

ב"ה
**Torah
Tidbits**

ISSUE 1548

ג' שבט תשפ"ד • JAN. 13 2024

פרשת וארא
PARSHAT VA'EIRA



United We Stand



An Open Heart
Page 46
Rabbi Judah Mischel



ברכת הבנים
Page 60
Rebbetzin Zemira Ozarowski



ויט אהרן את־ידו על מימי מצרים ותעל הצפרדע
שמות ח'ב'

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT PARSHAT VA'EIRA ZMANIM
CANDLES 4:18 PM • HAVDALA 5:35 PM • RABBEINU TAM 6:12 PM



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THIS WEEK'S COVER PHOTO

Chananya, Misha'el and Azariah were inspired to risk their lives in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, comparing their plight to that of the frogs in Egypt, who gave their lives by jumping into the Egyptians' ovens (Pesachim 53b). We pray for the safe return of all our soldiers who put their lives on the line for our safety. I photographed this frog at nearby Kibbutz Lavi. On the side of the frog's face, you can see bubbles—these are vocal sacs that the frog inflates to increase the volume of its call. Photographed by Julian Alper of Tiberias



HELPFUL REMINDERS

KIDDUSH LEVANA:

Earliest Kiddush Levana, 3 Days After Molad - 5 Shvat/Sun. night Jan. 14
7 Days After Molad - 9 Shvat/ Thurs. night Jan. 18
Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana until - 16 Shvat/Thurs. night Jan. 25

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



	VA'EIRA		BO	
	CANDLES	HAVDALA	CANDLES	HAVDALA
Yerushalayim / Maale Adumim	4:18	5:35	4:25	5:41
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	4:37	5:38	4:43	5:44
Beit Shemesh / RBS	4:37	5:36	4:43	5:42
Alon Shvut	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:41
Raanana / Tel Mond / Herzliya / K. Saba	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:42
Modiin / Chashmonaim	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:42
Netanya	4:34	5:36	4:41	5:42
Be'er Sheva	4:37	5:38	4:43	5:43
Rehovot	4:36	5:37	4:42	5:42
Petach Tikva	4:18	5:36	4:25	5:42
Ginot Shomron	4:34	5:35	4:40	5:41
Haifa / Zichron	4:23	5:34	4:29	5:40
Gush Shiloh	4:33	5:34	4:39	5:40
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	4:35	5:36	4:42	5:42
Givat Ze'ev	4:39	5:35	4:45	5:41
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:42
Ashkelon	4:37	5:38	4:43	5:44
Yad Binyamin	4:36	5:37	4:42	5:42
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	4:25	5:32	4:31	5:38
Golan	4:31	5:32	4:37	5:38
Nahariya/Maalot	4:31	5:33	4:38	5:39
Afula	4:32	5:33	4:38	5:39

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem) - 6:12 PM • Next Week - 6:18 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Bava Kama 72



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OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wed - Shabbat
Jan. 10 - 20 / 29 Tevet - 10 Sh'vat
 Earliest Tallit and Tefilin **5:45 - 5:44**
 Sunrise **6:40 - 6:38**
 Sof Zman Kriat Shema **9:13 - 9:14**
 Magen Avraham **8:34 - 8:36**
 Sof Zman Tefila **10:04 - 10:06**
 (According to the Gra and Baal HaTanya)
 Chatzot (Halachic Noon) **11:46 - 11:50**
 Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha) **12:16 - 12:20**
 Plag Mincha **3:48 - 3:56**
 Sunset (Including Elevation) **4:57 - 5:05**



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This Thursday, I will be attending a *seudat hodaya* unlike any I have ever been to. On October 7th, a young woman named Oriya who lives in Netivot ran to *shul* on Simchat Torah with her brother Itamar to notify their brother-in-law that he should come home and prepare to be called into service. This young woman had been a counselor in the OU Israel Youth Center in Sderot and a student in our Meshivat Nefesh counseling training program. Since Oct. 7, I have had the *zechut* to visit Oriya and Itamar and bring OU missions to meet these brave individuals. Unfortunately, on the way home from *shul*, she and her brother were hit by shrapnel from a missile that fell, and they were badly injured. While they are still recovering, now, three months later, they feel that they must give thanks to Hashem for surviving what could have been a fatal blow. They invited me to their *seudat hodaya*, and I look forward to being able to thank *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* along with them with such tremendous *kavanah*, because we all know it could have been so, so much worse.

now. There are so many injured soldiers. We need to daven for them, visit them, and help them in any way we can.

I want to tell you about someone who has personally inspired me and thousands of others. His name is Aharon Karov, and he is currently a captain in the IDF (reserves). When he was a first Lt., Aharon was called up to serve in Operation Cast Lead in 2009, hours after his own wedding. Literally. He got married on a Thursday night, and on Friday morning went into Gaza as an officer in the paratrooper unit. A little over a week later, he was clearing a house with his fellow soldiers when a bomb went off inside. The situation was critical. Aharon was badly wounded. He was taken by helicopter, and his wounds were so pervasive that they nearly gave up hope on him, ready to declare him dead.

Miraculously, he survived. At the hospital, he underwent many, many surgeries to save his life. His family was told by the army that he was considered the most wounded soldier in Operation Cast Lead. Not only did he

**Heartfelt condolences
to the family and friends of**

Mrs. Inge (Wohlfarth) Selig a"n
on her passing

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים



survive, but after going through a rigorous rehab, he has lived a full and healthy life, even running in several marathons around the world. He works for OU Israel, inspiring 11th and 12th graders in our OU Israel Youth Centers across the country to enlist in the IDF or *sherut leumi*, and why doing so is so important. Many of these teens are at risk, coming from low socio-economic neighborhoods. We have a goal of helping these teens finish high school, interview well for the *tzav rishon*, and eventually join the IDF or *sherut leumi*. The IDF and *sherut leumi* act as a melting pot for these teens. They can flourish in an environment where their background matters less and who they are matters more. Not only that, but the friends and connections they make during their national service often give them an advantage to getting into better universities and job programs than they otherwise would have been able to get into.

Aharon Karov works with these teens, talking with them, mentoring them, and ensuring that they take those important steps forward to the rest of their lives. Thank G-d, we have a 94% success rate in getting these teens to join the army or *sherut leumi*, and approximately half of them spend time in a *mechinah* program, *yeshiva*, or *midrashah* before they start the

army or *sherut leumi*. Not only that, but Aharon visits all of these teens once they have started their service, checking in on them and encouraging them throughout their years in the army and beyond.

Like so many others, on October 7th, Aharon was called up for *miluim*. His job in *miluim* is to visit severely injured soldiers, going from person to person in every hospital to give them support and *chizuk*. He tells them, “Listen, you might be in a horrible situation right now, but I want you to know that I was once basically declared dead, and look at me today.” His job is an inspiration. To inspire others with his own story.

Last week, Aharon came to the OU Israel office. I asked him how he's been and what he's working on. He takes out a huge sheaf of papers and says to me, "This is what I am working on." I took a look. It was story after story of soldiers who survived terrible injuries. Unbelievable stories of perseverance and resilience.

Many years ago, my wife's brother was

לעילוי נשמת

**Rabbi Moshe Chaim
Dombey z"l**

הרב משה חיים דמבי בן דוד עמנואל ז"ל

On his 18th yahrzeit - ג' שבט

injured in the army. He was a soldier outside Ramallah. The army informed us that he was "lightly injured." We soon found out that a rock had been thrown at him, breaking his teeth and jaw. They wired his teeth and jaw together, and for three months, all he could do was to sip food through a straw. He couldn't even talk. He certainly couldn't eat. In army terms, this is considered a "light" injury. *Baruch Hashem* he is fine today and back in *miluim* since October 8th.

I wonder, and worry, how many of our soldiers are injured now with "light" injuries? What does it do to the families? What does it do to the spouses, who are taking care of their kids while they are hospitalized or recovering? It should give us pause. It should impel us to act. To volunteer. To pray. We should also think about the incredible medical staff who are treating our wounded soldiers. As a husband of a nurse, I can tell you how hard the doctors, nurses, therapists and all the medical staff are working to take care of our wounded, and to make sure that they are getting the love, treatment, and care that they need right now in order to stand up on their feet in recovery.

I am looking forward to attending the *seudat hodaya* on Thursday because it reminds me how many lives have been saved, how many close calls were thwarted, and how many have so much to be thankful for that they are alive, with the love and support of their family and friends. I look forward to seeing Oriya and Itamar at the *seudat hodaya* and thinking back to the first time I visited them in the hospital and seeing the smiles on their faces when I brought the shawarma they requested. It also serves as a reminder of how important it is that we continue to

daven for those who are injured and we visit them (don't be shy, you can show up at the hospitals and visit) and help family members whose loved ones are recovering.

We are now entering the month of *Shevat*, which is said to stand for "*shenishma besurot tovot* - that we should hear good tidings." Let us hope that this month will take us to better times where *Klal Yisrael* will thrive and only have good news.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman
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FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

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Integrity as the Key to Ge'ulah

Integrity is a basic value to which our Sages attached great value, even referring to it as *m'yesodei hanefesh*, a foundation of the soul (Shaarei Teshuva 3:184). Our parsha demonstrates that it is also the foundation of our national destiny.

Why were we redeemed from Egypt? Why should one group of oppressed slaves be singled out for miraculous redemption? As our Parsha makes clear (Shemos 6:4-5), it is only because G-d keeps His word. "I established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan... I heard the cries of the Jewish people whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I remembered My covenant." As Rashi further underscores, G-d was telling Moshe that as long as the promise He had made to the Jewish people remained unfulfilled, He was not measuring up to His own signature quality of truth. G-d's integrity, His commitment to keep His word, is the key to the fulfillment of the destiny of our people.

Yet, it may be *our* integrity that is no less key to that fulfillment. G-d moved forward to fulfill His promise to Klal Yisrael only after Moshe expressed his own frustration

that since he had embarked on his mission to redeem the Jewish people things had actually gone from bad to worse. Moshe felt compelled to live up to the promise that he himself had made to the Jewish people and in doing so, aroused G-d to fulfill His own promise. Our commitment to keep our word will move G-d to keep His.

This may shed light on a classic Talmudic passage (Sotah 49b) that describes the period of history known as *ikvesa d'meshecha*, a pre-Messianic period when one can already hear the redemption's approaching footsteps. This period is characterized by serious moral failings, including the absence of truth, *ha'emes ne'ederes*. Evidently, our lack of integrity delays redemption and the fulfillment of our destiny.

In 13th Century Spain, Rav Moshe of Coucy (*Sefer Mitzvos Gadol*, Positive Mitzvah no. 74) offered an even more basic and sobering reason for our failures of integrity to delay redemption. His words are critical and relevant and should inform our own communal values and perspective.

I have exhorted the exiles of Yerushalayim found in Spain and other Western nations that as we experience this prolonged period of exile, it is incumbent upon us to discard the empty values of the world and to instead firmly uphold G-d's signature attribute of truth. They must not lie to either Jew or non-Jew nor mislead them in any way even when technically justified, as it is written (Tzefanya 3:13): "The remnant of the Jewish people

shall neither commit injustice nor speak lies; deceitful speech will not come from their mouths." If they behave in this way then when G-d will come to redeem them, the nations will recognize why they are deserving of Him doing so, as they are a people of truth who share a Torah of truth. If, however, they interact with non-Jews deceitfully, the nations will instead say: "Have you seen what G-d has done, making thieves and swindlers His chosen?!" ... G-d dispersed us in our exile to attract converts to our belief system, but who would be attracted to us if we are dishonest in our dealings with them?!"

We can and must stand strong in making honesty and integrity the foundation of our individual lives and communal values, serving as an example to the world and opening the door to G-d fulfilling for us every one of His magnificent promises of redemption. ■

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Each week, OU Israel provides volunteer opportunities to connect you to the Land of Israel and its people. Since the start of the war, there has been an incredible increase in volunteering throughout Israel. Jews in Israel and those coming from abroad are looking to help in any way they can. One of the key areas where volunteers are needed is helping Israel's farmers. By doing so we help them maintain their livelihood and provide quality produce while also connecting to the beauty of Eretz Yisrael.

Recent OU Israel farm volunteer opportunities include picking and sorting oranges, hot peppers, avocados, grapefruits and more! Busses depart from the OU Israel Center and travel to locations in central Israel. Each trip has a guard, and we subsidize the price to make these opportunities accessible. This is a great opportunity for people living in Israel and visitors to make a real difference.

Join our volunteering WhatsApp group to stay up to date with volunteer opportunities at farms and beyond.

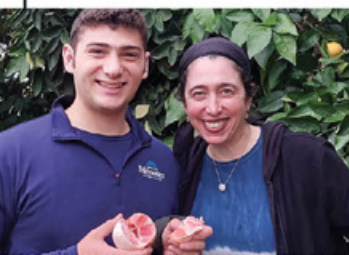
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"We are so happy to be helping in the war effort picking oranges. I hear they really need us so I feel very good about it."

– Peri G., Yerushalayim



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ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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PARSHAT VA'EIRA

Parshat Va'eira is the transition from Divine promises to Divine action. Responding to Paro's first refusal at the end of last week's Parsha, G-d assures Moshe that He will release the Jewish people from slavery and bring them to the Land of Israel. After Moshe's reluctance, Moshe and Aharon are sent to Paro. The first seven plagues occur: blood, frogs, lice, wild animals, animal disease, boils, hail. Paro responds in fits and starts, at times acquiescing then changing his mind.



1ST ALIYA (6:2-13)

In response to the futility of Moshe's approach to Paro at the end of last week's parsha, G-d responds firmly and definitively: I am G-d, a name unknown to the Avot. I promised them the Land of Israel. I heard the people's cries. And I remember the covenant. So tell the people: I, G-d, am taking them out, saving them, redeeming them, bringing them to Me, bringing them to the Land. The people cannot hear due to their burdens. G-d tells Moshe to go to Paro. He objects: the people didn't hear me, how will Paro?

In this aliya, G-d establishes the most fundamental of Jewish beliefs: G-d's direct intervention in Jewish history. Up until now, we know G-d as the One who Promises to Avraham that he will be given the Land of Israel. But we have yet to see this

promise become a reality. The promise of the Land has not been granted.

Everything changes now. Now, for the first time, instead of man having to search, to peer behind the scenes for the Divine, He tells us exactly what He is going to do. And it happens immediately. He tells Moshe and the people in vivid Technicolor detail exactly what He is going to do: take them out, save them, redeem them, bring them to Him, bring them to the Land.

We will see this even more vividly in the plagues themselves; He will say what He is going to do today or what He will do tomorrow. And then He does it immediately. That is why there are 10 plagues. He wants to demonstrate over and over that He is controlling the world and hence also, human history.



2ND ALIYA (6:14-29)

The lineage of Reuven, Shimon and Levi is outlined. Including the birth of Moshe and Aharon. These are the Aharon and Moshe who G-d commanded to go to Paro. The ones who speak with Paro.

Perhaps Moshe's lineage is given in order to highlight that he is not a leader by dint of lineage. He is not from the first-born son Reuven. Nor from the first-born son of Levi. Nor even the first-born son of Amram. Moshe is not a leader by dint of lineage.



3RD ALIYA (6:30-7:7)

G-d tells Moshe to go to Paro. Moshe objects: I am tongue-tied,

how will Paro listen? G-d tells Moshe: I am making you Paro's judge and Aharon your mouthpiece. I will harden Paro's heart. He will not listen to you.

Here the detail of what will transpire begins. By normal political measures, Moshe knows he will not be successful. He, weak. Paro, powerful. But he is told that he and Paro are but pawns in the Hand of G-d.



4TH ALIYA (7:8-8:6)

The plagues begin. Go to Paro in the morning when he goes to the river. In this you will know that I am G-d; the water will turn to blood. Moshe warns Paro. Aharon hits the water; it turns to blood. The sorcerers do it. Paro does not listen. The 2nd plague: come to Paro and tell him G-d says to let My people go and serve Me. If not, frogs will invade your home, bed, ovens, and slaves' homes. Aharon raises his staff and the frogs invade. Paro calls Moshe and requests he pray for this to stop.

The first 2 plagues, blood and frogs, come from the water. Water immediately makes us think of Creation: the spirit of G-d hovered over the waters. Water is beginnings: in Breishit, the beginning of the world. Here, the beginning of the Jewish people.

And the plagues will start low and ascend. What is lower than ground level? Water, which gathers on lower ground. The first 2 plagues are from the water. 4 and 5, wild animals and animal disease are on the land. And 7, 8, 9, hail, locust swarm and darkness are from the sky.

This too harkens back to Creation: first there was water. It separated to make the heavens, the sky. And the water was split below to make dry land appear. The

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plagues target the very things formed in the dawn of Creation.



5TH ALIYA (8:7-8:18)

Moshe prays, the frogs stop. Paro reneges. 3rd plague: Aharon raises his staff; lice invade man and beast. The sorcerers unsuccessfully try to imitate; it is the hand of G-d. Paro does not listen. The 4th plague: Go to Paro in the morning when he goes to the river. Tell him: there will be wild beasts in Egypt but not in Goshen. In this you will know that I am G-d in the midst of the land.

The placement of the end of an aliya is a type of commentary. In our parsha it would make sense to have aliyas end nice and cleanly with the end of one plague – at the paragraph break. But both this aliya and the next conclude similarly: so you will know that I am G-d.

The 1st, 4th and 7th plagues begin with Moshe meeting Paro at the water in the morning. And each repeats the same phrase: so you will know... The 1st is so you will know I am G-d. The 4th, so you will know I am G-d in the midst of the land. And the 7th, so you will know there is none like Me.

These are the 3 pillars of Jewish belief. There is a G-d. He is our G-d, meaning, involved in the world. And He is One.



6TH ALIYA (8:19-9:16)

The plague of beasts happens. Paro agrees to allow the people to leave to celebrate in the desert. Moshe prays for cessation of the plague. Paro changes his mind. The 5th plague: Come to Paro, the animals will be smitten with disease, though not those of the Jewish people. Paro checked, saw that it was true. But hardened his heart. The 6th plague: Moshe, throw dust in the sky in front of Paro. It became boils and blisters on animals and people. G-d hardened Paro's heart. 7th plague: Moshe, go to Paro in the morning. With this plague you will know that there is none like Me.

Plagues 4 and 5, wild animals and animal disease attack only the Egyptians, not in Goshen. This is to teach that G-d is involved in the activity of man, distinguishing between evil and good.

Turning water to blood was an attack on the Egyptian god; hence you know that I am G-d. Here the plague distinguishes between people, the Egyptians and the Jews to teach: I am G-d working in the midst of the land. And the last plagues come from the sky – He controls the sky, the powers, the cosmos. None but Him.



7TH ALIYA (9:17-35)

Hail will rain down and kill all in its path. Moshe raised his staff and hail rained down amidst thunder, with fire. Paro called Moshe and Aharon: I have sinned; G-d is righteous. Pray to remove this and I will let you go. Moshe did so. Paro refused to send the people out.

While the plagues have a very clear order, Paro's reactions do not. He softens, allowing them to leave to celebrate. Then changes his mind. Here, he agrees that he has sinned. This is a very impressive acceptance of responsibility. He is contrite. And then changes his mind.

While this demonstration of G-d's involvement in the world is unprecedented, man nonetheless remains stubborn.

The Parsha ends after 7 plagues. The last 3 will be in next week's Parsha.

This story is the most noted story in Jewish life. Daily mention in our prayers. In the Shema. In Birkat Hamazon. Mentioned in Kiddush. And the seder. For 2 reasons. 1. Because it represents a radical innovation in religious belief. G-d as Creator is a core belief. G-d as Judge, rewarding and punishing is a core belief. But the notion that G-d intervenes in the world, in shaping human history, in drawing the Jewish people to Him, to bring us to the Land of Israel – the G-d of history is introduced here. We are spoiled in our time, as we see the G-d of history in our return to the Land of Israel. To us it is self-evident. We see it with our own eyes. The G-d of history is introduced to us here in our Parsha. And 2. Because overt perception of G-d is, well, hard for us. G-d's Hand is hidden in this foggy world of ours. He created it that way – the Hebrew word for world is

olam, similar to *ne'elam*, hidden. But to perceive His Hand as shaping history requires great faith and insight. Oh, how many have chosen in our time, due to the eclipse of His Face, the lack of our ability to see His Hand in our history in the Holocaust, oh how many have abandoned Him. This story of Egypt is as if He says to us: I am going to show you My Hand once. Just once. Pay attention. It won't happen like this again. But I am doing it because I know how difficult it is for you to see Me. My Hand is revealed in Egypt, in the plagues, in the crossing of the sea. I know all too well that you, My Jewish people will live in the future in the thick fog of life, when seeing My Hand is oh so difficult – you will refer back, many times, in prayer, in mitzvot to this glorious sunny, clear day of My Hand. And you will know that as my Hand was so clear and obvious then, so too is My Hand, while obscured in the fog of life, nonetheless present now.

HAFTORAH YEchezkel 28:25 - 29:21

This week's *haftorah* opens with a reference to the return of the exiles. It spotlights a theme found in the *parshat hashavua* in which Hashem promises: "I will take you out of the suffering of Egypt." The prophet Yechezkel continues to describe the destruction that will be brought on Pharaoh and Egypt. This theme is reminiscent of the major theme found in the Torah portion - the devastation that Hashem brought upon Egypt.

Yechezkel describes what will occur at the time of the ingathering of the exiles: "When I gather in the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have

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been scattered, and I have been sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, then shall they dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, to Jacob. And they shall dwell upon it securely..."

The prophet then continues to convey a prophecy regarding Pharaoh and Egypt in which he describes the fall of the Egyptian empire.

Hashem warns that the land of Egypt will be desolate for forty years. After that time Hashem will return the people to the Land to re-inhabit it, but it will no longer be a significant nation that will be a player on the world stage. ■

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וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה רָאה נִתְּנִיךָ אֱלֹהִים לַפָּרֶעָה (ז'א')

"And G-d said to Moshe: See, I have placed you as a judge over Pharaoh" (7:1)

Rashi interprets the word "Elohim" as a judge and chastiser, that Moshe was appointed to chastise Pharaoh with plagues and affliction.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959 Volozhin-Jerusalem "The Griz") asked what was the real purpose of this role of Moshe, assigned to be judge, by G-d? Wasn't Moshe's true role in using the plagues to compel the Egyptians to free the Israelites?

Rabbi Soloveitchik answered no. Rather, Moshe was given another task, the position of judge in order to fulfill the promise G-d made to Avraham at the Covenant of the Pieces "And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge" (15:14) וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנוכי (טו'יד')

We see that the plagues were not a method of forcing the hand of the Egyptians to release the Israelites but rather an important milestone that had to be achieved in the promise of G-d to Avraham. The Israelites will be flung into a foreign land to serve others and be afflicted. The next level requires G-d to judge those peoples who have afflicted you as a people and then you shall be liberated with great wealth. Moshe was chosen to judge Pharaoh and his servants according to each one's actions and carry out their judgement by means of the plagues.

Shabbat Shalom



STATS

14th of 54 sedras; 2nd of 11 in Shemot.
Written on 221.8 lines in a Torah; (16th).
16 parshiot; 8 open, 8 closed.
121 pesukim - ranks 20th (4th in Shemot).
1748 words - ranks 15th (3rd in Shemot).
6701 letters - ranks 17th (3rd in Shemot).
Pesukim are above average in length.



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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

On the Shoulders of Giants

"They don't make them the way they used to." We have all heard this comment with reference to all sorts of things, usually tools and utensils. Despite all the technological advances from which we benefit, we often are convinced that certain things were of superior quality in the old days. We believe that the old hammer Grandpa once used was stronger, and the snow shovel he wielded more effective, than the newfangled "throw-away" junk that they produce nowadays.

We even extend this belief of things being better back in the old days to human beings. Today's leaders cannot be compared to those of old, and today's athletes are cheap imitations of the Babe Ruths and Ty Cobbs of yesteryear.

In the Jewish tradition, there is a concept of *"nitkatnu hadorot*, the generations get progressively smaller". Talmudic sages are no match for biblical heroes, and the great rabbis of recent times cannot compare to the rabbinical leaders of centuries ago.

Like any other belief, this one requires a healthy dose of skepticism. Surely technological progress has provided us with tools that are superior to those we once used. And, whereas every generation has its outstanding heroes, not everyone in the past was a perfect person. Furthermore, there are plenty of people today who can stand up to the best of previous generations in their

courage, in their erudition, or in their piety.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Va'eira*, we encounter what might be the first example in history of the comparison of a current personage with previous ones in which the former comes off poorly.

Rashi shares with us, and ultimately rejects, the Talmud's version of what the opening verses in our parsha tell us. The Talmud understands these verses in the context of the concluding episodes of last week's Torah portion, where Moses challenged the Almighty and asked Him why He has "mistreated this people," thereby questioning his very mission. Indeed, somewhat earlier in last week's portion, he asked God, "What will I tell the people if they ask me for Your name?"

With this background, the rabbis understand the opening verses of this week's Torah portion as follows: God compared Moses to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From this perspective, the patriarchs were much more trusting in God and demonstrated greater faith than Moses. They did not question God in spite of their frustrations. Moses did.

"A pity that they are gone and no longer to be found." This statement, which the rabbis attribute to the Lord, closely resembles the opening statement of this essay, "They don't make them like they used to."

Personally, I have come to appreciate the opinion of those other commentators

who defend Moses and who point out that Moses challenged God, not out of faithlessness, but out of a profound and powerful empathy for the suffering of His people.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were individuals. At best, they were heads of families, whereas Moses held the role of a leader of a large nation. In his circumstances, blind faith would have been irresponsible.

When comparing later generations with earlier ones, we must take into account the changed circumstances of those later generations. We must judge them, not by the standards of those who came before them, but in their own contexts.

In the reading that I do about the Holocaust victims and survivors, I often ask myself whether I could possibly have struggled to remain alive in the conditions of torture and horror that they experienced, retaining their will to live. And I am certain that had I personally suffered the Holocaust experience, I would not have been able to emerge from it with the faith commitment of so many of the survivors who came to these shores with recreated families, practicing their faith punctiliously, and reconstructing vibrant religious institutions.

I believe that it is not that we are innately inferior to them. Rather, our circumstances have softened us, whereas their circumstances strengthened them.

There is indeed a theme in our tradition that sees a generation as diminished in comparison with the previous one; the later generation in fact becoming "smaller."

But our tradition also encourages us to realize that later generations have one great advantage over previous ones: We stand on their shoulders. We benefit from

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their precedent.

Moses had this advantage: He could learn from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and could model his faith and leadership capacities upon them.

From this view, Moses' confronting the Almighty in defense of his people was simply something he learned from Abraham, who similarly confronted God in defense of the people of Sodom.

It might be true of us that "they don't make them the way they used to," but that need not stop us from asking ourselves, as our sages did, "When will my deeds approach the deeds of my fathers?" For we have the deeds of our fathers to learn from as we build our own spiritual lives.

We stand on the shoulders of long generations of giants. Perhaps future generations will similarly look up to us. ■



MIDEI CHODESH

B'CHODSHO

BY RABBI SHMUEL GOLDIN

Faculty, OU Israel

Rabbi Emeritus, Congregation Ahavath
Torah, Englewood NJ

Tu B'Shevat: A Land That Doesn't Lie

"Ha'shekeidia porachat, v'shemesh paz zorachat; tzipporim b'rosh kol gag m'vasrot et bo ha'chag, Tu B'Shvat higiya, chag la'ilanot, Tu B'Shvat higiya, chag la'ilanot.... The almond tree is blossoming and golden sun is shining, birds on the rooftop herald the arrival of the festival. Tu

B'Shvat has arrived, a festival for trees! Tu B'Shvat has arrived, a festival for trees!"

Nothing brings back memories like a song... and the above Tu B'Shvat tune is no exception. In this case, my memories are those of a simple poem sung in grade school. *Spring in Israel is arriving*, our teachers would excitedly tell us each year; we would sing this song; and we would then celebrate by eating fruits (ostensibly) from Israel. Quaint practices, but hardly the stuff of a serious occasion. Mostly we wondered: How could it be Spring if snow still coated the ground?

As the years passed beyond those childhood experiences, not much changed in my relationship with Tu B'Shvat. As long as I lived outside the land of Israel, this occasion did not really resonate.

But... then, with our Aliyah to Israel, Tu B'Shvat, as a holiday celebrating nature's

cycle, began to feel real. I started to notice, for example, that in Israel everything is seasonal - from celery to grapes, from persimmons to pomegranates. *Not everything is available always*. A far cry from my experience in the United States where everything seems to be available (through imports, if necessary) at any time of the year.

And rain, a phenomenon that I used to view simply as an annoyance, was now a need that you were supposed to truly pray for. In short, I found myself in a country where all is clearly dependent on the natural cycle of the year.

Which brings us to a basic question...

Why did HaShem choose a land like Israel for our home? The question is magnified when we consider Moshe's words in Sefer Devarim, as he supposedly encourages the Israelites towards entry into the land:

"For the land to which you come, to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt from which you left, where you would plant your seed and water it on foot, like a garden of vegetables.

The land to which you cross over, to possess, is a land of Mountains and valleys; from the rain of the heavens, you shall drink water.

A land that the Lord, your God, seeks out; constantly the eyes of the Lord, your God, are upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end."¹

This appears to be strange encouragement,

1. Ibid 11:10-12

indeed! Why should the nation be inspired by the news that they have left behind a country sustained by regular irrigation, in favor of a new homeland dependent upon rain? Why should they feel reassured by the fact that God's constant care is needed; if they are to thrive in this new homeland?

And yet, upon consideration, perhaps that is exactly why God chose the Land of Israel as our homeland.

God wants us to live in a land without any façade; in a land that does not lie; in a land that does not let us forget what should be an obvious truth:

No matter where we live, we are dependent upon God.

This truth is easy to forget when you live in concrete cities and suburban enclaves that shield you from the rhythms of the natural world; when abundant produce fills the shelves of your stores at all times of the year; when you surround ourselves with creature comforts that distance you from any uncertainty that might touch your lives.

In such environments, it takes dramatic events to remind you of your limitations; to remind you that no matter how "sophisticated and knowledgeable" you have become, you are not truly in control of your lives.

I and my fellow citizens of Israel are experiencing the lessons of Tu B'Shvat through difficult times.

We live in a land that doesn't lie.

We live in a land that, from the beginning of time, hasn't let its inhabitants forget their dependence on God. From the famines and water scarcity of the Patriarchal Era-to the continuing concern for natural resources in our day; from our geopolitical position at the crossroads of competing ancient

empires across history -to the current war that is exacting such cost from our nation.

And now, we are living the messages of Tu B'Shevat in real time....

The wrenching events of the past few months have brought our people together in a commitment toward complete victory. The cost is painfully high. Our brave soldiers are fighting for the very existence of the Jewish State. HaShem's plans for us along this tortuous path remain inscrutable.

Nonetheless, these events have also awakened in many a new awareness of our *true dependence is upon God*. The requests for tzitzit and tefillin from soldiers who have never donned these items before; the number of soldiers who are wearing small metal tabs engraved with the words of the Shema; and more; are all indicative of a new awakening in the hearts of many towards a deeper connection with HaShem.

Our army is strong and can certainly prevail in its battles, but even our brave troops are increasingly aware of our essential partnership with God in securing a full victory.

May HaShem protect those who are fighting for our State's survival; may He guard the hostages so cruelly held by a vicious enemy and grant them a safe return to their homes...

And may we never forget the lesson of Tu B'Shevat.

Far from child's play, this festival is a clear reminder of all that remains in HaShem's direct control. ■

Jonathan Rosenblum, DPM

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HaRav Ya'akov Zvi ben David Arie'el zt"l

לעילוי נשמות

פנחס בן יעקב אשר וגולדה בת ישראל דוד איז ע"ה ועזריאל בן אריה לייב ומעניה בת יצחק שרטר ע"ה

The Birth of History

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

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

What exactly does this mean? As Rashi points out, it does not mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah did not know God by the name Hashem. To the contrary, God's first words to Abraham, "Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house," were said using the name Hashem.

It even says, just a few verses later (Gen. 12:7), *Vayera Hashem el Avram*: "Hashem appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this Land." So God

had appeared to Avram as Hashem. And in the very next verse it says that Avram built an altar and "He called on the name of Hashem" (Gen. 12:8). So Avram himself knew the name and had used it.

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

The answer is that through Bereishit, God is the God of Creation, the God of nature, the aspect of God we call, with different nuances but the same overall sense, *Elokim*, or *E-l Sha-ddai*, or even *Koneh shamayim va'arets*, Creator of heaven and earth.

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

There were profound differences between the gods of polytheism and myth and the one God of Abraham, but they

operated, as it were, in the same territory, the same ballpark.

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

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

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

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

And now God appears to Moses and tells



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

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

Think about this: Long before the West, the Chinese had invented ink, paper, printing, porcelain manufacture, the compass, gunpowder, and many other technologies. But they failed to develop a scientific revolution, an industrial revolution, a market economy, and a free society. Why did they get so far and then stop? The historian Christopher Dawson argued that it was the religion of the West that made the difference. Alone among the civilisations of the world, Europe "has been continually shaken and transformed by an energy of spiritual unrest." He attributed this to the fact that "its religious ideal has not been the worship of timeless and changeless perfection but a spirit that strives to incorporate itself in humanity and to change the world."¹

To change the world. That is the key

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

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

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

These weekly teachings from **Rabbi Sacks** zt"l are part of his 'Covenant & Conversation' series on the weekly Torah teaching. With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. Visit www.RabbiSacks.org for more.

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PROBING THE PROPHETS

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER

Faculty, OU Israel Center

Rabbi Winkler's popular Jewish History lectures can be viewed by visiting the OU Israel Video archive: <https://www.ouisrael.org/video-library>

The Wheels of Justice

The navi Yechezkel, whose words we read this week as our haftarah, lived in Babylonia during the years preceding and following churban bayit, the destruction of the First Temple, and had the unenviable task of breaking the horrific news of the churban to the Jewish community in the Diaspora. Like his older contemporary, the prophet Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel often speaks harshly to Israel and warns them of the impending doom that awaited them if they did not change their wicked ways. And, like Yirmiyahu as well, he also soothed and reassured the grieving community sharing prophecies of comfort and of consolation to them.

Understanding this historical background will help us understand the prophetic message and its connection to Parashat Va'eira.

The haftarah's opening verses are ones of encouragement and hope, promising the newly exiled that Israel would return from the Diaspora and rebuild their land. However, the subsequent seven p'sukim, those that open the 29th perek, hearken back to the ancient Egypt of long ago - the great and powerful empire that oppressed and enslaved Israel. In that section, Yechezkel reminds the exiled Jews that during those of months of plagues (as depicted in our parasha), the powerful empire was forced to "bend their knee" before Hashem's power, so the proud Pharaoh, who

had once declared "I do not recognize Hashem", soon told Moshe "go and worship Hashem...and bless me, as well".

Drawing a parallel between the "then" and the "now", Yechezkel tells his nation that, just as the Par'oh of Moshe's day denied the divinity of Hashem and saw himself as a god, and, as a result, was humbled by Hashem's punishments, so too the Egyptian king in their time denied G-d as all-powerful - boasting that the mighty Nile river was his for it was he who created it [29:3] - so that he too will be brought to his knees through G-d's punishing retribution. Certainly, when we read of Hashem's chastisements would include the targeting of the Nile (v. 4) and sending Egypt in to a wilderness (v.5), - with Egypt becoming desolate for **forty years** we recognize clearly the linkage Chazal saw between the haftarah and our parasha.

Yechezkel's words were addressed to a suffering community who saw little hope for their future. The navi's message guaranteeing that G-d's justice would be meted out to Egypt was an essential one for the exiled community. The Tanach records how Judea had allied herself with Egypt to come to their aid in the event of any Babylonian attack. Yet, despite Yehudah's cries for help, the Egyptian empire remained idle. She was, as Yechezkel (and Yirmiyahu)

describes her, a "mish'enet kaneh" (v.6) - a support staff made up of reeds, a cane that collapses when one leans upon it for support. The prophet's assurance that Egypt's callous treachery would not go punished provided a modicum of comfort to the Jewish nation. It was a message that, although Hashem's wheels of justice might grind very slowly...but they will grind very fine.

Yet, we can better appreciate the importance of this prophetic message and its comforting impact on the people when considering how, from p'rakim 2 - 24 (!) Yechezkel's messages are but condemnations of Israel and her sins, and the descriptions of the approaching punishments that would befall them. These twenty-four chapters of G-d's judgements against Israel made up the very first communications of this prophet to his nation. Our haftarah, therefore, which indicates that Hashem will be judging ALL nations - especially Egypt that was seen as the cause of Israel's collapse - served as a source of bittersweet consolation for the people.

We can now also understand why our haftarah is introduced by the final verses of perek 28, verses that are, as I mentioned earlier, ones of encouragement and hope, promising that Israel would return from the Diaspora and rebuild their land

Yes, there would be punishment and destruction but there would always be a return - a promise never made to other nations.

This is the lesson taught to us by the prophets.

And a lesson whose truth we have seen throughout our long history. ■

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Road to Success Passes Through Valleys of Failure

In the beginning of Sefer Shemot we are introduced to Moshe Rabbeinu. He is given a mission by God along with several signs to prove to him that his mission will be successful. Moshe and Aharon spoke to the nation and gained the belief of the people, as is stated העם ויאמן – “the people believed” (Shemot 4:31).

However, then things take a turn and seem to go terribly wrong. Pharaoh refuses to recognize God and rejects Moshe’s request to permit the nation to worship Hashem in the desert. Pharaoh then makes life more difficult for the Jewish people and they are not only to perform slave labor but to prepare their own raw materials. The Jewish people turn against Moshe and Aharon and state:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם יְרָא ה' עֲלֵיכֶם וְיִשְׁפֹּט אֶשְׁרֵי הַבְּאֻשָּׁתֵיכֶם אֲתֵּי-יָרִיחוּנוּ בְּעֵינֵי פָרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי עַבְדֵּי לְתֵת חֶרֶב בְּיָדָם לְהָרִגְנוּ (שמות ה:כא)

And they said to them, “May the Lord look upon you and judge, for you have brought us into disfavor in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants, to place a sword

into their hand[s] to kill us.” (Shemot 5:21).

Moshe returns to Pharaoh and begins performing miraculous acts – like turning his staff into a snake. Pharaoh is unimpressed, as his own magicians can perform the same acts. We begin to sense Moshe’s frustration. At the end of Parshat Shemot Moshe turns to Hashem and states:

וַיֹּשֶׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל-ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֶד-נִי לָמָּה הִרְעִיתָ לָעַם הַזֶּה לָמָּה זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי. מֵאַזָּא בָאתִי אֶל-פָּרְעֹה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ הַרֵע לָעַם הַזֶּה וְהִצַּל לֹא-הִצַּלְתָּ אֹתָם עַמֶּךָ (שמות ה:כב-כג).

Moshe returned to Hashem and said, “O God! Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me? Since I have come to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this people, and You have not saved Your people.” (Shemot 5: 22-23).

In Parshat Va’eira, although Hashem reassures Moshe that he will succeed, Moshe replies:

...הֵן בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאִיךָ יִשְׁמְעֵנִי פָרְעֹה וְאִנִּי עָרַל שִׁפְתֵּימִ: (שמות ו:יב)

Behold, Bnei Yisrael did not believe me. How then will Pharaoh believe me, seeing that I am of closed lips?”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l in his book Lessons in Leadership, explains that leadership is often marked by failure. Many successful individuals experienced failure

prior to success. Lincoln and Churchill faced several setbacks. Van Gogh sold only one painting during his lifetime despite the fact that his brother was an art dealer!

Leaders are tested not only by their success, but more importantly by how they deal with their failures. Sometimes success is accomplished due to tailwinds. It is easy for a business to succeed when the economy is booming, but during a depression, it is much harder to keep a business functioning.

Jim Collins, one of the great writers on leadership is cited by Rabbi Sacks:

“The signature of the truly great versus the merely successful is not the absence of difficulty, but the ability to come back from setbacks, even cataclysmic catastrophes, stronger than before.”

Rav Hutner expresses a similar sentiment by citing a pasuk in proverbs (24:16)

כִּי טֹבֵעַ יִפּוֹל צַדִּיק וְקָם וְרָשָׁעִים יִכָּשְׁלוּ בָרָעָה
For a righteous man can fall seven times and rise, but the wicked shall stumble upon evil.

The supreme role model is Moshe Rabbeinu, who despite all setbacks listed in Shemot and Va’eira, eventually became known as the man to whom there is no comparison. לא קם בישראל כמשה עוד.

When we experience defeats and disappointments, both on a personal and national level, it is important to remember that even the people who achieved great success experienced failure along the way. What made them great was their ability to persevere and continue past overwhelming challenges. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu grant us the ability to emerge from these challenging times, better individuals and a more united and stronger nation. ■

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Profound Perspectives

One of the most famous midrashim about *makat dam* – the plague of blood – is quite perplexing. Consider the image: an Egyptian and a Jew are drinking from the same vessel. The Jew's face is serene as he enjoys the fresh, cool water. Simultaneously, The Egyptian's face is twisted in disgust as deep red blood touches his lips. How exactly is that possible? Either the liquid is blood or it is water! How can both be true? Similarly, the *Alshich Hakadosh* zt"l notes that when the Jewish people crossed the Red Sea on dry land, the Egyptians drowned. Once again, how are we to understand contradictory events happening concurrently?

Rav Yerucham Levovitz in *Da'as Torah* offers a fundamental principle in response to this puzzle. We view miracles from our limited perspective of the natural world and how it functions. Therefore, to us it seems impossible that two different realities can exist simultaneously. It is no different when we learn about *kefitzat haderech*. We wonder, did the land contract? Did the people fly? We try to fit the details into our framework of natural law using the means by which we measure our physical world. However, there is another "order" that is predicated on spirituality with an

entirely different set of rules. Once we recognize this, we have no questions since it is beyond our scope of comprehension.

Rav Meir Chadash zt"l offers a different viewpoint. Chazal teach that each person is obliged to say, "*bishvili nivra ha'olam* – the world was created for me." At first glance, this statement is faulty. If the world was created for me, how could it have been created for you? Rather, we see from the midrash mentioned above that each person is a world unto himself. Thus, in the Egyptian's world the water was blood, and in the Jew's world it was indeed water. Hashem relates to each person as a separate world. So, when you feel the gentle warmth of the sun shining overhead, be grateful! It is there specifically for your benefit.

Rav Tzadok Hachohen zt"l in *Tzidkat Hatzadik* teaches that one must first and foremost believe in Hashem. Then one must believe in himself, that Hashem created him and everyone else for a unique purpose, no one is just a random individual on planet earth. Rav Hutner zt"l often would note that although we don't struggle with the *yetzer hara* of *avodah zara* – idol worship – these days, we do struggle with appreciating our self-worth. If we could recognize the inherent value of who we are as a *tzelem Elokim*, made in the image of G-d, infused with a Divine mission, we could facilitate greatness in our personal world and beyond. ■

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9:15 AM

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Executive Director, Camp HASC
Author of *Baderech: Along the Path of
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An Open Heart

Rav Aharon Kotler, zt'l, the renowned *ga'on* and *rosh yeshivah*, was the founder of Beis Medrash Govoha in Lakewood. One of *Gedolei haDor*, Reb Aharon was both an incomparable guardian of Talmud Torah and the leader of Va'ad Hatzalah during the Holocaust. Rav Aharon's brilliance was matched only by his sensitivity, caring heart and dedication to *Klal Yisrael*. He consistently decried any hint of vapidity in his *talmidim*, and demanded that they work to become people of thoughtful attention, depth, open-heartedness and caring.

One morning, Rav Aharon appeared restless and agitated, and was seen pacing to and fro outside the Beis Medrash. A *talmid* approached the venerated Rosh Yeshivah and softly inquired what was bothering him. "Imagine a *Yid* after davening, sitting with his breakfast, leafing through the morning newspaper. He looks at the headlines and sees what's happening in the world — a war here, an earthquake there... He takes a bite of his cheese danish, turns the page and continues reading. Where is the *Yiddishe* heart? Where is the *penimiyus*?"

Our *sedra* culminates with *Makas Barad*, the sixth plague delivered upon *Mitzrayim*,

a hail-storm of such intensity that no living thing could escape its fiery downpour. Safety was to be found only in the shelter of the houses....

הִיָּרָא אֶת־דָּבָר ה' מֵעֶבֶדִי פְרָעָה הָנִיס אֶת־עֶבְדֵי
וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ אֶל־הַבָּתִּים:
וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׁם לְבֹ אֶל־דָּבָר ה' וַיַּעֲזֹב אֶת־עֶבְדֵי
וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה:

Those among Pharaoh's courtiers who feared Hashem's word brought their slaves and livestock indoors to safety, but those who paid no heed to the word Hashem left their slaves and livestock in the open. (9:20-21)

The Egyptian citizens had already endured months of retribution and Divine wrath. Again and again, they had experienced the revealed hand of Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu had warned them of each punishment that was to come, and each time the plague had arrived exactly as Moshe had described. The Egyptians must have known to heed Moshe's exhortation, yet they continued to rebuff him and ignore Hashem's word spoken through Moshe.

A miraculous hailstorm of fire and ice pummeled *Mitzrayim*, destroying homes and property, and the servants and livestock that the Egyptians callously left outdoors. As the plague wreaked havoc throughout the land, Paroh verbally surrendered, promising to free the nation he held captive, and ordered Moshe to plead to Hashem that the plague stop. As soon as Moshe Rabbeinu spread out his hands and

davened, "the thunder and hail ceased and rain did not reach the earth"(9:33). Rashi clarifies: the hailstones that were in mid air at the time of Moshe's prayer immediately disappeared and never reached the earth.

Darash Moshe, a compilation of posthumously published *shiurim* delivered by Rav Moshe Feinstein while he was the Rav of Luban, Russia, addressed the incredible and seemingly extraneous miracles performed in this *makah*. We know that Hashem does not perform a miracle unless it is necessary, and the hailstones disappearing in midair — not even suddenly melting and turning into rain — was an additional miracle. Why was it necessary?

We view the halting of the hail's descent as miraculous only because we accept as fact the laws of physics, which demand that heavy objects such as hail that are suspended in midair must eventually fall. This reality is true only because Hashem ordained at the time of Creation that heavy objects fall and lighter ones are suspended. Had Hashem wanted, He could just as easily have done the opposite.

To Hashem there is absolutely no difference between hailstones landing on earth and hailstones stopping in mid-fall. At the time of the plagues, when Hashem was acting toward the Egyptians in a way that was contrary to the normal order of this world, it was perfectly "natural" for the hailstones to disappear as suddenly as they had appeared, and not fall to earth. "Miraculous" had become the "natural order" of the moment. The lesson is: *From Hashem's vantage point, nature and miracles are one and the same.*

Our question remains, however: how is it possible that the Egyptians continued to be

in such blatant denial, so insensitive to God's power and Providence, to the extent that Pharaoh's own servants left their servants and livestock out in the fields to be destroyed?

Actually, the *pasuk* itself reveals the answer. The Egyptians who did not bring their slaves and livestock indoors were not necessarily *kofer b'Hashem*, in *denial* of Hashem's word, but rather *לֹא־שָׁם לְבֹ אֶל־דָּבָר ה'*; they simply did not take the word of God *to heart*. Perhaps they had an intellectual understanding and recognition of Divine involvement in the world, and even some form of awareness of the greatness and infinite capabilities of God. They simply did not 'pay attention.'

We can understand this 'plague of inattention' from our own experience. We are surrounded by a culture of distraction and mindless images that require no thought. This is arguably a greater threat and has a more corrosive effect on our long-term spiritual well being than any hailstorm or physical darkness. In this culture of 'content over contact', we are bombarded with information and media that discourages engagement, critical analysis, or effort. We are served up 'inspiration', the 'answers' the 'truth', and are subtly directed to swallow these whole, without even looking to see what we are internalizing. Irrespective of the holy worthiness of the content, be it an uplifting story, a powerful Torah idea or a moment of family togetherness, we are still capable of glibly scrolling through it without really paying attention or taking it to heart. We can't even recognize the darkness that we're in.

Regarding the *barad*, Ramban (13:16) asserts that one does not have a share in

the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu unless he believes that everything that occurs in this world is, in fact, miraculous, and that there is nothing truly “natural” at all. A lesson learned from *Makas barad* is thus to center our experience on real interpersonal contact, Divine connection, and to mindfully internalize what is real and beneficial. To actively cultivate a sensitivity to what is *really* miraculous.

May we awaken our *Yiddishe* heart, opening ourselves to see and learn new things, showing gratitude, making thoughtful choices and generously shining the light of our attention upon our *tefillas*, Torah study and performance of mitzvos. May we appreciate the miracles and wonders that surround us and grace us every day — and may we pay heed to the word of Hashem, Who desires to redeem us from exile. **בקרוב ממש!**



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Bishul Akum and Non-religious Jews PART 1

Our Sages decreed that certain foods cooked by non-Jews are prohibited to consume, even when the food is entirely kosher. Based on most early authorities (see *Tosfot Avodah Zara* 38:a), the reason for this decree is concern about possible intermarriage resulting the closeness that might develop from eating with non-Jews.

Later authorities raise the question of whether non-religious Jews are included in this decree. *Tiferet Lemoshe* (*Pitchei Teshuva* YD 113:1) claims that since the basis of the decree is the concern of intermarriage through mingling, this decree should not include Jews, since there is no prohibition against marrying the children of non-religious Jews. On the other hand, *Tiferet Lemoshe* also mentions an additional reason brought down by *Rashi* (*Avodah Zara* 38:a) and other early authorities (see: *Rashi* mentions that another reason for the decree of prohibiting kosher food cooked by a non-Jew is the concern that a non-Jew would intentionally mix non-kosher food into the cooked dish, in order to cause Jews to transgress. According to this reason, even a non-religious Jew could conceivably do this and therefore might be included in the decree of *bishul akum*).

WHAT IS A MUMAR?

Halachically, the status of a Jew who has

sinned, even in something quite severe such as illicit relations, remains unchanged (see *Sanhedrin* 44:a). However, there are some exceptions. Numerous sources state that a Jew who believes in and worships foreign gods has lost his or her status as a halachic Jew. This removal of status is so severe that such a person may not slaughter kosher animals, which may only be done by a Jew; they are not permitted to perform a circumcision (*brit milah*) and they cannot testify for any binding Jewish ceremony such as a wedding or divorce. The *Gemara* in *Chullin* (4:b) adds that one who publicly transgresses the laws of Shabbat is also in this category. *Rashi* on the *Gemara* explains that a Jew who desecrates Shabbat is denying Hashem's creation of the world, which is heresy. These severe sins classify someone as a *Mumar* (apostate, someone who has left the fold).

This classification is relevant to *bishul akum* since it is the source of a serious dispute between early and later authorities regarding the status of Jews who do not observe Shabbat or who worship other gods, and whether they are included in the decree of *bishul akum*. And of course if they are included in the decree, it would be prohibited to consume their cooked food

even if it was kosher.

MARRYING A MUMAR

As seen before by *Tiferet Lemoshe*, only according to the second reasoning behind *bishul akum* — i.e., the suspicion of mixing in non-kosher food — would a *mumar* status qualify for the *bishul akum* decree. However, certain authorities claim that even according to the original reason for *bishul akum* — the concern of intermarriage — a *mumar* would be included in the decree. *Mahar"i Asad* (YD 31) brings proof from early authorities (*Ran* on *Chullin* 4:b) that a *mumar* is not only considered “not Jewish” in relation to testimony and kosher slaughter; there is also a prohibition against marrying a *mumar*, just like any non-Jew. Other authorities also concur with this conclusion (*Mahara"m Shik* 281, *Avnei Nezer* 92:5).

Many authorities disagree. According to the dissenting view, although we have rules that are meant to distance us from *mumarim*, there is no prohibition against marrying one, since they are still essentially Jewish and can return to keeping mitzvot. Rav Ovadia Yosef in his responsa (*Yabia Omer* YD 5:10) brings numerous proofs from the numerous sources that marrying a *mumar's* child is certainly permitted.

BISHUL AKUM BY KARAITES

Another point discussed regarding *bishul akum* as it relates to a non-shomer shabbat Jew is the status of Karaites. Karaites

believe that all of the Divine commandments which were handed down to Moses by God were recorded in the written Torah, without any additional Oral Law or explanation. Halachically they are certainly Jewish, but their rejection of the Oral Law accords them a status similar to a *mumar*. Interestingly, *Pri Chadash* (YD 112:1) and *Pri Megadim* (YD 112:3), both very dominant halachic *poskim*, rule that Karaites are included in the decree of *bishul akum*. This is perplexing, since Karaites are definitely Jewish. Some authorities see these rulings as proof that nonobservant Jews are included in the decree, since they should be no different than Karaites (see Responsa *Yehuda Ya'alei* YD 34). The *Pri Chadash* himself adds that since the Karaites desecrate the holidays, it is as if they are not Jewish.

The subject of food cooked by the non-religious in terms of *bishul aku'm* is very complicated. We will expand on the subject in our next article. ■

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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center

The second of the ten plagues, the plague of frogs, contains within it (like each of the plagues), profound symbolism and eternal messages.

The *pasuk* tells us: *VaTa'al HaTzfardya vatechas et eretz Mitzrayim - And the Tzfardaya arose and covered the land of Egypt.*

Rashi in a famous comment explains: *VaTa'al HaTzfardya-Tzfardaya Achat Hayta- One frog rose from the water- vehayu makin ota vhi matezet nichilim nichilim- they hit the frog, and it streamed forth swarms and swarms of frogs...."*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zy'a, points out the significance of the miraculous way in which this particular *makka* becomes gradually worse; initially there was only one frog, and once that frog was struck suddenly there came forth swarms of frogs. The Rebbe pointed out that this plague emphasized that unlike some of the other plagues which were able to be imitated or copied by the sorcerers in *Paroh's* court, it's perhaps true that these sorcerers could bring forth frogs, but what they could not replicate was the miraculous capacity for one frog to suddenly spew swarms and swarms of additional frogs. Only *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* could orchestrate such a miracle.

What other messages might we infer from Rashi's insight?

Rav Shamshon Refael Hirsch zt"l explained that a frog is noisy in the evening, but with day break becomes silent.

How might *Rav Hirsch's* words help us to understand the eternal message within the plague of frogs? If the frogs were indeed annoying, or a major nuisance how should the Egyptians have responded to that annoyance? How should we in turn respond when someone annoys or irritates us through their words, actions or world view?

The great tzadik, **Rabbi Dr. Avraham J. Twerski zy'a**, offered a beautiful insight to address this fundamental question regarding responding to annoying or offensive actions or comments:

We may be negatively affected by what we hear just as we may cause harm by what we say. It is important to be as selective about our hearing as we are about our speech...

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, zt"l affectionately known as *the Steipler Gaon*, writes that initially the dreaded plague of frogs only consisted of one frog, as Rashi teaches us. However, the Egyptians apparently didn't like the frog, and hit it in an attempt to make it go away. Unbeknownst to them, this frog had the miraculous capacity that each time it was struck, it actually multiplied and spewed forth many more frogs.

While one might understand the first few attempts to strike the frog, if indeed the frog kept reproducing with each time it was struck, at some point it should have been clear that they should no longer strike the frog, as it just kept making the

situation worse!

The *Steipler* explained that this is what happens when one let's their anger overcome their intellect. When one gets caught up with anger, they tend to lash out, lose all sense of rational thought, and ultimately can make an uncomfortable or upsetting circumstance exponentially worse. We all can look in retrospect at how foolish and counterproductive it was for the Egyptians to continue to strike these frogs, so perhaps we also need to begin to ask ourselves why we so often fail to learn from their foolishness, and allow our anger to get the best of us.

The eternal message from the plague of *Tzfardaya*, is an important and relevant *musar haskel* for each of us. When we encounter any annoyance or frustration in life, it is important not to lash out at that annoyance in anger, which can only make the situation worse, but rather to take a step back, restrain ourselves, and let that nuisance pass, rather than lash out and make it potentially worse.

May we each merit to heed the powerful words of *Rav Twerski zt"l* and the *Steipler Gaon zt"l*. ■

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GEULAS YISRAEL

BY RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN
Ram, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The Mitzvah to be Courageous

Fear is a visceral response to the uncertainties and dangers which surround us. By activating our “fight or flight” response, fear enables us to either confront threats or escape them. Fear is a healthy and essential emotion.

Surprisingly, the Torah repeatedly warns us *not to be afraid* during times of war. Forecasting our entry into Israel and the ensuing military encounters Moshe cautions us:

לא תיראום כי ה' אלוֹקֵיכֶם הוא הנלחם לכם

For Moshe, the acknowledgment that Hashem campaigns on our behalf deters fear. Similarly, he hopes that recall of past miracles stifles anxiety:

לא תירא מהם וזכר תזכר את אשר עשה ה' אלוֹקֵיךְ לפרעה ולכל מצרים

The alert against fear wasn't only delivered by Moshe in a *general* fashion, but was issued prior to each *actual* Jewish war. On the eve of battle, a כהן מלחמה – or a Kohen military official- delivered a “pep talk” in which he discouraged fear:

ואמר אלהם שמע ישראל אתם קרבים היום למלחמה על איביכם אל ירך לבבכם אל תיראו ואל תחפזו ואל תערצו מפניהם

Evidently, managing wartime fears is fundamental to religious identity. How does the Torah expect us to suppress this powerful and natural emotion?

A DIVINE PROMISE

Perhaps the Torah isn't *banning* fear but *assisting* us in overcoming it. The Ramban

interpreted these verses as divine promise that we will not suffer wartime fear. According to the Ramban, these pesukim describe הבטחות rather than איסורים. Hashem offers divine guarantees that we won't collapse into fear.

This is a startling pledge. Generally, divine promises relate to *events* but not to human *decisions* or *emotions*. By endowing us with free will, Hashem voluntarily withdrew from our heart and from our conscience, leaving us absolutely free to make decisions and to experience emotions. The human heart is the only space in the entire cosmos which Hashem doesn't control.

Admittedly, certain meta-outcomes surrounding large-scale historical arcs are predetermined. Redemption of history is inevitable, and this includes mass repentance both of Jews and of enlightened gentiles. Individuals are still free to make decisions which can alter the trajectory or the pace of these predetermined events, but these large-scale outcomes are pre-programmed into history.

Presumably, purely personal decisions are based entirely on *bechirah chafshit* or free will. However, the Ramban claims that Hashem assures *each and every Jewish soldier* that they will not be afraid on the battlefield.

Evidently, though Hashem doesn't control our *decisions*, He does *supply us with*

vital traits, entering our hearts and supplying us with courage. Though he cannot make decisions for us, He can supply us with fortitude and valor. These pesukim guarantee the delivery of divine courage.

In addition to assuring divine courage, these warnings also set *expectations*. By *promising* that we will not be frightened, Hashem also lodges *expectations* that we *should not* be frightened. Often, when a “moral bar” is raised, human behavior rises to the occasion and matches expectations. Knowing that Hashem expects courage, and knowing that He never sets expectations beyond our ability, we are more empowered to summon the courage which He expects of us.

The pesukim both assure us of divinely-delivered courage while also inspiring us to generate courage.

THE SIN OF FEAR

Unlike the Ramban, astonishingly, the Rambam interpreted these warnings as actual prohibitions against wartime fear. In both his registry of mitzvot (Sefer HaMitzvot, negative prohibition # 58), as well as in Mishnah Torah (Hilchot Melachim Perek 7) he lists an actual sin to be afraid during wartime. His position raises a troubling question: how can Hashem legislate natural emotions, and how are we to avoid this “unavoidable” emotion?

Dissecting the Rambam's characteristically precise language provides a few clues. By analyzing the halachic sin of wartime fear, we can learn how to manage fear in general. Fear management is essential to religious success.

SELF-INDUCED FEAR

When codifying the prohibition of

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wartime fear, the Ramban prohibits self-induced fear.

וכל המתחיל לחשוב ולהרהר במלחמה ומבהיל עצמו עובר בלא תעשה

Excessive rumination, overthinking potential threats, or immediately escalating to worst-case scenarios amplifies fear. Obsessively dwelling on fearful thoughts causes runaway anxiety. Catastrophizing outcomes magnifies our dread and trepidation. Proportionate fear based on legitimate danger may not be forbidden, but self-induced panic and imbalanced worry is forbidden. Courage isn't the denial of fear but rather the ability to operate under its influence. We can be crushed by fear, or we can act decisively while we carry its heaviness in our hearts. Hashem expects us to confront fear rather than be crushed by it.

BEYOND INDIVIDUALISM

Additionally, fear can be managed by framing the war in broad terms which extend it beyond our personal fate. Every Jewish war has broader theological connotations, even battles which appear to be political, economic, or geographical. As the Rambam claims, any and every Jewish war is waged on behalf of Hashem's presence in this world:

ידע שעל יחוד השם הוא עושה מלחמה וישים נפשו בכפו ולא יירא ולא יפחד

Envisioning war as part of our ongoing mission to defend Hashem's presence in our world helps mute fear. We are placed on this Earth to represent Hashem and, optimally, we amplify Him by modeling the nobility of religious life. If, however, we live not for our personal leisure but to draw Him down to our world, we are prepared to die if necessary on behalf of the

ideal which underwrites our lives. *Kiddush Hashem* through death (or as the Rambam phrases it, *yichud Hashem*) is not something we actively pursue, but is a not illogical consequence of Jewish life and mission. Recognizing Jewish wars as Kiddush Hashem lends deeper meaning to and, hopefully, this added meaning reduces fear of death.

The Rambam suggests an additional "perspective" which broadens the stakes of war and diminishes fear. Recognizing that the lives and security of other soldiers depend upon proper functioning during war helps us avoid the paralysis of fear:

ולא עוד אלא שכל דמי ישראל תלויין בצוארו, ואם לא נצח ולא עשה מלחמה בכל לבו ובכל נפשו, הרי זה כמי ששפך דמי הכל

Panic is so devastating to military operations that a coward who doesn't fight with full valor is likened to a "rodef", since he endangers the lives of other soldiers. For that reason, guards were stationed on the back lines, to aggressively prevent desertion. Knowing that your own successful combat protects other soldiers, stretches our own fighting beyond self-interest and helps us overcome fear.

My Rebbe, Rav Amital, was emotionally broken after losing 8 talmidim of the Gush hesder yeshiva during the Yom Kippur war. Yet, knowing that other talmidim and the families of the fallen were looking to him for leadership, he was motivated to summon and display courage. Responsibility for others forces us to rise above fear.

FAITH AND FEAR

Finally, stout *emunah* must neutralize excessive fear. As the Rambam writes in the Sefer HaMitzvot

כי בענין זה אפשר לקיים אמונת האמת

Extreme fear is a glaring lack of faith. Emunah doesn't assert that every frightening situation will be resolved favorably. During period of הסתר פנים, when Hashem's presence is veiled, we are never assured of triumph. Emunah does, however, assure us that there is an overall *purpose* to events and even to tragedy. *Nothing is random*. Knowing that Hashem deliberately orchestrates large-scale events takes the edge off fear, and provides confidence that there is a divine meaning to the madness.

Emunah also asserts that our collective destiny is already predetermined. We know exactly how Jewish history ends. The only thing we don't know is how soon it will end and upon whose shoulders it will be carried to its Messianic endpoint. Foreknowledge of the overall conclusion of history also mitigates fear of the present. We live intergenerationally, both in the past and in the future. Certainty about the future helps stabilize courage in the present. As Sameul Johnson, an 18th century British author remarked "Whatever enlarges *hope* will also exalt *courage*". Faith provides hope and exalts courage.

We are all afraid of both our violent barbaric enemies and of our uncertain future. The fear of the battlefield may be more acute, but we, even non-soldiers, are struggling with fear. Overcoming fear and summoning bravery is a "mitzvah", and a religious calling. Hashem expects courage. Faith, prophecy, and selflessness help us muster that courage. ■

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HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

BY REBBETZIN DR. ADINA
SHMIDMAN



Clinging to Our Leaders

In our Haftorah this week, Yechezkel describes the strained relationship between the Jewish people and Egypt during his time, delving into the future dynamic between Egypt and the Jewish people. What is the distinction between the Jewish culture and the Egyptian way of thinking? Why is this chasm significant? To answer these questions, it is valuable to understand the motifs and values of Egypt and Jewish people throughout Jewish history.

During the famine in Egypt at the time of Yosef and his brothers, the Egyptian populace had to sell their land for sustenance. The priests retained ownership of their land and received support from the Pharaoh during the famine. The Torah emphasizes this to underscore the privileged status of the priests, portraying a society marked by social disparities and highlighting power dynamics. Why is this detail important for us to know?

In contrast to the Egyptian clergy, the Leviim did not own land. Rav Yissachar Yakovson, in his Sefer Chazon Hamikra, observes that this intentional design created a unique bond between the people and their spiritual leaders. In contrast, the Egyptian priests, dependent on the king

rather than the people, lacked a genuine and relational connection with the Egyptian populace. The Haftorah underscores the failure of the Egyptian model, where clergy and community are not connected.

The divine design between the spiritual leaders and the Jewish people, assures a lasting bond and intimate connection. This relationship creates a system of reciprocity and interdependence, fostering a sense of need for spiritual presence and growth. The haftorah reminds us to stay connected to and support our leaders in the hope that they will usher in the messianic era speedily in our days. ■

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TOWARDS MEANINGFUL SHABBOS

BY REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI
Director of OU Israel L'Ayla Women's Initiative



ברכת הבנים

A bit more than a decade ago, my high school friend Ahuva Mosak Prager z"l passed away from cancer. At the shiva, her mother told me the following: Every time Ahuva would go to shul and hear Birchat Kohanim, she would say – "I wish that I could pass on all of these special brachot to my children. I just want to envelop them with the bracha and protection of Hashem."

I think about her words every time I hear Birchat Kohanim. Those words made an impression on me because often we stand in shul during Birchat Kohanim and don't realize what a great privilege we have to receive these special brachot. Ahuva took the words of the brachot to heart, and understood the special *koach* inherent in them, and wanted nothing more than to grant all of that to her children.

But the truth of the matter is that we do have the opportunity to give those very brachot over to our children every single Shabbos. We start off our peaceful Shabbos meal with words of blessing to our children. We take advantage of the peaceful atmosphere to connect with our children with the special words of Birchat Kohanim.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l explains the words as follows:

יברך ה' וישמרך - May Hashem give you bracha and watch over you. This refers to

material blessing, like parnassa and health.

May Hashem shine – יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחנך His face on you and give you some of his 'חן'. This is a **moral**, interpersonal blessing. We ask Hashem to give some of His *chen* (grace) to us so that we can get along with other people.

May Hashem turn – ישא ה' פניו אליך His face toward you. This is a **spiritual** blessing, of connection with Hashem. To explain this bracha, Rabbi Sacks quotes a story about a large crowd of people who were all watching as a boat passed by. One boy started waving furiously at the boat. When he was asked why he was waving, he responded that he was waving to get the attention of the captain. Everyone laughed and told him that there was no way the captain would notice him amongst the huge crowd of people. But the boy answered confidently – "of course the captain will notice me, he's my father!". Our bracha here is that out of the billions of people living in this world, Hashem will take notice of our children because they are His children and they will have a personal connection with Him.

These words that we recite on Friday night are the very same words that the Kohanim use to bless the congregation. But there are two big differences. Firstly, the bracha of the Kohanim is a collective bracha, one bracha is given for the entire crowd together. Secondly, the kohanim don't necessarily know the congregants and

their specific personalities, circumstances, and needs, so it's a one-size-fits-all bracha.

On Friday nights, it's exactly the opposite. The father (and sometimes, the mother) makes sure to give a separate bracha to every single one of the children. And what's more, a parent knows his children more than anyone else in the world. Following in the footsteps of Yaakov Avinu, he makes sure to take into account each child's individuality as he gives the bracha. While the same words might be used for each bracha, in his mind, the parent is focusing on that specific child and his needs. What was unique about Yaakov's brachot was that he looked inside each and every one of his children and grandchildren (Efraim and Menashe) and was able to give each of them the exact bracha and guidance that they needed.

After reciting the words of the Birchat Kohanim, we give a bracha to our sons that they should be like Efraim and Menashe and to our daughters that they should be like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah. Why do we want our children to be specifically like these individuals? If you think about it, every single one of these people grew up with difficult backgrounds and surroundings. Our matriarchs all grew up in idol-worshipping homes, many of which were full of deception and corruption. And though Efraim and Menashe grew up in a good home, they were the first of our ancestors to grow up with the challenges of living in exile, in a country full of immorality. These individuals are amazing role models for our children because of the difficulties and challenges that they overcame.

Though we are sometimes in a rush

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to get started with the Shabbos meal, it's important to take a few moments focusing on each child. Even if you don't say anything extra, give yourself a few seconds before you begin the bracha to think about your child, his specific challenges and personality, and only then plunge into the bracha. It's also a nice idea to add on a personal bracha for each kid – to commend them for something positive that they did over the course of the week and to wish them well for whatever is coming up the following week. But if there's not enough time for that, at least give it some thought in your head as you recite the formalized words. And don't forget to add a hug!

In this way, we are able to take some of the *koach* of Birchat Kohanim combined with the personal touch, to truly envelop our children with Hashem's bracha and protection. ■



RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

EDITOR, TORAH TIDBITS
RAV, THE JERUSALEM SHUL - BAKA, JERUSALEM

The Blessing in a Grain of Sand

The oppression of the Jews in Egypt can be traced to the *kefiyat ha-tov*, the ingratitude, of a single but exceedingly powerful man. The Torah relates that “a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef” (Exodus 1:8), on which Rashi comments, “he made himself out as if he did not know Yosef.” Everything that Yosef did for Pharaoh at the end of Genesis, solving the grain crisis and enriching Pharaoh in the process, has been forgotten. The very title “Pharaoh” (פַּרְעֹה) bears this out: when read backwards, it yields “the nape” (הַעֲרֵף). Pharaoh turned his back on those who had done him good. He was nothing more than an ingrate.¹

Moshe, on the other hand, was an exemplar of *hakarat ha-tov*, gratitude. When delivering God’s message, he told Pharaoh that he would strike the waters of the Nile with the staff in his hand and it would turn to blood (Exodus 7:17). However, God then specified to Moshe that Aharon would hold

the staff and initiate the plague, which he did by striking the waters of the Nile (Exodus 7:19-20). God gave Moshe similar instructions, which were duly followed, for the plague of frogs (8:1-2) and the plague of lice (8:12-13), which required striking the dirt of Egypt. Why was Moshe not the one to perform these plagues?

Rashi writes beautifully that for Moshe to have struck the Nile personally would have been to bite the hand that fed him, or rather saved him. The river’s reeds sheltered Moshe and its current delivered



him safely into the open arms of Pharaoh’s daughter. The same was true of the earth: the relative ease with which the sand could be shifted to hide the body of the Egyptian Moshe killed allowed him to escape immediate Egyptian retribution.² To commit violence against these personal life-

savers would be a symbolic act of gross ingratitude.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook viewed gratitude to be more than a moral principle. It is a spiritual capacity with cosmic significance:

הַכֹּהֵן טוֹבָה הִיא הָעֲמוּד הַמוֹסְרִי הַיֵּתֶר גָּדוֹל וְנִשְׁגָּב, שֶׁכְּשִׁיתְפַּתֵּחַ כָּל צָרְכּוֹ בְּלִבּוֹת בְּנֵי אָדָם יִהְיֶה עוֹזֵר מְאֹד אֶל הַתִּקּוֹן הַקָּלִיל.

2. Rashi on Exodus 7:19, s.v. וְרָאָה לֹא רֵמָא and on Exodus 8:12.

Gratitude is the greatest and loftiest pillar of morality, which when fully developed in the heart of man contributes greatly to collective perfection.³

The inclination to express gratitude to others and reciprocate their kindnesses is inborn but requires continuous development. And though it comes to us naturally to give thanks to those who support us most, such as our parents, spouse, and close friends, we all too often neglect to show our true appreciation to the Almighty who gives us life, sustains us, and protects us. The reason, in Rav Kook’s view, is because of “man’s smallness and the greatness of the Benefactor and His beneficences.”⁴

How does one become more mindful of God’s blessings? By taking note of and appreciating the material gifts, be they big or small, that serve our needs. The more we accustom ourselves to recognizing the manifold gifts that surround us, the more likely we are to recognize God’s grace and the fact that we are beneficiaries of His countless kindnesses.

With this in mind, Rav Kook isolates an essential piece of the weekly Shabbat experience: the respite from the frenetic pace of life that allows one to be more mindful and discern the many reasons to be grateful.⁵ With physical and digital distractions removed, the beauty of family, the pleasure of friends, the comfort of hearth and home, the belonging of community, and the flavor of dishes all emerge clearly from the background noise. This capacious

3. *Ein Ayah, Shabbat*, 1:14.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 1:15.

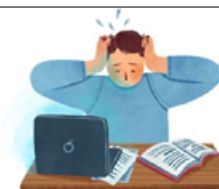
attunement draws us out of our constricted consciousness to recognize the source of all our blessings: our Father in Heaven.

The great master of the Musar movement, the Alter of Kelm, did not squander this weekly opportunity. It is told that he would pause at his door every Friday night upon returning from prayer. For a couple of minutes, he would gaze through the window at the beautifully set table, marvel at the tidiness of the home, and savor the aromas of the delectable dinner. He would say to himself, “All of this I owe to my wife. How much effort she must have exerted so that the home is this tidy, the Shabbat table so beautiful, and the food so delicious!” With this heightened sense of gratitude for his wife, he would cross the threshold into his home and begin Shabbat each week.⁶ ■

6. Heard in a lecture from Rabbi Norman Lamm.

Rabbi Goldscheider is the author of the newly published book ‘Torah United’ (OU Press), featuring divrei Torah on the weekly parasha from Rav Kook, Rabbi Solovetichik, and the Chassidic Masters.

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The Orthodox Union - via its website - fields questions of all types in areas of kashrut, Jewish law and values. Some of them are answered by Eretz Hemdah, the Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, headed by Rav Yosef Carmel and Rav Moshe Ehrenreich, founded by HaRav Shaul Yisraeli zt"l, to prepare rabbanim and dayanim to serve the National Religious community in Israel and abroad. Ask the Rabbi is a joint venture of the OU, Yerushalayim Network, Eretz Hemdah... and OU Israel's Torah Tidbits.



What Should One Skip to Get to Shemoneh Esrei on Time?

לעילוי נשמת
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: If I wake up not long before *sof z'man tefilla* (=szt - a third into the day), should I go straight into *Shemoneh Esrei* (=SE), or are there parts of *tefilla* that must come first?

Answer: We accept the latter opinion among *Tannaim* (Berachot 26a, 27a) that the end time for *Shacharit* is "after four hours" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 89:1). However, one may *daven Shacharit* until *chatzot*, just that he loses the element of being on time (ibid.)

Some sources on relative prioritization of elements of *tefilla* enjoy a (partial) consensus; from there, we can also extrapolate. It is better to recite SE without a *minyan* before *szt* than *tefilla b'tzibbur* afterward (Shulchan Aruch, OC 90:10). Seeking *tefilla b'tzibbur*, still, justifies skipping parts of *tefilla*. One may skip the majority of *Birchot Hashachar*, as they can be done after *davening* (Rama, OC 52:1). (Yechaveh Da'at (V:5) says to do *Birkat Hatorah* and *Elokai Neshama* beforehand.) The Shulchan Aruch (OC 52:1) rules that one can skip all of *P'sukei D'zimra* to make *tefilla b'tzibbur*. Most Ashkenazi authorities

say one can only greatly shorten but not eliminate *P'sukei D'zimra* (Mishna Berura 52:6). *Kri'at Shema* (=KS) and its *berachot* are not skipped or shortened for that goal (ibid.). *Tallit* and *tefillin* are also put on before *davening* (see Mishna Berura 66:40; Berachot 14b) even if it will cause him to miss *tefilla b'tzibbur*, despite the fact these *mitzvot* apply all day.

How do these elements stand up to the value of making *szt*, which we have seen is more critical than *tefilla b'tzibbur*, even though it can be done fully after "its time"? The Mishna Berura (66:40, based on Magen Avraham 66:12) says that if putting on *tefillin* will cause one to miss *szt*, he should don them after SE, just as he puts off putting them on to make *sof zman KS* (ibid.). It is actually more of a *chiddush* regarding *szt*, because *davening Shacharit* before and after *szt* are both fundamental Rabbinic *mitzvot*. In contrast, one who misses *sof zman KS*, while he should still read it with its *berachot* for another halachic hour (Shulchan Aruch, OC 58:6), has lost that *mitzva* from the Torah, and his subsequent recitation is apparently much less fundamental (see Berachot 10b and Rashi ad loc.).

Regarding skipping all of *P'sukei*

D'zimra, it seems logical (although one can readily disagree) that since there is a major *machloket* (see above) regarding doing so for *tefilla b'tzibbur*, it is worthwhile to skip it to make *szt*. Regarding doing KS and its *berachot* before SE at the expense of *szt*, *Tefilla K'hilchata* (3:(82)) posits based on his own logic, that the importance of going from *Ga'al Yisrael* into SE is too great to forego in order to *daven SE* at the preferred time. This approach is strengthened by another consideration. Although it should be possible to recite KS and its *berachot* after SE (as sometimes is done at *Ma'ariv* – Shulchan Aruch, OC 236:3), in this case, as *szt* is about to pass, most *poskim* posit that it becomes too late to recite the *berachot* of KS (Shulchan Aruch, OC 58:6). Thus, if one is ready for either KS and its *berachot* or SE (with, let's say, 5 minutes until *szt*), if he does KS first, he will get to do everything, but if he does SE first, he will not only not lose the connection of *geula* and *tefilla* but also lose the *berachot* of KS.

A final factor that gives options and also complicates matters is the prospect of being able to start but not finish SE by *szt*. In general, we *paskan* that we must **finish** SE on time (Mishna Berura 89:5). However, there are significant opinions (including Aruch Hashulchan, OC 110:5) that it suffices to **begin** by *szt*. If one knows he will be able to start SE on time if he does an abbreviated *P'sukei D'zimra* and is unsure whether he will or will not finish it, it is likely worthwhile

to try to do so, especially since it is definitely permitted to do SE even after *szt*. ■

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RABBI GIDEON

Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha

WEITZMAN

Our Answer to Crisis

I once received a telephone call from a journalist in California who was writing an article about fertility for a large newspaper there. She was interested in certain aspects of Jewish law and fertility treatment, the sort of topics that we discuss in this column. She was also fascinated by Israeli secular law's attitude to fertility treatment, since Israel has one of the most comprehensive and permissive legislation regarding fertility treatment in the world.

She then asked a question that I have thought of many times since. "Do you find that people in Israel are having less children due to the situation there?" I had to ask her to repeat and explain her question, and she clarified that due to the difficult and somewhat precarious security situation in Israel, people could be justified in deciding to refrain from having children.

I cannot recall what war or spate of terrorist attacks was underway when I got that call, but I was a little taken aback. The journalist's assumption was that adversity and strife would make Israelis more cautious when deciding to have children. However, we know and see that we Israelis, and, indeed, us Jews, have a distinctly different approach.

Since our slavery in Egypt we have always believed, "as they subjugated them, so did they increase and so did they spread out" (Shemot 1:12). Our answer to those who try to kill us is to have more and more children. This is a uniquely Jewish response that has made us the truly Eternal People, the nation that simply refuses to die.

They may try to kill us, and may succeed in attacking us and causing us great pain and suffering. But they, whichever they may be, in each and every generation, cannot stop us having children, living our lives and succeeding.

David wrote in Psalms "I will not die, for I will live, and I will tell God's works" (Tehillim 118:17) and we sing this as part of our Hallel on each Jewish festival and Rosh Chodesh. Rabbi David Kimchi, the Radak, explains that our enemies came to kill us and were convinced that they were successful in destroying us. However, despite all odds, we survive. And, when we survive, we declare the praise of God. We are ourselves a testimony to Hashem's hand in creation and history. We continue His work by having children, even in the face of the greatest danger and horrific evil and destruction.

And that is our Jewish answer; they kill us, we have more children.

More on this next time. ■

Be'er Tziporah a'h - Bottled Water Gemach

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She was like Aron, who loved peace and pursued peace.



Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem.

With thanks and Toda. Love, Yoni

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What Do You Do When You Mess Up?

“Messing up”, “losing it”, yelling at your child, losing your patience and saying “all the wrong things”, can make a parent feel like a failure.

When this happens, a parent tends to spiral down a rabbit hole of guilt, negative self talk and blame. Parents are great at laying on a thick layer of guilt and magnifying even small transgressions. But what can you DO when you mess up??

Acknowledging that you messed up is an important step. Recognizing that you did something wrong or said something wrong allows for repair!

Repair is a beautiful opportunity. It is an opportunity to gain self awareness and grow and change. It is also an opportunity to model self reflection to your children. This will allow them to also feel

comfortable apologizing or recognizing that they’ve made mistakes. Perfection is not attainable. If a parent projects perfection, it creates distance between the parent and child. When a parent is aware of his/ her mistakes it creates a connection. It can be an opportunity to have a conversation with your child about how it feels to “mess up”, take accountability and move on. Don’t make excuses for your actions. You can still be a confident, great parent even if you mess up once in a while.

Finally, if you feel that you are losing it or messing up all the time, you might be under too much stress. You may want to seek professional help to manage your anxieties.

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THE DAILY

BY SIVAN RAHAV-MEIR

PORION

Wounded and Limping - With Unimaginable Potential

Here are some thoughts I shared at a recent event for "HaTzaad Haba" ("The Next Step") an association for amputees in Israel, mainly those injured during the current war:

The Lubavitcher Rebbe said that he did not like the term "disabled veterans" applied to those who were physically handicapped as the result of Israel's wars. Instead, he preferred the term "exceptional veterans."

Yaakov Avinu wrestles with an angel of evil. He finishes the fight, but has been badly hurt and walks with a limp. Yet due to this horribly dark and bitter confrontation with evil, Yaakov achieves a new stature and is rewarded with the name of Yisrael.

That is to say: An encounter which leaves me wounded is the encounter that brings me to a much higher level. In fact, the question that needs asking is: "Would I have achieved

so much and gotten so far had I not been wounded?" It could in fact be the case that from this hardship I grew enormously and reached previously impossible heights.

Today, in our fight with evil, there are many who have been physically wounded. They represent all of us and the entire nation, in a sense, now walks with a limp. But just as Yaakov rose to new heights from his struggle with evil, so may we emerge from our struggle with evil on a higher level — closer, more caring, more united, with previously unimaginable potential for growth. ■

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Real Life Rescues



Saving An Elderly Woman From Cardiac Arrest

Just after 11a.m. on Monday, an 80-year-old woman in Holon collapsed at her residence. Her foreign caregiver immediately called emergency services.

United Hatzalah EMTs Chen Bador and Hillel Hamawi were on their ambucycles when they received the alert on their communications devices. They immediately stopped what they were doing and rushed to the scene, arriving in under 3 minutes. Yuval Dantziger, another United Hatzalah EMT, also arrived at the same time in his private vehicle.

They entered the home and found the woman lying unconscious on the floor. She wasn't breathing and had no pulse. Springing into action, they attached a defibrillator and began chest compressions with assisted ventilation. The defibrillator did not recommend a shock, so they, together with another EMT who had just arrived, continued administering CPR.

Shortly after, an Advanced Life Support ambulance team arrived at the scene. The paramedic attached a heart monitor and administered a shock to the patient. The paramedic also administered medication via IV, while the EMTs continued their efforts to revive the woman. After about 25 minutes, the woman's pulse and breathing were restored. She was rapidly transported to the hospital for further treatment.

"It's an incredible feeling," said Dantziger, reflecting on the team's success. "We provide initial treatment and do the best we can to give the person a chance to survive later at the hospital, so when we succeed in giving them that chance, it's extremely rewarding. Calls like these make everything worth it."



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THE Y FILES

(*YERUSHALAYIM)

Theme:
ISRAEL

חממת גדר
Chammat Gadder

by
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AND SO AARON RAISED HIS STAFF BEFORE PHAROAH AND...

...FLUNG IT ON THE GROUND, WHEREBY - BEHOLD! IT BECAME A...

...CROCODILE!



OR POSSIBLY A SNAKE -

COMMENTATORS ARE DIVIDED AS TO PRECISELY WHICH ANIMAL IT WAS,

BUT LET US GO WITH THE CROCODILE VERSION, AS IT IS AN AGE-OLD PARABLE FOR PHAROAH HIMSELF (SEE HAFTARA), AND WAS ONE OF EGYPT'S MANY GODS, TOO...

PLUS, IT SUPPLIES US WITH FAR MORE PUNS FOR THE STORY...

AT FIRST, PHAROAH WAS UNIMRESSED.

HAR-HAR-HAR-HAR! YOU THINK YOU CAN INTIMIDATE ME WITH YOUR FIRST-GRADE-LEVEL TRANSFIGURATION?



WHATEVER NEXT? TURNING BUNNIES INTO BEDSIDE SLIPPERS OR SOMETHING?

BUT PHAROAH WAS IN FOR A BIG SURPRISE, FOR THE LESSER-KNOWN PART OF THE MIRACLE WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN...

THE CROCODILE OPENED ITS MOUTH WIDE AND CRIED...



RRRAAARGH!!!
BA-BOOM! MISTER CREEK, THE COMPLETELY-CRACKERS CROC IS IN TOWN, BOYS, AND WE ARE GONNA CROC AROUND THE CLOCK!



GRRRR!!

HA! YOU DON'T FRIGHTEN ME!
I'LL BET YOU'RE ALL NOT EVEN REAL WOOD!
PROBABLY SOME FLIMSY NILE REED OR SOMETHING, HUH?



REED? I, SIR, AM PROPER CEDAR-WOOD, 12 INCHES, WHIPPY, PHOENIX TAIL-FEATHER CORE...

NO, YOU'RE NOT! YOU'RE CHEAPO SANDWICH-WOOD FROM IKEA!

AT LEAST WE'S NOT JUST WOOD-COLOURED PLASTIC FROM ALI EXPRESS, EH, CHARLIE?



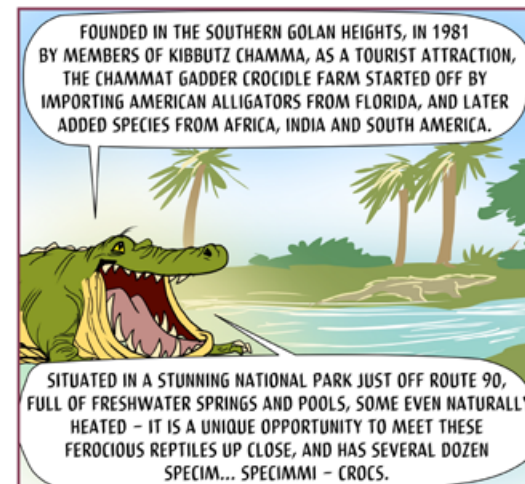
WELL, WHAT MAKES YOU SO SURE OF YOURSELF, MISTER BIG-SHOT?

ME? YOU THINK THE HOLY, GODLY STAFF OF AHARON HACHOEN WILL BECOME JUST SOME RANDOM EGYPTIAN REPTILE?



I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT I AM A GENUINE CHAMMAT GADDER PEDIGREE!

A WHAT, SORRY?



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OH MY! THAT IS SOMEWHAT INTIMIDATING....!



I'D LIKE TO START WITH THAT ALL-TIME OLD FAVOURITE...

"CROCODILE ROCK"...

WHEREBY PHAROAH CALLED UP HIS TRUSTY IN-HOUSE SORCERERS AND CRIED:

NO!!! ANYTHING BUT ELTON JOHN! SORCERERS! DO SOMETHING!



EACH OF THE SORCERERS FLUNG THEIR RESPECTIVE STAFFS TO THE FLOOR AND THEY, TOO, EACH BECAME A CROCODILE!



RIIIIIIGHT....



NOW, ENOUGH TALK. ARE YOU CHAPS GOING TO COME QUIETLY, OR ARE YOU GOING TO BURST INTO SOME GOOD OLD CROC-AND-ROLL WITH ME?

I THINK I'D RATHER BE EATEN, DON'T YOU?

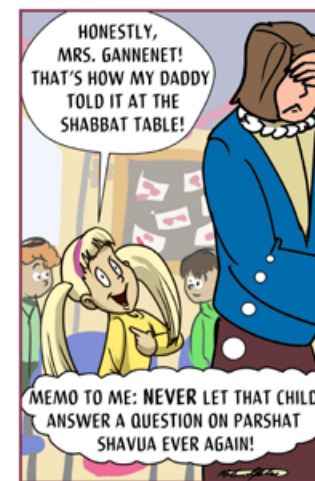
ME TOO!



AND WITH THAT - AHARON'S STAFF GOBBLED UP PHAROAH'S SORCERERS' STICKS...

WITH A MUFFLED "SEE YOU LATER, ALLIGATER!"

AND RATHER A LOT OF SELF-SATISFIED CHORTLES...



HONESTLY, MRS. GANNENET! THAT'S HOW MY DADDY TOLD IT AT THE SHABBAT TABLE!

MEMO TO ME: NEVER LET THAT CHILD ANSWER A QUESTION ON PARSHAT SHAVUA EVER AGAIN!



TORAH 4 TEENS

BY TEENS NCSY ISRAEL



Rabbi Michael Kahn
Executive Director
NCSY Israel

Leaving Mitzrayim

In Parshat Va'eira Hashem promises to redeem us from our bondage known to us all as the "Four Lashonot of Geulah". In the first lashon, "Vehotzeiti", Hashem says that he will take us out from the sivot of Mitzrayim.

6:6 - "לכן אמר לבני ישראל אני ה' והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים....."

In his sefer "Mayanei Shel Torah" Rabbi Alexander Zusha Friedman zt"l quotes the Chidushei Harim who highlights the fact there is one word in this posuk that sticks out amongst the rest and can be understood in two ways. He highlights the word "sivot", which literally translates as suffering, and points out that it also means tolerance. He explains there is no coincidence as to why Hashem decided to use this word when he was telling Moshe he would

redeem the Bnei Yisroel.

The Bnei Yisroel were not only suffering in Egypt, but they became tolerant of the situation they were in. They accepted their situation and became complacent. The only way they were going to be able to be redeemed from Egypt was if they first became intolerant with their position in life. The Chidushei Harim applies this to our lives currently and says that only once we have become intolerant of our present situation living in Galut will we be able to finally be redeemed.

On a similar note, the Gra comments on the very famous declaration of the Bal Hagadah when he writes "In each and every generation a person is obligated to see themselves as if they are leaving Mitzraim" that the word Mitzraim (Egypt) can also be read "MeiTzarim" which means limitations. Just as Egypt tried limiting ourselves as a nation, we have an obligation every single year to see ourselves leaving the limitations that we have placed on ourselves. Although we can't imagine what it was like to leave Egypt, we can imagine what it is like to release ourselves from our personal limitations.

We tend to fall into personal "Mitzraim"- lives of limitations and tolerance where we accept our situation in life for what it is and refuse to change it. We become tolerant of bad habits, bad blood between our fellow Jews, and we remain in the same position we were the day before. This applies on a personal level, and this applies on a national level to each



SERIES TWO

AND THE DOVE FOUND REST

STUDIES IN THE WEEKLY PARSHA
BERASHIS - SHMOS - VAYIKRA - BAMIDBAR - DEVARIM

RABBI BARUCH TAUB

NEW



and every one of us.

The first step to becoming redeemed is to make the decision to become redeemable. If we are tolerant of our situations, then we will continue to suffer and if we limit ourselves then we will continue to remain in Egypt or our present day Galut. May we find the drive, passion, and commitment to take action and become intolerable individuals and an intolerable nation to our current situations whether it be our personal limitations or our national limitations we find ourselves surrounded with and may that lead us to the final redemption with the building of the Third Beit Hamikdash speedily in our days.



Raphael Roshwalb
12th Grade
Raanana

Forging Greatness

In this week's parsha the Torah says אלה (4:14) ראשי בית אבתם. The Torah wants to tell us the lineage of Levi because of Moshe and Aharon, so it began to set out their genealogy in the order of their birth from Reuven and on (Rashi). Why is it necessary to trace and record their yichus — pedigree? Contrary to the belief of the Christian

world regarding their own leader, the Torah wants to emphasize that a Jewish leader is not one who is born in a supernatural way. He is a normal person who has a father and mother and who has elevated himself spiritually to be worthy of his rank.

Every Jewish boy has the potential to become a Moshe Rabbeinu — a leader of the Jewish people in his generation. It's a powerful call for each of us to strive for excellence, showing that every Jewish soul holds the capacity to lead, inspire, and contribute significantly to our community. Our heritage empowers us to pursue greatness through commitment, perseverance, and a strong connection to our roots.

The heroes of Israel's fight for independence, much like Moshe Rabbeinu, were not born into supernatural roles. They were individuals who stepped forward, driven by their unwavering commitment to a homeland. Their stories echo the Torah's message; that greatness arises from within, from a resolute spirit and the courage to stand up for what's right.

In the same way, every Jewish person, regardless of circumstance, has the potential to contribute to Israel's future. The spirit of resilience displayed in Israel's struggle for independence echoes through generations, inspiring us to nurture our potential, lead with courage, and contribute meaningfully to the ongoing story of the Jewish people. ■



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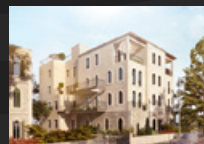
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front

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- ☒ **Institutionalized antisemitic environment**
- ☒ **Championing terrorism as a form of social justice**
- ☒ **Denunciation of genocide regardless of "context"**
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