apply its logic to help explain some of the peculiar laws of "chag ha'matzot" [i.e. the commandment to eat matza (and not eat chametz) for seven days].

Let's begin with the very pasuk in Chumash that appears to explain the reason for "chag ha'matzot":

"And Moshe said to the people: REMEMBER THIS DAY that you have left Egypt...- you shall not eat CHAMETZ.... [therefore] when you come in the Promised Land... EAT MATZA FOR SEVEN DAYS... you shall not see or own CHAMETZ in all your borders... " (see Shmot 13:2-8).

This commandment implies that by eating matza (and not eating chametz) for seven days, we will remember the events of the Exodus. In Part One of our shiur, we explained how (and why) eating matza would remind us of that experience.

However, based on that explanation, it would have made more sense for Moshe to say: "Remember this day... **by eating matza**". Instead, he commands them to remember this day by **not eating chametz!**

Furthermore, from the laws that follow, it seems like the Torah puts a greater emphasis on the prohibition of "chametz", more so than it does on the obligation to eat "matza". If we assume, as most people do, that the Torah forbids eating 'chametz' as a means to ensure 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 YEchezkel

Let's quote once again from Yechezkel's rebuke of the elders of Yehuda, as he reminds them of the behavior of their forefathers - PRIOR to Yetziat Mitzraim:

"On the day that I chose Israel... that same day I swore to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey... And I said to them [at that time]: Each man must RID himself of his detestable ways, and not DEFILE ('tum'a') himself with the fetishes of Egypt - [for] ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM. But, they REBELLED against Me, and they did not OBEY me, no one rid himself from his detestable ways...and I resolved to pour out My fury upon them..." (Yechezkel 20:5-8).

In other words, God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to rid themselves of their 'avoda zara', i.e. their Egyptian culture, BEFORE the redemption process began.

Unfortunately, Bnei Yisrael did not 'listen', and hence deserved to be destroyed! Nevertheless, God saved Bnei Yisrael, Yechezkel explains, for the sake of His Name: "va-a'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:

- Korban Pesach in Egypt (12:3-13)
- Korban Pesach for future generations (12:14)
- 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:

- Korban Pesach in Egypt (12:21-23)
- 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 psukim

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 psukim 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:

- Korban Pesach and chag ha-matzot; and
- 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.