



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

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ISRAEL Parsha Picture









וְהָיָה כִּי יִבְיָאֵךְ ה' אֵל... אֶרֶץ
 זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ... וְהָיָה לְךָ
 לְאוֹת עַל יָדֶךָ וּלְזִכְרוֹן בֵּין עַיְנֶיךָ
 לְמַעַן תִּתְּהֶיָה תּוֹרַת ה' בְּפִיךָ...
 שמות יג:ה, ט

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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The Mixed Multitude

Confronting New / Old Challenges



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

Great blessings are often accompanied by great challenges. This is the nature of the total package of life and the complex tapestry of human experience.

The mass aliyah which began 30 years ago from the former Soviet Union was no exception. In 2013, a book in Hebrew entitled 'The Million that Changed The Middle East' was written to highlight the change not only within Israel but also its impact on the entire region. One million Russians arrived in Israel between 1990 and 2010, something totally unpredictable in the years before. One of the significant shifts in Israeli geopolitics has been the fact that Russians, by and large, are more politically conservative and tend to vote on the right. This has added a significant right-wing demographic to Israeli society, turning a clear majority in Israel as part of the right-wing. This, of course, has significant implications, not only for the Israeli government but also for regional and global geopolitics. Apart from this political consequence of aliyah, there have also been major spiritual and religious challenges.

As we know, many of the olim were denied any connection to religious practice in the Soviet Union, so some came either without religious practice or even with Christian practices and customs. Up to a third are most likely not halachically Jewish. So for the first time, there was a very significant population group that called themselves Jews and wanted to be part of Israel but were not halachically Jewish. This posed a genuine national problem from a halachic point of view.

Back to the Future

Amazingly, when we look at the Tanach, we can see that the challenges of today and tomorrow were often met earlier and that there are precedents for this. In this week's parsha, we see an unexpected pasuk about who exactly came out of Egypt. After the devastating 10th plague, Pharaoh gives the green light, and indeed the Jewish people leave Mitzrayim, and there is an incredible, unusual, and cryptic group of people who join the exodus:

“גם ערב רב עלה איתם וצאן ובקר כבד מאד” (שמות יב:לח)

“And there was this mixed multitude that came with them.” (Shemot 12:38)

This is the only time in the entire Torah, in the entire Tanach, that they are mentioned. ‘Eirev rav,’ a mixed multitude. However, the phrase ‘eirev rav’ is repeated many times by our sages in a negative context. So, who are these people?

Rashi comments that they were a mixed group of converts – many Egyptians and others – who saw the Hand of G-d; the incredible plagues, and could not help but join the Jewish people when we came out of Mitzrayim.

Rashi brings a Midrash that explains that Hashem was not so impressed by this. The Midrash Rabbah, which Rashi brings in Parshat Ki Tisa about the Egel HaZahav, says that Hashem said to Moshe Rabbeinu: ‘Do not bring them out with you.’ Moshe replies, ‘but they want to come, they have seen the Hand of G-d’ and an argument ensues.

In the end, Moshe Rabbeinu makes a humane, practical decision: that these people should come out because they want to come, “tachat kanfei hash-china” – under Divine protection. Yet it was precisely these people who caused such challenges and problems because they were not descendants of the forefathers and mothers and not an integral part of the historic community of the children of Israel who suffered so much in Egypt. These were outsiders who joined only after seeing the shifting of Israel’s fortunes just prior to the exodus.

Ibn Ezra identifies the eirev rav as the ones referred to (Bamidbar 11:4) as the ‘assafsuf’ – the riff raff --who were constantly complaining about the conditions in the desert which ultimately brought so much suffering to the Children of Israel. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem said to Moshe “לָךְ יָד כִּי שָׁחַת עַמֶּךָ” – “Hurry down, for your people, have acted basely” (Shemot 32:7). Rashi, quoting the Sages, says that the “people of Moshe” are none other than this mixed multitude. G-d is so to speak “pointing a finger” at Moshe, saying: “the people that you chose to bring out against my warnings and are therefore considered ‘your people’, not mine. They are the ones who caused the sin and caused the Jewish People to fall.”

How Many of Them Were There?

It is not clear from the verses themselves how many people actually came out as “eirev rav”. It does seem to be a significant



There is a great comfort in knowing that the issues we face today are not totally uncharted territory as we have faced similar challenges before.

number, since they had great influence on the Jewish people at certain points in the desert, such as in inciting the sin of the Golden Calf and complaining about the food in the desert and causing the populace to despair.

Remarkably, the Targum Yonatan quotes the midrash in which there is a dispute amongst the Sages about how big the group of the eirev rav was, and the numbers are quite staggering:

במכילתא מובא: “וגם ערב רב: מאה ועשרים ריבוא דברי ר’ ישמעאל, ר’ עקיבא אומר: מאתים וארבעים ריבוא, ר’ נתן אומר: מאתים וששים ריבוא וצאן ובקר” (פרשת בא מסכת דפסחא פרשה יד). “וגם ערב רב עלה אתם: מאה ועשרים ריבוא דברי רבי ישמעאל. ר’ עקיבא אומר מאתים וארבעים ריבוא. ר’ יונתן אומר שלש מאות וששים ריבוא” (שמות, פרק י”ב סימן ר”ט)

The numbers indeed boggle the mind. Rabbi Yishmael says that there were as many as 1.2 million people, Rabbi Akiva says 2.4 million, while Rabbi Yonatan says 3.6 million. Whether their numbers

were much smaller or as significant as the Sages discussed, one thing is clear: a very large group of non-Jews or perhaps converts joined the exodus. Rashi says that although they had converted, there were challenges here as well. The eirev rav were a constant source of negative and damaging influence as they struggled in the desert on their way to the Land of Israel.

So too today, there are many challenges that Israel is facing. Indeed, there is so much positive happening with so many people having joined the State of Israel and having decided to throw their lot in with the Jewish People.

Just as in the past the situation was complex with both positive and negative elements intertwined together, so too today. There is a great comfort in knowing that the issues we face today are not totally uncharted territory as we have faced similar challenges before. With all the complications in the past, we managed somehow to navigate these ordeals. May we have the siyata d’shmaya and the insight to deal with them in a way through the prism of halacha and our mesorah while strengthening Israel and enhancing our resilience and unity.

PIRKEI AVOT

What We Gain From Pain



Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi
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בְּהַאֲרָא הָא אֲמוּנָה, לְפִינֵי צַעֲרָא אַגְרָא: (אבות ה:כג)

Last week, we saw how Ben Hei Hei links the *agra* (reward) received for *mitzvah* fulfillment to the *tza'ar* — the effort and pain — involved.¹¹ The obvious question is why this linkage exists. Why is the reward proportional to the *tza'ar*? The answer to this question hinges on how we understand the *agra* referred to by the *mishnah*. What type of *sechar* does it refer to?

Reward

The standard explanation² is that the *mishnah* refers to the *sechar* given to us by Hashem. Hashem rewards us most for the *mitzvah* fulfillment we find challenging and painful. The Sefer Chassidim³ explains that Hashem is fully aware and appreciative of our efforts, not just what we accomplish.

Benefit

Avot D'Rebbi Natan⁴ seems to have a different understanding of *agra*, because it links the *agra* to the fact that the *tza'ar* is inherently “good for man.” According to ADR⁵, the *agra* is the intrinsic benefit we receive naturally from the *tza'ar*, not some external heavenly reward.

What natural benefit do we derive from effort and pain?

Comprehension — The “Butter” of Torah

The Meiri⁵ connects Ben Hei Hei's statement to Torah learning and defines the reward as our comprehension of Torah. We grasp ideas best when we work hard to understand them.⁶ The more effort we invest in our learning, the better we understand the material.

The Meiri's explanation echoes the Gemara's⁷ assertion that “*yagati u'matzati, ta'amin* — (only) one who claims that ‘I worked and found’ should be believed.” It is hard work that facilitates “finding” the ultimate comprehension.

For this reason, Rav Kook⁸ rejected attempts to make Torah learning more user-friendly. He argued that hard work is critical to achieving a high level of Torah study. This is how he explained the Gemara's assertion

that “the butter of Torah” can only be achieved by those who “spit out their mothers' milk.”⁹ Those who settle for “mothers' milk,” learning that is spoon-fed to them, will never invest the effort needed to create “butter” — the deeper, more advanced form of Torah. Though we should help people succeed in their learning, we should avoid spoon-feeding because the extra effort yields a higher level of comprehension.¹⁰

Retention — The Torah of “Af”

The Rambam¹¹ links Ben Hei Hei's statement to our retention of Torah learning. We remember ideas that we work hard to understand.¹² Reish Lakish¹³ made this point in a strong way by asserting that Torah learning only “remains” with those who “kill themselves” to attain it.

Easy come, easy go. Only the Torah that we make sacrifices to learn remains with us years later. Shlomo HaMelech called this the Torah we study “*b'af* — under duress.”¹⁴ Even Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest amongst men, recognized that the wisdom he retained best was that which he struggled to attain.¹⁵

Appreciation

Part of why we retain what we work hard to attain is because we appreciate it more. We care about what we struggle and sacrifice for. This is why Hashem arranged for His three greatest gifts to us — Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and Olam Haba — to all be *nikneit b'yisurin*, acquired through suffering.¹⁶ We appreciate the missions that are difficult to complete; the *tza'ar* we experience helps us appreciate the goals we accomplish.

The Beit Yosef and the Ramchal (based on the Zohar) saw this appreciation as the reason why Hashem created our world. This world's reality of Hashem's hidden presence affords us the opportunity to choose to commit ourselves to Him. This makes our reward in the World to Come — a close relationship with Hashem — more meaningful to us. We appreciate a relationship we have to work hard to develop more than one that is easily achieved.¹⁸

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks¹⁸ used this idea to explain why the degree of observance of the Yamim Tovim is proportional to how difficult each one is to observe; the ones hardest to observe are the ones most observed.¹⁹ Pesach requires more advanced preparatory work than any other Yom Tov. Yom Kippur is the day hardest to complete. Surprisingly, the percentage of Jews who observe these two holidays is significantly higher than that of those easier to observe. We appreciate and are therefore most committed to that which is most difficult.

Growth — Making Ourselves Stronger

The struggle and pain we endure also strengthens our character. Difficult circumstances force us to develop additional skills and aspects of our personality.

Rav Elimelech Biderman²⁰ describes a street in Lakewood which was hit by Hurricane Sandy. The trees on one side of the street were all uprooted while the parallel ones on the other side remained standing. The only difference between the rows of trees was that the trees on the first side of the street benefited from a custom-made watering system, while the trees on the second side did not. The conveniently available water allowed the first set of trees to survive without needing to forge deep roots. They were thus easily uprooted. In contrast, the trees without easy access to water were forced to strike deep roots. These roots helped them survive the hurricane. Difficult circumstances force us to develop stronger survival skills.

Rabbi Lamm²¹ applied this idea to *chinuch habonim* (child rearing) and cautioned against over-protecting:

“Without labor and struggle, without exertion of the intellect and long hours of patient plodding, one can neither master the intricacies of any profession, nor can one achieve great and satisfying success in any business.

It is true about children— if we over-protect them, if we train them to accept easy triumphs, the shortcuts to success, then

Continued on page 7

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Parashat Bo: Israel on the World Stage



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Parashat Bo begins with Hashem's message to Moshe concerning Pharaoh and the Egyptians, whereas the rest of the parasha focuses on instructions particular for Am Yisrael. Here we find a turning point in history. Until now the history of Am Yisrael has been presented together with that of the world at large. At the eve of their redemption, it is imperative that they see themselves as separate and distinct from the nation around them. The haftarah selected for this week (Yirmiyahu 46:13-28) is one of the first prophecies delivered by the prophet to other nations, and like the parasha, contains both universal and particular themes. The first part of Yirmiyahu's prophecy (v. 13-26) is universally addressed to Egypt and the entire world, while the concluding two pesukim contain a special message concerning the destiny of Am Yisrael: "... For I am with you, for I shall make an end of all the nations... but I will not make an end of you." This echoes the contrast Hashem made during the plagues of darkness and death of the firstborn - "in order that you shall know that G-d separates between Egypt and Israel" (Shemot 11:7).

As opposed to the parasha which focuses on the distinction of Am Yisrael, the haftarah teaches that Hashem, as the G-d of the entire world, continues to deliver



As opposed to the parasha which focuses on the distinction of Am Yisrael, the haftarah teaches that Hashem, as the G-d of the entire world, continues to deliver messages to all the nations throughout history.

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

Although the haftarah contains similar themes, the plagues described by Yirmiyahu that will befall Egypt come from the nation of the north and not directly

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

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

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: What are the rules of ma'aser kesafim?

Answer: As part of the general mitzvah of tzedakah, Chazal instituted that one should give 10% of their income. The Gemara in Ta'anit (9a) relays a story where Rebbe Yochanan met the son of Reish Lakish and asked him to share a passuk that he had learned that day. The boy quoted the passuk of "Aseir te'aser" (regarding the general laws of ma'aser). Rebbe Yochanan responded by explaining: "Tithe (aseir) so that you will become rich (shetit'asheir)." After the child asked Rebbe Yochanan where he got this from, Rebbe Yochanan told him to go try. While one generally may not test Hashem, Rebbe Yochanan brings a proof from Malachi that this is the one exception.

This teaching of the Gemara is surprising! It appears as though giving ma'aser is a piece of advice, and Rebbe Yochanan even says one can test Hashem in this respect!

The Ba'alei Hatosfot explain this concept. They begin by mentioning that the laws of ma'aser not only apply to produce, fruit, etc., but also to money. Tosfot then brings a story about a rich man whose field yielded 1000 kor a year, and he gave 100 as ma'aser each year. Before he died, he gave the field to his son, telling him to continue giving ma'aser. The son did not listen to his father, and the field yielded only 100 kor. His relatives told him: when you gave ma'aser, you were the owner and G-d was like the kohen taking the ma'aser. Now that you have stopped giving ma'aser, Hashem has become the owner and you are receiving the ma'aser.

This story of Tosfot teaches the main idea of ma'aser: making Hashem a partner. When one gives ma'aser, it is, so to speak, beneficial for G-d to increase your produce

so the sum of the ma'aser is greater! From here, we see that ma'aser is part of the Jewish economic framework. The logic is as follows: The Torah allows you to make as much profit as you would like on the condition that an appropriate amount is given to the poor. If you give, then the Torah not only maintains this structure but even helps you! If you do not give, the entire economic basis in which you made money dissolves and Hashem will not continue to give.

We see clearly that ma'aser kesafim is part of the economic framework of the Jewish people and not just an appeal to do chesed.

It is noteworthy that not everyone agrees that ma'aser kesafim is mideoraita. Some hold that it is miderbanan (Shu"t Maharil) and others hold that it is a minhag (Shu"t Maharam). Nevertheless, all agree that one should try hard to give ma'aser kesafim and that doing so will benefit the economy, himself included.

Therefore, as a general rule, it is proper for all to give ma'aser kesafim. However, somebody who is in a difficult financial situation can give a smaller amount. If one's financial instability stems from excessive spending, the individual should try to create a healthier balance while giving ma'aser as well.

As we saw, one makes Hakadosh Baruch Hu a partner when giving ma'aser kesafim. It is worth mentioning an additional element of the religious significance of ma'aser. While a person may work hard for income, the money remains physical in nature. When a person gives money to tzedakah, for Torah or chesed, he is uplifting the nature of all of the money from chulin (secular) into money of kedusha, chesed, and Torah.

Here are some specific laws pertaining to ma'aser kesafim:

1. Lechatchila, one should separate 10% of all profits. You should say "bli neder" before the first time you give in case you struggle financially in the future and cannot give the entire amount.
2. One should deduct ma'aser from the sum of profits before deducting one's spendings. However, if the spending is necessary for the sake of the profit, the money can be deducted (ex: paying for a gun to be a guard, paying for a babysitter in order to go to work, money for gas to go to work, etc.)
3. In a case of a need, there is room to deduct the following from the total sum: half of social security, money spent for limud torah of children above the required amount (especially for a child over 13 and certainly over 18), and seforim which you let others use.
4. One should give ma'aser on money that was given as a gift. However, money that was given for a specific purpose (for example: parents gave you money to buy something specific), there is room to be lenient and not include this (it is best to give at least a portion).
5. It is proper to give half of the ma'aser to the poor and the second half to other chesed/Torah organizations.
6. It is recommended to make a separate bank account for tzedakah, so that each month 10% of the income will automatically go into this account, and you will be able to easily give that money.
7. If one has family members struggling financially, giving to them should come first.

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

תקציר פרשת בא

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



כאנשים היוצאים לדרך ויש להם זמן לקחת איתם צידה לדרך. הם אף לא יצאו בחוסר-כל, ולא ימשיכו את תחושת העניות והמסכנות, אלא יצאו ברכוש גדול, המאפשר להם בניית חיים חדשים ומכובדים.

והצעד המשמעותי ביותר: ישראל יפנו אל המצרים וידרשו מהם כלים. עבד איננו מעז לבקש מאדונו מאומה, ובוודאי שלא לקחת ממנו. שאילת הכלים היא פעולה המציינת את המפנה. היחס בין ישראל למצרים השתנה לגמרי. גם המצרים עצמם שינו את יחסם כלפי ישראל, ולכן הם מוכנים לתת להם, וגם ישראל שינו את יחסם כלפי המצרים, והם מעזים לבקש מהם, ולקחת מהם, כ"איש מאת רעהו ואישה מאת רעותה", ואף יותר מכך: כבעלי זכות לדרוש מהם.

כאשר ישראל יצאו בתחושה כזו, הם כבר אינם עבדים למצרים, אלא שווי-מעמד להם, ובכך מתחיל תהליך חירותם הנפשית.

ליציאה ממצרים, אלא היא עניין מהותי, ולכן היא נמצאת בכל הצמתים המרכזיים של סיפור הגאולה ממצרים.

לאחר שנים רבות של שעבוד, ה' ידון את המצרים על שעבוד ישראל, כפי שהובטח בברית בין הבתרים: "וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנכי" (בראשית ט"ו, יד). ישראל יצאו ברכוש גדול, כפי שמגיע להם לאחר שנות השעבוד רבות, כשם שיש מצווה להעניק רכוש לעבד משוחרר "וכי תשלחנו... לא תשלחנו ריקם" (דברים ט"ו, יג). **יציאת ישראל ממצרים ברכוש גדול, מהווה חלק מהנהגת ה' את העולם בצדק:** "והיה כי תלכון לא תלכו ריקם" (שמות ג', כא).

מכיוון שהמצרים אינם מוכנים להעניק מרכושם ברצון, בדרך ישרה, ה' מצווה על ישראל לקחת את המגיע להם, על מנת שלבסוף הצדק ייעשה.

בנוסף לכך, לקיחת הרכוש ממצרים ע"י בני ישראל בעצמם היא חלק מתהליך השחרור של ישראל. הם אמנם יצאו ממצרים בחיפזון, אך לא יצאו כעבדים אשר מהירים לברוח ולא אכפת להם מרכוש, אלא

ביציאה של היציאה ממצרים בחיפזון מוזכר עניין שולי לכאורה, ומתמיהה מאד: "ובני ישראל עשו כדבר משה וישאלו ממצרים פלי כסף וכלי זהב ושמלת: וה' נתן את חן העם בעיני מצרים וישאלום וינצלו את מצרים" (שמות י"ב, לה-לו). הציווי על שאילת הכלים הופיע גם בעיצומו של העימות הנוקב בין פרעה למשה: דבר נא באני העם וישאלו איש מאת רעהו ואשה מאת רעותה פלי כסף וכלי זהב (שמות י"א, ב); ציווי זה נאמר למשה כבר במעמד הסנה, ועוד לפניכן, בברית בין הבתרים (בראשית ט"ו) הובטח לאברהם שלאחר השעבוד במצרים צאצאיו יצאו ברכוש גדול.

כיצד יתכן שהתורה מצווה על ישראל לקחת רכוש שלא שייך להם – לשאול כלים ולבסוף לא להחזירם? ומדוע התורה חוזרת ומדגישה זאת?

ההדגשה החוזרת ונשנית על שאילת הכלים ממצרים מבהירה ששאילת הכלים היא לא דבר בעייתי מבחינה מוסרית, והיא אף איננה פרט שולי הנספח

Continued from page 4

they will grow up without backbones, nurtured on the infantile conception that a wishbone is enough.

Such people can never fly, they can only flutter.

Their vision never soars, their dreams remain myopic, their conceptions petty."

No Pain...

Our *mishnah* reminds us of the famous saying: "No pain, no gain." Our "gain," or, as the *mishnah* describes it — our *agra*, is proportional not only to our accomplishments, but also to the effort we invest and the pain we endure.

This *agra* consists of both heavenly blessings as well as our own internal personal growth. The challenges we face help us reach and retain higher levels of learning and spirituality and also inspire us to develop ourselves as stronger people.

May realizing the above help us successfully face and even celebrate the opportunity to confront life's challenges.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis.

1. Masechet Avot 5:23.
2. Rashi to Avot 5:23, Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:6, and Rambam Shemonah Perakim 6 all use the word *sechar*.
3. Sefer Chassidim 155.
4. Avot D'Rabbi Natan 3:6. The full formulation is that "One accomplishment achieved through is better for man than one hundred that he achieves with ease." The Chofetz Chayim (Be'er HaParshah Toldot 5783) once used this source to raise the spirits of a talmid who after one month of learning had only reached *daf gimmel*. The Chofetz Chaim responded that, based on this source in AD"N, the talmid should vie himself as actually on *daf kuf gimmel*.
5. Meiri to Avot 5:23.
6. The better understanding can be understood as an external reward for, or a natural result of, our efforts.
7. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Megillah 6b.
8. Ein Ayah, Berachot 9: pg. 344.
9. Talmud Bavli, Mesechet Berachot 63b.
10. See Chovat HaTalmidim (pg. 22-23) who applies this idea to spiritual development. The spiritual level we reach is directly proportional to the amount of effort we invest.
11. Rambam to Avot 5:23.
12. The source for the Rambam is Kohelet Rabbah (2:9).
13. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Berachot 63b. Understandably, this piece is followed by the gemara about the butter of Torah that Rav Kook built off of (see footnote 8). See also Talmud Bavli, Masechet Ketubot 23b.
14. See Sefer Kohelet 2:9 with Midrash Zuta. See also Yalkut Shimoni Kohelet 3:968.
15. See Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:12 who connects this midrash and the aforementioned words of Reish Lakish.
16. Masechet Berachot 5a.
17. The *meforshim* call the latter type "bread of shame". The Radak (Hoshe'a 8:13) applies this idea to Hashem as well. He explains that Hashem compares himself to a mother bear because she has to work hard to give birth. This heightens her appreciation of the children she gives birth to.
18. Reflections on Pesach: What Does Avodah Mean To You?, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.
19. Similarly, the Gemara (Bava Metzia 38) writes that a person prefers his own *kav* to nine *kavs* gifted from someone else.
20. Be'er HaParsha, Naso 5782.
21. Backbone — A Sermon on the Anatomy of the Spirit, Rabbi Norman Lamm.

Lessons from Pharaoh's Heart



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

Once read a request from Rav Steinsaltz not to look upon Pharaoh as evil since, in fact, we have more in common with him than we do with Moshe Rabbeinu... in other words, there is much we can learn from Pharaoh. He is not a remote or alien evil person but an archetype who exists inside of us.

Until the first five plagues have ended, Pharaoh's heart is described in these words:

וַיִּחַזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֶלְהֵם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה'

But Pharaoh's heart remained steadfast, and he did not hearken to them (Moshe and Aharon), as the Lord had spoken. (Exodus 7:13, 8:15)

Or in these:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּבֹד לֵב פַּרְעֹה מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעָם

In other words, Pharaoh rules, he's in charge, he decides how his heart will react. And then, after the sixth plague of boils ends, there is a dramatic change:

וַיִּחַזַק ה' אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֶלְהֵם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה

But the Lord strengthened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not hearken to them, as the Lord spoke to Moses. (Exodus 9:12)

Afterwards, seeing that Pharaoh's heart has not changed, Hashem once more takes control of it.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי־אֲנִי הַכְּבִידְתִּי אֶת־לְבוֹ.

The Lord said to Moses: "Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart..." (Exodus 10:1)

And there are similar passages after the eighth and ninth plagues.

At a certain stage, Hashem hardens Pharaoh's heart and he does not control its decisions alone. What happened? Why is

the Torah so concerned with what is happening inside Pharaoh's heart? Because it is teaching us a most important lesson: when free choice is not properly utilized, it vanishes altogether with the passage of time.

It would appear that what we are really talking about is addiction. All of us understand that there are physical addictions. Let's imagine someone addicted to cigarettes. How much choice was there before smoking the first cigarette? A great deal. With the second cigarette, too. But after five years, when the addiction demands two packs a day and each new cigarette is pulled automatically from the pack without thinking, how much choice is there?

We need to internalize the following principle: addiction applies to good character traits and habits as well as to bad ones! This is true with following Torah and doing mitzvot as well as in less positive pursuits and habits. Let's take lying as an example. There is a difference in the control we have over the first as opposed to the millionth lie, no?

Professor Nehama Leibowitz writes wonderfully about this, and in my opinion she does not discuss this at length arbitrarily. Generally, she almost never brings her own ideas into the discussion and allows us to understand the commentators solely from their own words. But here she explains in her own words, expansively and beautifully:

"Every decision concerning which of two paths to take is always in a person's hands, but it is only at the beginning that the two possibilities are available in equal measure. Once a choice is made and a path is taken, no future choice will be as easy as that first one. If the first choice made was a wrong one, the longer a person persists

in following that path, the more difficult it becomes to choose the right path and, if free choice is always available, it is not as free and limitless as it was initially. Thus, it is not Hashem who makes getting back on the right path more difficult but rather the person who persists in piling up obstacles on the road back to the right path. And Hashem created people in this manner that sins create a barrier to teshuva, to returning to Him. Thus, it is the person who chooses, opening or hardening his or her heart, and Hashem assists according to that person's desire, in whichever direction he or she wants to go".

Rav Jonathan Sacks, in his book "Covenant and Conversation," says that this is the salient point in the story of Pharaoh:

"Freedom in the deepest sense, the freedom to do the right and the good, is not a given. We acquire it, or lose it, gradually. In the end tyrants bring about their own destruction, whereas those with will-power, courage and the willingness to go against the consensus, acquire a monumental freedom. That is what Judaism is: an invitation to freedom."

In short, if you are an evil tyrant, you slowly close your options. But wait a moment, even evil people have hope since it is always possible to choose good. It's not written that Hashem locks Pharaoh's heart, only that He hardens it. A person can choose a better path. Some of the most hardened addicts succeeded in getting clean. It's difficult but it's possible. Free choice is always there, but it diminishes with the passage of time when you are on the wrong path. This is a message of our Exodus from Egypt, here and now.

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi
Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd Moshe said, ‘So says Hashem, ‘At about midnight (k’chatzot) I shall go out in the midst of Egypt. Every firstborn in Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the millstone and all the firstborn of the beast...’” (Shemot 11:4-5). As we approach the tenth and final plague, Moshe’s lack of precision in declaring that the plague will occur “at about midnight” is difficult to understand. If Moshe was just repeating what he had been told by Hashem, it could be dangerously understood that Hashem did not know when exactly the plague would occur. Alternatively, if Hashem said the plague would be at midnight, but Moshe changed it to “at about midnight”, it seems as if Moshe doubted Hashem’s ability to keep to His exact word. Either way we look at it, it is difficult to understand.

Rashi (based on the Gemara, Brachot 4a) explains: “And they (our Sages) said that Moshe said “at about midnight” which means close to it, either before or after, and he did not say “at midnight” in case Pharaoh’s astrologers would err and claim that Moshe is a liar” (Rashi, Shemot 11:4). Indeed, Moshe changed Hashem’s words from “at midnight” to “at about midnight”, but not for a lack of faith. Rather, he was concerned that the Egyptian astrologers would erroneously make a slightly different calculation as to when exactly midnight is and would claim that Moshe is a liar. Whilst solving the difficulty in the wording of the verse, this remains troubling. After all, even if the astrologers made a slightly inaccurate calculation, only a moment later, Egypt was struck with the ultimate plague that affected every firstborn and family in the land. Surely that would have given Moshe the last word

on the matter – why was he so concerned about the astrologers’ momentary smirk? Reb Elya Meir Bloch zt”l (of the Telshe Yeshiva) explains that Moshe was not concerned about what cynics would say about him personally, but about what he represented and the potential Chillul Hashem. If Hashem said He would strike at midnight, and people are sitting around looking at their clocks thinking that He is late, that is a Chillul Hashem. Though it may only have lasted a few moments before the arrival of the devastating plague, every effort must be made to prevent Chillul Hashem, even for a moment. From Moshe Rabbeinu we learn to do everything in our power to avoid even the slightest Chillul Hashem. The damage inappropriate actions can cause should never be underestimated. May we succeed, not only in avoiding Chillul Hashem, but in making a tremendous Kiddush Hashem whenever possible. Shabbat Shalom!

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The Spiritual Child



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l

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

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

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

Nowhere was this point made more dramatically than by Moses in this week's *parsha*. The tenth plague is about to strike. Moses knows that this will be the last. Pharaoh will not merely let the people go. He will urge them to leave. So, on G-d's command, he prepares the people for freedom. But he does so in a way that is unique. He does not talk about liberty. He does not speak about breaking the chains

of bondage. He does not even mention the arduous journey that lies ahead. Nor does he enlist their enthusiasm by giving them a glimpse of the destination, the Promised Land that G-d swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the land of milk and honey.

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

And when your children ask you, “What do you mean by this rite?” you shall say... (Ex. 12:26–27)

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

And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, “What does this mean?” you shall say to him.... (Ex. 13:14)

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

Jews became famous throughout the ages for putting education first. Where others built castles and palaces, Jews built schools and houses of study. From this flowed all the familiar achievements in which we take collective pride: the fact that Jews knew their texts even in ages of mass illiteracy; the record of Jewish

scholarship and intellect; the astonishing over-representation of Jews among the shapers of the modern mind; the Jewish reputation, sometimes admired, sometimes feared, sometimes caricatured for mental agility, argument, debate, and the ability to see all sides of a disagreement.

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

For some time now, along with many others in the West, we have sometimes neglected this deeply spiritual element of education. That is what makes Lisa Miller's recent book *The Spiritual Child*³ an important reminder of a forgotten truth. Professor Miller teaches psychology and education at Columbia University and co-edits the journal *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Her book is not about Judaism or even religion as such, but specifically about the importance of parents encouraging the spirituality of the child.

Children are naturally spiritual. They are fascinated by the vastness of the universe and our place in it. They have the same sense of wonder that we find in some of the greatest of the psalms. They love stories, songs, and rituals. They like the

shape and structure they give to time, and relationships, and the moral life. To be sure, sceptics and atheists have often derided religion as a child's view of reality, but that only serves to strengthen the corollary, that a child's view of reality is instinctively, intuitively religious. Deprive a child of that by ridiculing faith, abandoning ritual, and focusing instead on academic achievement and other forms of success, and you starve him or her of some of the most important elements of emotional and psychological well-being.

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

relationship, especially in Judaism, mirrors the relationship between G-d and us. That is why Moses so often emphasises the role of the *question* in the process of education: "When your child asks you, saying..." – a feature ritualised at the Seder table in the form of the *Ma Nishtana*. Judaism is a questioning and argumentative faith, in which even the greatest ask questions of G-d, and in which the rabbis of the Mishna and Midrash constantly disagree. Rigid doctrinal faith that discourages questions, calling instead for blind obedience and submission, is psychologically damaging and fails to prepare a child for the complexity of real life. What is more, the Torah is careful, in the first paragraph of the *Shema*, to say, "You shall love the Lord your G-d" *before* saying, "You shall teach these things diligently to your children." Parenthood works when your children see that you love what you want them to learn.

The long walk to freedom, suggests this *parsha*, is not just a matter of history and politics, let alone miracles. It has to do with the relationship between parents and children. It is about telling the story and passing it on across the generations. It is about a sense of G-d's presence in our lives. It is about making space for transcendence, wonder, gratitude, humility,

empathy, love, forgiveness, and compassion, ornamented by ritual, song, and prayer. These help to give a child confidence, trust, and hope, along with a sense of identity, belonging, and at-home-ness in the universe.

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Have you learned more about who you are through school, or from your family?
- Why do you think Judaism places such a strong focus on education?
- What do you think a child needs most from the education they receive from their parents?

1. Bruce Feiler, *The Secrets of Happy Families* (New York: William Morrow, 2013).
2. Ibid., 274. Feiler does not cite the source, but see: Jennifer G. Bohanek, Kelly A. Marin, Robyn Fivush, and Marshall P. Duke, "Family Narrative Interaction and Children's Sense of Self," *Family Process* 45.1 (2006): pp. 39–54.
3. Lisa Miller, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2015).




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Kiddush HaChodesh



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

This month shall be for you the beginning of the months. (Shemos 12:2)

According to the Rambam, this passuk – referring to Moshe and Aharon (along with a third member, since a beis din may not consist of an even number of judges) – teaches us that kiddush hachodesh (sanctification of the new moon) and ibbur hashanah (intercalation of the year) must be carried out under the auspices of the Beis Din HaGadol.

The Ramban disagrees, claiming that while it would be improper for an ad hoc group of three judges to determine the kevi'as halu'ach (establishment of the calendar) on behalf of the Jewish Nation without the authorization of the Sanhedrin, its determination would, post facto, be legally binding.

The Ramban argues that this must be the case because we know that kiddush hachodesh was performed until the days of Abaye and Rava by their counterparts in Eretz Yisrael, even though the Beis Din HaGadol had ceased to exist many years earlier. The Sanhedrin only maintained its special status when it met in its official location, the Lishkas HaGazis (Chamber of Hewn Stone) inside the Beis HaMikdash (Sanhedrin 14b). This status was lost from the time the Sanhedrin was exiled from this location forty years before the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash.

Even the Ramban, who maintains that kiddush hachodesh may be effected even without the Beis Din HaGadol, requires that the members of the beis din have authentic semichah, as part of a direct chain back to Moshe Rabbeinu. If so, how is it that we sanctify the months nowadays, when the chain of semichah has been broken? The Ramban explains that Hillel HaSheini, realizing that the

chain of semichah would be broken, was mekadesh all of the chodashim in advance until the time that semichah will be reinstated with the coming of Mashiach.

Regarding this point as well, the Rambam disagrees and assumes that the Jews living in Eretz Yisrael are responsible to be mekadesh the chodesh, even today. Those Jews, even if they constitute a small fraction of the world Jewish population, are the ones who are classified as “Klal Yisrael,” and it is the body of Klal Yisrael that is assigned the role of being mekadesh the chodashim. The Rambam claims that there is a Halachah LeMoshe MiSinai that in the absence of the Beis Din HaGadol, the mitzvah is incumbent upon the body of Klal Yisrael.

The Ramban questions this assertion, arguing that such a Halachah LeMoshe MiSinai is not mentioned anywhere in the Talmud. To this, the Brisker Rav responds that this is in fact the meaning of the Gemara's reference to the סוד העיבור, “the secret of intercalation” – that Klal Yisrael has the ability to sanctify the months in place of the Sanhedrin.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that the Beis Din HaGadol functioned in two primary capacities – as the final arbiter of halachic matters and as the representative of Klal Yisrael. The Rambam's requirement that the Sanhedrin oversee kiddush hachodesh is not a manifestation of its role as the Supreme Court of the Jewish People, responsible for rendering the final legal decision on halachic matters. Kiddush hachodesh does not necessarily involve a complicated psak halachah that requires the greatest legal minds of the Jewish Nation. Rather, in performing kiddush hachodesh, the Beis Din HaGadol serves to represent Klal Yisrael. In this sense, the

Sanhedrin fills a role akin to that of the Congress in the United States.

As such, the responsibility of kevi'as halu'ach ultimately rests upon Klal Yisrael as a whole. When there is a Beis Din HaGadol, it performs this task as the representative of Klal Yisrael. When a Beis Din HaGadol is not available, the mitzvah reverts back to Klal Yisrael itself. When its members recite birchas hachodesh and observe the dinim associated with Rosh Chodesh, they demonstrate that the day is Rosh Chodesh and sanctify it as such.

The Rambam, as mentioned, stresses that kiddush hachodesh – either under the auspices of the Sanhedrin or, in their absence, through the actions of the general Jewish populace – may only be performed in Eretz Yisrael, because only the Jews who live in Eretz Yisrael constitute Klal Yisrael. The Jews who live in Chutz La'Aretz have kedushas Yisrael, but they are not really part of Klal Yisrael, as the main tziruf (combination) of Klal Yisrael only applies to those Jews who live in Eretz Yisrael. The role of the Jew in the Diaspora in the kevi'as halu'ach and kiddush hachodesh is that of a spectator; only those in Eretz Yisrael actually make the day into Rosh Chodesh.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that the conferring of semichah is not a private undertaking between a rebbi and his talmid. The passuk in reference to the semichah of Yehoshua commands, “You shall stand him before ... the entire assembly, and command him before their eyes” (Bamidbar 27:19). We see from here that the rebbi confers semichah publicly as a representative of Klal Yisrael. Since it is Klal Yisrael which confers the semichah, it may only be done in Eretz Yisrael, since only the Jews who live there form the unit of Klal Yisrael.

Continued on next page

More Than Just Months



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

The Ramban in this week's Parsha introduces a topic which is somewhat ambiguous as to whether he is speaking with practical Halachic ramifications.

Commenting on the Mitzvah of Kiddush HaChodesh - the sanctification of the new month - the Ramban writes that it is a Mitzvah to count the months of the year starting with the month of Nissan. Although the year technically begins with the month of Tishrei, since Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt in the month of Nissan, by counting the months from Nissan of year one, year two and so forth since leaving Egypt, it is a fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Zecher Yetziat Mitzrayim - remembering the exodus from Egypt.

However, this isn't what we do nowadays. Instead of counting the months as numbers, counting from when we left Egypt, we use the names of the months: Nissan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, etc. These names don't appear in Tanach until the end of the exile of the first Beit Hamikdash. We find these names in Megillat Esther and in Zecharya. The Yerushalmi says that these are not Jewish names and that they are names which were adopted by the Jewish people during the exile in Paras and Madai. They are not Jewish names at all. Why did Jews use non-Jewish names?

The Ramban answers that it is fulfillment of Yirmiyah's prophecy: "Assuredly, a time is coming—declares the LORD—when it shall no more be said, 'As the LORD lives who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt', but rather, 'As the LORD lives who brought the Israelites out of the northland, and out of all the lands to which He had banished them.' For I will bring them back to their land, which I gave to their fathers" (Yirmiyahu 16:14-15). Yirmiyah prophesies that the Jews will return to Eretz Yisrael after 70 years, at which point they are going to praise Hashem not just for just taking us out of Egypt but for bringing us back from the exile of Paras and Madai. As a fulfillment of that prophecy, we began to use the names of the month that we brought with us out of exile as a remembrance of the fact G-d redeemed us from there too.

What does the Ramban mean by this? Is he saying that the Mitzvah changed? Originally there was a Mitzvah to count from the redemption of Egypt and it then changed to counting the months as a remembrance of the redemption from Paras and Madai?

The Abarbanel in this week's Parsha says the Mitzvah did not change. He explains that we still count the months by their number, but we also use a name. He brings numerous examples from Megillat Esther.

It says in 2:15 בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָעֲשִׂירִי הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ טֵבֵת - 'In the tenth month, which is the month of Tevet'. It says in 3:7 בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ נִסָּן - 'In the first month, which is the month of Nissan'. It says in 3:13 לְחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר - 'Of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar'. In each of these cases it says the number plus the name. The Abarbanel is saying that the idea of the Ramban is that nowadays we should count with a number plus a name.

There is an obvious difficulty with this. On a Ketubah, and also when Gittin are written, we only write the name of the month. Based on the Ramban, why don't we include the number as well? Furthermore, every month when we recite Kiddush HaChodesh on Shabbat Mevarchin, we similarly only mention the name of the month and don't include a number. Based on the Ramban, our practice nowadays certainly needs an explanation, however it's definitely ambiguous as to whether the Ramban is speaking למעשה - with practical Halachic ramifications.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

Continued from previous page

The Rambam proves this from the Gemara in Horayos, which teaches that with regard to the offering of the פַּר הַעֲבוּרָה (bull for the communal error), the "majority of the population" is calculated based solely on those Jews living in Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara derives

this from the passuk describing Shlomo HaMelech's inauguration of the First Beis HaMikdash: "At that time, Shlomo instituted the celebration, and all Yisrael was with him, a huge kahal (congregation) from the approach of Chamas [the northernmost point of Eretz Yisrael] until

the brook of Mitzrayim [the southernmost point of Eretz Yisrael]" (Melachim I 8:65). Eretz Yisrael is the National Homeland of the Jewish people and so only the Jews there constitute the kahal, the nation.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

The slave to the compass has freedom of the seas



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

Were we liberated from one form of servitude, only to enter another?

In Parshat Bo, the Torah describes how Hashem commanded Moshe to appear before Pharaoh, King of Egypt. There he demanded in Hashem's name (Shemot 9:1): "Shalach et ami vey'avduni!" – "Let my people go so that they shall serve me!"

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

Some people might wonder: what kind of freedom is this? Are we so free if there is

a long list of do's and don'ts that we must comply with at all times? The Talmud (Ethics of the Fathers 6:2) puts it as follows: "Ein lecha ben chorin eileh mi sheosek baTalmud Torah." – "There is actually no-one who is as free as the person who studies Torah."

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

The Torah is our compass.

The Torah provides us with an opportunity to lead lives of meaning and joy. There is so much room for individuality and spontaneity within the context of the 613 do's and don'ts of the Torah.

Every responsible educator and parent knows how crucially important it is to raise our children to reach their own personal potential; to be able to achieve what they can as unique personalities within the context of a loving and healthy discipline. Without such discipline, without any inspirational compass, it is possible for a person to abuse their freedom and for their lives to be filled with mayhem.

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



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צילום ריבו: הרצל ריזלר

Who Goes to Worship Hashem?



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

וישב את משה ואת אהרן אל פרעה ויאמר אלהם לכו עבדו את ה' אלהיכם מי ומי ההלכים. ויאמר משה
בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך בבנינו ובבנותנו בצאננו ובבקרנו נלך כי חג ה' לנו. (שמות יח:ט)

And Moshe and Aharon were brought again unto Pharaoh; and he said unto them: "Go, serve Hashem your G-d; but who and who shall go?" And Moshe said: "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go; for we must hold a feast unto Hashem." (Shemot 10:8-9)

Moshe and Aharon went to warn Pharaoh of the impending plague of locusts, and Pharaoh's servants pleaded with him to allow Bnei Yisrael to go to the desert to worship their G-d. Pharaoh then summoned Moshe and Aharon to return, at which point he asked them who would be required to leave Egypt to participate in the offering of sacrifices.

The *Kli Yakar* raises a number of questions on these *pesukim*, the first being why Pharaoh used the double term *mi vami haholchim* – "who and who shall go" instead of simply "who." Secondly, Pharaoh used the present perfect tense *haholchim* – "those who are going" or "the goers" instead of the future tense *yelechu* – "those who will go." Moreover, says the *Kli Yakar*, Moshe replied to Pharaoh: "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we will go." Why the repetition of *nelech* – "we will go"? Finally, what did Moshe mean by *ki hag Hashem lanu* – "for we must hold a feast unto Hashem"? Who else would it be for?

The *Kli Yakar* answers all of these questions with one common principle: Pharaoh wasn't really asking who would be going. He basically assumed and decreed that only the men would be able to participate. He was, in essence, telling Moshe: "*Mi vami haholchim*" – using the double language to indicate: "Look around to the right and then to the left; look around at the rest of the world – who generally goes to offer

sacrifices? Only men!" Pharaoh spoke in the present tense using the term "*haholchim*" because he wasn't asking Moshe who would go to this festival; rather, he is rhetorically asking who *generally* goes to bring sacrifices. Pharaoh knew Moshe would ask for everyone to participate, so Pharaoh was negotiating: "Come on, Moshe, be honest with me. You're going to sacrifice? Take the men; they're the only ones who sacrifice."

The Menachem Tzion adds that Pharaoh's view was that only the elders partake in religion. the double language of "*mi vami haholchim*" mirrors a statement in Tehillim

מי יעלה בהר ה' ומי יקום במקום קדשו (תהילים כד:ג)

Who will ascend upon Hashem's mount and who will stand in His Holy place?

Who practices religion? Only the elders. Members of the younger generation are busy engaging in pleasures and do not have time, energy or interest in partaking in spiritual matters. Furthermore, to serve G-d would restrict the people in a more severe manner than under Pharaoh's rule. Pharaoh allows them to eat and do what they want when they are on a break. Hashem will limit what they can eat and the activities in which they may engage. To which Moshe replied – we educate our people from a young age to appreciate our religion. Our religious practices provide additional meaning to our lives. It is not a burden but rather an enhancement of our very being.

Moshe adds: "We will go with our young and old." Don't compare our worship of Hashem with the customs of other nations. We all go, our whole families, because "we must hold a feast unto Hashem" – all of us, collectively, *lanu*. The sacrifices are at the center of a bigger festival. All other nations bring sacrifices, and that's where the worship starts and ends. We sacrifice as part of a festival in which we all participate. Man's celebration is only complete when his wife and children can partake in the celebration.

If the family is unable to celebrate together, then something is lacking, because hag should bring families together. Moshe repeated *nelech* to explain to Pharaoh that we need youths and elders so they could worship, and young sons and daughters to enhance the holiday joy. "You're right," said Moshe, "only the older boys and men are necessary for the sacrifices, but everyone else has to be involved for the *simcha* element."

The Torah stresses the importance of educating one's children. The entire religious experience is imbued in us from childhood. It is critical for us to portray our enthusiasm and excitement when fulfilling mitzvot. To make our celebrations, even each week at our Shabbat table a fun and exciting encounter. That is why Moshe demanded that even the children and elderly had to participate in the offering of sacrifices in the desert.

Death by Darkness



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

In this week's parsha, Parshas Bo, after hundreds of years in Egypt, the Israelites leave their country of bondage, marching to a hopeful future.

With the final three plagues outlined in the parsha Pharaoh orders the Jews to leave. As the devastation of *makkas bechoros* unfolds across the land of Egypt:

And Pharaoh arose at night, he and all his servants and all Egypt, and there was a great outcry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not a corpse; And he called to Moshe and Aharon at night and said: Rise up, go out from among my people, even you, even the children of Israel; go and serve Hashem as you spoke! (Shemos 12:30-31)... And the Children of Israel journeyed from Ramses to Succos, about 600,000 on foot, the men, aside from the children (ibid, v.37).

While the *Bnei Yisrael* did leave Egypt, a miracle and series of wonders which we commemorate every year when we relive *Yetzias Mitzrayim* (the Exodus from Egypt) on *layl ha'Seder*, the reality is that not all the Jews left.

During the ninth plague, *makkas choshech* (darkness), the Egyptians found themselves in a state of six days of darkness, when the darkness became so thick that they could not move from sitting to standing, or from standing to sitting (Rashi to Shemos 10:22).

Rashi comments: *And why did He bring darkness upon them? For there were among Israel in that generation wicked individuals who did not wish to leave Egypt, and they died during the three days of thick darkness. This happened so that they Egyptians should not witness their downfall and say: they too are being stricken as we are!*

Furthermore, Rashi later tells us (13:18) *The Children of Israel went up 'in fifths': Only one out of five Israelites departed from Egypt, and the other 4/5's died during the three days of darkness.*

How could it be, we wonder, that some of the Jews did not want to leave Egypt? Wasn't this the land of their affliction, the land of "every male that is born shall be thrown into the river" (Shemos 1:22)? Was this not the Pharaoh who would slaughter Jewish babies and bathe in their blood (Rashi to 2:23)? Was this not the country of "and they embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks, and with every labor of the field" (1:14)?

How is it possible that there were those who did not want to leave?!

Perhaps Chazal are teaching us a profound life lesson.

Often in life, we become complacent with our personal station and level. It may not be good, it may not be what we ideally longed for, it may not be ideal... but it is what it is and it will do. Change is hard, moving forward takes commitment we don't necessarily feel we have, and we are afraid of the unknown.

When we adopt the mindset of "I can't" – in regard to reaching new heights in learning, in *tefillah*, in *tikkun ha'middos*, in *bein adam la'chavairo* and *bein adam la'Makom* – we too become stuck in the proverbial darkness of the *שְׁלֵשָׁת יָמֵי אֶפְלָה*. We may want to improve, but don't feel strong enough, brave enough, and courageous enough to march forward into a whole new existence. And so... we would rather "not leave" and are content to stay where we are.

After the tragic passing of R' Moshe Twer-sky zt'l HY"D (of one the *kedoshei Har Nof*, murdered *al kiddush Hashem*, 25 Cheshvan 5775/11.18.14) – himself a *gaon olam* and *gadol ba'Torah, mitzvos, v'yiras Shomayim* – a note was found on his desk, dated 15 Elul 5774, the date of his last birthday. In the note, he had written words of encouragement to himself, "...nevertheless, *chalilah v'chalilah* to slacken and say, 'What gain is

there in all of our efforts, for we are lost and our hope is lost!', because that is the counsel and song of the *yetzer harah* (the evil inclination)! Therefore, come and let us renew the old resolutions, for they are good" (A Malach in Our Midst, p.299)

Rebbetzin Twersky emphasized, sharing a sentiment that all who knew R' Twersky agreed upon, "My husband was not at twenty-five what he was at fifty-five. He never got to a plateau (in his *avodas Hashem*). He was forever going up the ladder; that is who he was" (ibid, p.300).

It is true that changing who we are, how we live, behave, think, act and interact is not easy. And yet, the alternative is to remain in the darkness of *Mitzrayim*, afflicted with the inability to stand from sitting, or to sit from standing. I.e.: if we don't have the courage to embrace our potential, we become stuck in place and find ourselves unable to spiritually move.

In a famous quote attributed to R' Yisrael Salanter zt'l (1810-1883), known as the father of the *mussar* movement, we are taught that: It is easier to learn through *Shas* than to change a single *middah*. Resolve to change, and implementing change, is not easy! So difficult is it that 4/5's of the Israelites died during the plague of darkness!

But let us not forget the 1/5th *who marched forward*. Difficult, yes; impossible, not at all.

While we are yet here in this world, and the possibility for change exists, let us be courageous enough to leave our personal *Mitzrayim* (lit. straits), to improve what needs to be improved and to create a new reality for ourselves in our lives.

Let us be sure that, after 120 years, when we give our accounting, we will be able to say: *בְּרַבְּהָא יֵצְאוּ מִצְרַיִם* – with great haste, we left *Mitzrayim* behind and marched forward to an ennobled and exalted life of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Korban Pesach and the Tenth Plague



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

It is interesting to note that during the first nine “makkot”, Bnei Yisrael appear to be ‘out of the picture.’ From the time that “makkot” are introduced to Moshe and Aharon until the completion of the ninth plague, Sefer Shmot focuses exclusively on the confrontation between Moshe and Pharaoh, i.e. between G-d and Egypt. During that lengthy narrative, we find no mention of any instruction or commandment to Bnei Yisrael. The purpose of these makkot is stated explicitly: “V’yadu Mitzrayim ki Ani Hashem” – And Egypt will recognize that I am G-d, when I stretch out My Hand over Egypt...”

In contrast, from Parahat HaChodesh in Parshat Bo and onward, Chumash changes its focus from the Egyptians to the Israelites. Moshe must now complete his mission to Bnei Yisrael by encouraging them to become an active partner in the process of Yetziat Mitzrayim.

During the first nine plagues, G-d finds no particular difficulty differentiating between Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians. Nevertheless, for the final plague – Makkat Bchorot – it seems that a special sign is necessary: Bnei Yisrael must sprinkle the blood of the “korban Pesach” on their doorposts so that G-d can distinguish between them and the Egyptians. Surely, G-d is mighty enough to recognize who was an Israelite even without a sign on their doorposts! Why then is this special sign necessary?

G-d does not need to see the blood on the doorposts to determine the ethnic identity of the household. Rather, G-d requests this sign in order to determine who is **worthy** of redemption. Through the korban Pesach, Bnei Yisrael show that they understand the purpose of their redemption. They prove to God that they **deserve** to be saved.

This explains why Bnei Yisrael are commanded to prepare this korban on the

tenth of Nisan (12:3). The three (or four) days before their redemption need to be dedicated to spiritual preparation.

The korban Pesach is also significant in itself. Its purpose was not only to provide the blood for the sign on the doorposts. Considering that this korban is offered as Bnei Yisrael become free from their slavery (and their oppressor is punished – see Breishit 15:13-14), the korban Pesach serves as a proper thanksgiving to G-d for His fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha’Btarim.

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

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

Had Bnei Yisrael truly been worthy of this ideal redemption, the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts may not have been necessary. However, the people were not worthy; their hastened preparation for the Exodus was hardly sufficient to erase their past entirely. Now that G-d is about to reveal Himself b’shem Havaya, they deserve to be punished together with the Egyptians; however, G-d has Mercy (Ezekiel 20:7-9). The fact that G-d has to pass over their houses emphasizes this very point – that they actually deserve to be punished, but instead of smiting them, He saves them

at the last minute. [“Po’sey’ach” in Hebrew implies skipping over. One ‘skips over’ that which he should have stepped on.]

Therefore, the Korban Pesach serves a double purpose:

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

This awareness, that although they deserve punishment, G-d ‘passes over’ them, is the primary purpose for offering this korban in this situation; hence its name – “korban Pesach.”

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

Every year, when we commemorate the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim on ‘Passover,’ we thank G-d for His fulfillment of Brit Bein Ha’Btarim (**magid**) and pray for our final redemption (**hallel/nirtzah**). Before that prayer, we invite Eliyahu to our Seder table not only to taste our wine, and not only to encourage him to smite our enemies; Eliyahu comes to remind us that we need to do proper “teshuva” **prior** to our redemption, and to warn us of the consequences lest we do not.

Constant Growth



Rabbi Eli Mansour

Edmond J Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

Parashat Bo tells us of G-d's commands to Beneh Yisrael regarding the Korban Pesah – the paschal sacrifice which they offered on the night of the Exodus, before they left Egypt. G-d commanded Moshe to instruct the people to place the blood of the sacrifice on the two sides of the doorposts (“Mezuzot”) and on the top of the doorframe (“Mashkof” – 12:7). Interestingly, however, when Moshe relayed these commands to the people, he reversed the sequence, instructing them to place the blood on the top of the doorframe and then on the posts. Why did Moshe deviate from G-d's instructions, and reverse the sequence?

King Shlomo teaches us in Mishleh (3:16), “Orech Yamim Bi'yminah Bi'smolah Osher Ve'chavod” – “Longevity is to the right [of Torah], and to the left is wealth and honor.” It has been suggested that the doorposts, which stand to the right and to the left of a person as he walks through, symbolize these blessings of longevity, wealth and honor. Sometimes a person involves himself in Torah for ulterior motives, hoping to earn reward. He commits himself not out of genuine devotion to the Almighty, but rather to receive the rewards promised for involvement in Torah. The Gemara in Masechet Pesachim (50b) famously teaches that although learning “She'lo Li'shmah” – for insincere motives – is less than ideal, it is nevertheless acceptable. The reason is that once a person begins getting involved in Torah



Every time we rise to a new level of spiritual achievement, we must look further to the next level.

out of self-serving motives, he will, with time, reach the level of “Li'shmah” – learning Torah for sincere, altruistic reasons. Accordingly, G-d instructed Beneh Yisrael to begin with the “doorposts” – the rewards for Torah. Before we can rise to the level of “Li'shmah,” where we learn and practice out of a deep-seated and genuine love of G-d, we should first begin with the more modest level of “She'lo Li'shmah,” involving ourselves in Torah in order to reap the practical benefits that it offers us.

The question then becomes, why did Moshe reverse the order? Why did he tell the people to start with the “top,” with the ideal level of “Li'shmah,” and only then to descend to the “doorposts,” to the ulterior motives for learning Torah?

The answer is that growth is an ongoing, lifelong process. Every time we rise to a new level of spiritual achievement, we must look further to the next level. The new level we have achieved should, with time, seem to us unsatisfactory, such that we then set our sights upon a more

ambitious level. The Gemara's formulation indicates this in Pesachim: “A person should always engage in Torah and Misvot even not for their sake...” The Gemara teaches us that one should always study and practice “She'lo Li'shmah.” Once a person reaches a level of “Li'shmah,” that level should then seem like “She'lo Li'shmah.” The level of sincerity we achieve now should seem to us later as insincere. We must constantly strive to raise our standards and grow in our level of sincerity and purity of motives. And thus Moshe told the people that after they reach the “Mashkof,” the exalted level of “Li'shmah,” they must then descend, so to speak, and see themselves back on the level of the “Mezuzot,” the level of “She'lo Li'shmah.” What seems to us as an admirable spiritual achievement now must seem insufficient as we continue to grow and develop in our religious commitment.

This is one of the vital messages that Beneh Yisrael were taught at this moment, as they were about to leave Egypt and become G-d's sacred nation. They were told that they need to constantly grow and advance, that no achievement is ever sufficient. Every new level we reach should be celebrated, but we mustn't stop there. We must continue working to progress and reach ever greater heights, each day of our lives, one modest achievement at a time.

Renew us in Days of Old



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

The first mitzva Hashem gave the Jewish people was the mitzva that the *beis din* sanctify the new moon every month. If this is our first mitzva, it is no coincidence. It must be that it demonstrates that all of Yiddishkeit, on a national level and on an individual level, is dependent on this mitzva.

The word for the new month (חדש) is related to the word for renewal (התחדשות). The concept of the sanctification of the firstborn is also connected to the idea of something new. By studying several teachings related to newness and renewal, we can understand the answers to these questions.

The Chofetz Chaim says that there was one mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:11) that he could not understand. Raban Yochanan ben Zakai recounted the praise of his top five students. He said that (i) Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenus was a sealed pit that did not lose a drop, (ii) the one who gave birth to Rabbi Yohoshua ben Chananya was fortunate, (iii) Rabbi Yossi Hakohein was pious, (iv) Rabbi Shimon Shimon ben Nesanel was G-d fearing, and (v) Rabbi Eliezer ben Aroch was like an ever-strengthening wellspring. The Chofetz Chaim points out that all of the traits for which the students were praised were the result of a lifetime of work. But Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenus's phenomenal memory was a blessing of birth. It is wonderful that he blessed in such a way, but why should he be praised for something that came naturally to him? A photographic memory is something that a person either has or does not have. But it is not comparable to being pious or sin-fearing!

After pondering this question for a number of years, the Chofetz Chaim finally found the answer to his question when he witnessed a conversation between two elderly

men. One of them was telling the other about an experience he had eighty years earlier, when he was only five years old. The Czar and his wife had passed through his town and everyone gathered to watch their procession. He recounted every detail of the event to his friend. He told him about the color of the Czar's shoes, his clothing, what his wife was wearing, exactly what his beautiful carriage looked like, and many other details of the amazing experience.

Listening to this conversation, the Chofetz Chaim realized that a person remembers every detail of something when it makes a profound impression on him. It must be that Raban Yochanan ben Zakai was not praising Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hurkenus for being born with a naturally powerful memory. Rather, he was praising him that he loved Torah so much that he was deeply affected by every word that entered his mind. He felt, when he learned every halacha, like he was a five-year-old child by witnessing the Czar's procession pass by. The key was that every word of Torah was new and exciting to him. That is an exalted level, worthy of praise.

One of the most beautiful things about children is that everything they experience is new and fresh. A person can play "peek-a-boo" with a young child a hundred times and he will squeal with glee every time he uncovers his face and says "boo!" The goal of life is to be more like that child. That is why we say in benching, "I was a child and now I am an elder." We should have the wisdom of an elder along with the wonder and freshness of a child.

The Gemara (Brachos 54a) teaches that when a person sees the Mediterranean Sea or other wonders of creation, he should say a blessing praising Hashem for the beauty and awesomeness of His creation.

However, if one sees the same sight less than thirty days from the last time he saw it, he should not make a blessing because he is still feels the novelty and amazement of the experience from the last time he saw it and made the blessing. But if he sees the same wonder more than thirty days after the last time, then the feeling of amazement will have worn off such that when he sees it again, he will feel a new sense of wonder. He therefore may make the blessing again.

We see from this that for most new experiences, their novelty wears off after thirty days. I once heard, perhaps in the name of the Sfas Emes, that there is remarkable connection between the mitzva to sanctify the new moon and the thirty-day expiration date on the novelty of a person's experiences. He pointed out that the new moon occurs every twenty-nine and a half days, forty-four minutes, and 3.3 seconds; slightly under thirty days. It is beautiful. Hashem designed creation in such a way that thirty days never goes by without a new moon (חדש). We are always in a state of renewal (התחדשות). We are meant to live in such a way that our Yiddishkeit never gets old. We constantly live less than thirty days from the last time of renewal. We must never allow the Torah we learn or the mitzvos we do to get stale and old. Creation was designed to help a Jew live in a state of awe and wonderment.

May we merit to serve Hashem with newness and freshness, never letting it get old. By experiencing the wonder of our service of Hashem while in exile just like our grandparents experienced it when they left Egypt, may we merit to see the renewal of the world with the arrival of the final redemption in fulfillment of the Navi's words (Micha 7:15), that "as in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt I will show wonders."

How Can Sensitive People Calm Their Anxiety?



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

The Hebrews have been living in Egypt for 210 years. For close to one hundred years they were brutally oppressed. At last, after ten plagues that devastated the Egyptian Empire, the night of liberation has arrived. Moses, in the name of G-d, instructs the Jewish people on their behavior during that memorable night, when they will discover liberty.

Surprisingly, the nature of that night's cuisine occupies a significant space in the Divine imagination: "G-d said to Moses and Aaron... They shall eat the flesh on that night, roasted on the fire, with matzos and bitter herbs. Do not eat of it roasted in a pot, or cooked, or boiled in water; only roasted on the fire."

Indeed, this became the annual Passover routine. When the Beis HaMikdash stood in Jerusalem, every Jewish household would bring a lamb or kid to the Temple on the fourteenth day of Nissan. The lamb would be offered in the Temple courtyard, parts of which would be burned atop the altar. It would then be roasted on a spit over a fire. That night the meat would be eaten with matzah and maror, constituting the three staples of the seder. Nowadays, in the absence of a Holy Temple, our seder tables are left only with the matzah and maror, without the Passover offering.

It seems strange that G-d would choose the roast and reject the sauté for the Passover offering. Does G-d really care if you cook, boil or sauté the Passover offering meat? What sets the Passover offering apart from all other offerings in the Temple in that it is the only one that

must be roasted over a fire, and you were not even permitted to pot roast it in its own juices without any other liquids?

It is precisely here where we subtly encounter the Jewish definition of freedom.

The difference between cooking and roasting is, that while in cooking (or boiling or sautéing) the food is prepared via a combination of both fire (or heat) and water (or other liquids), roasting only employs fire as the means to heat the food.

What is the difference between fire and water? Fire is always rising, licking the air, in a perpetual upward dance. The flickering flame is never "content" in its space; it is always seeking to depart from its container and soar to the "heavens." Water, on the other hand, descends, and it can be contained to remain in one space of tranquility.

Fire also shatters and decomposes every item it comes in contact with. Water possesses the quality of connecting items.

In the works of Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah and Chassidus, where every physical phenomenon mirrors spiritual energy, fire represents upward striving, yearning, thirst, passion, tension, and restlessness. Water, on the other hand, symbolizes satiation, containment, tranquility, fulfillment, calmness, and resolution. Fire decomposes, breaks, and divides; you place an object in fire and it's challenged to its core, literally. Water connects and unites, and helps the nutrients you eat to be absorbed and integrated by your body, representing integration.

Fire represents the part in us that challenges the status quo, seeking to shatter convention; water embodies our ability to make peace with life, to come to terms with reality; to embrace what is.

Human life must synthesize "fire" and "water." If we only develop our fire dimension, the resulting tension can be harmful. People who are never satisfied, tend to make themselves and the people around them miserable. On the other hand, if we are only water-like creatures, we can become paralyzed and immobile, smug and narrow. A healthy and productive life is one in which one learns how to balance and even integrate the "fire" and "water" elements within the human personality.

Which quality within us is more liberating, is it the water or the fire? One would imagine that freedom means achieving that state in which the psyche is cleansed from the tension and longing that only serves to turn life into a battlefield of ideas and emotions. "Show me the heart unfettered by foolish dreams and I will show you a happy man."

Comes the Torah and tells us that on the very night when Israel embraced the miracle of liberty, it simultaneously learned that the Passover freedom offering could not be prepared with even one drop of water, only through direct contact with fire. Why?

Freedom is the ability to be truly and fully human. And to be human is to be moved by the call of the infinite, by endless mystery, by boundless vision. Created in the image of the Divine, the infinite essence of reality, a person's horizons are forever

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Positive Posits

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

On Rosh Chodesh Nissan Hashem commands Am Yisrael to take a sheep on the tenth of the month, to be brought as the korban Pesach (Shemot 12:3-6). We then find the confirmation, “And the children of Israel went and did as Hashem had instructed Moshe and Aaron. They did it exactly.” (Shemot 12:28). How could the Torah tell us that Benei Yisrael fulfilled Hashem’s instruction when obviously they didn’t do it until ten days later? And how did the Jews even dare to do something so difficult as slaughtering the god of their host nation?

Rashi explains that since they were mekabel, they intended to fulfill their task, they were recognized as having already done it. How are we to understand this principle of Chazal? How can something be considered done before it is actually accomplished?

The Sefat Emet teaches a fundamental rule when it comes to doing mitzvot. There are two levels involved in doing a mitzvah, the thought that precedes and inspires the action and the action itself. One is accountable for his thoughts that motivates the mitzvah. The midat hadin demands that one’s thoughts should be as perfect as possible accompanied by a

deep desire to do the ratzon Hashem to the fullest degree. However, the power to act is not in our control. There are so many things that can prevent a person from doing a mitzvah or doing the mitzvah the way he intended. It is important to know though, that the extent of siyatta dishmaya one receives to effect a mitzvah’s completion is dependent on the intensity and purity of the doer’s ratzon. Therefore, notes Rav Aaron Kotler, when the passuk tells us that the Jews ‘did’ the mitzvah, it refers to their desire to do the mitzvah which generated the siyata dishmaya needed when the mitzvah would be done. In that the only thing in their control was their desire they had already performed their part of the mitzvah.

The Chovot Halevavot adds that one’s desire must be very powerful for it to be considered as if he has done the mitzvah before its actual implementation. In the days leading up to yetziat Mitzrayim, Am Yisrael was able to accept this difficult challenge with tremendous joy and commitment to Hashem. They overcame all inner obstacles so were therefore credited with doing the mitzvah.

As a corollary, Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz shares practical advice. If one finds himself in a difficult situation, he can commit

to a kabbalah, to accept a particular mitzvah or stringency that will stand as a merit. If he affirms this with complete dedication and commitment, it is considered as if he has fulfilled his obligation and the merit will already stand for him.

Where did the Jews get this inner strength to flout the Egyptians and slaughter their gods? It takes a lot of courage to challenge the prevailing culture and act with such audacity. Were they not on the 49th level of tum’ah? Notes Rav Dovid Hofstetder in Darash Dovid, that the inner will of a Jew is linked with tremendous love to Hashem and to do His will. When Moshe Rabbeinu approached the burning bush, he was told to remove his shoes since the land he was standing on was holy (Shemot 3:5). We can understand this homiletically. Our forefathers are the holy ‘ground’, our source in which they have embedded a deep connection to Hashem, so no matter what a Jew looks like on the outside, inside he possesses a holy energy to cleave to his Creator whatever it takes.

Continued from page 20

extending. The infamous lack of human satiation is not reflective of man’s lowly nature; on the contrary, it is reflective of human greatness. A human being always senses that there is much more to life, to reality, to truth, and he/she yearns for it.

To live a free life, free to express your full humaneness and G-dliness, means never

to dull your fire or stifle your horizons; not to allow even a drop of water to slake your thirst and silence your quest; not even to allow a “pot” to contain and limit your inner fervor and passion to touch truth.

Your perpetual striving ought not to result in tension and anger, but rather in

celebration of the opportunity to mirror Divine infinity. You must learn to cherish the restlessness within your heart, to make peace with your peacelessness, to embrace your unwillingness to embrace convention. See it as part of being in the “flow” of cosmic consciousness and universal oneness.

Preserving the Path of the Tree of Life



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

This week, thousands of employees of the global corporation Google were laid off. Some of them have not even received proper notice from the faceless employer. They describe how they tried to log into the computer in the morning and a message informed them that their access was blocked...

In the absence of termination letters, the laid-off workers suddenly began writing thousands of letters themselves, letters of resignation.

In one of the published letters, a woman wrote that she had been employed at Google for 17 years. She described how much she loved the team she worked with, how she worked overtime, and that she never married and had no children. She ended her letter by saying, "I beg you: do not live for work! Work for life..."

Work was her life, like that of many of us, and "fomo," the fear of missing out, gave way to "fomme," the fear of missing me...

Yitro's daughters go out to draw water and are pushed to the end of the line, as they are every day. Then Moshe comes, "An Egyptian saved us; he even drew water for us!" They joyfully announce this to their father. But him? He contorts his face, "Why have you forsaken the man?" he asks. "Perhaps he will marry one of you?" They are used to successfully completing the daily task of filling buckets. They do not realize that on the way they have left the man, left themselves...

The tree of knowledge and ascension must not make us forget the way of the tree of life.

The "Bnei Issachar" said something wonderful about the month of Shevat: "The

Mazal of the month of Shevat is Aquarius, and there is no luck for Israel."

Wait, good luck or bad luck?

And he explains: in this month there is a bucket, and each one is responsible, according to his choice, to fill this bucket: Will he pour and invest in his family tree, in his tribe (in Hebrew shevet), or will he once again, like Sisyphus, fill the bucket just to please a boss who has no face?!

So work, be diligent and faithful, but spiritually give up the work that withers the tree of life.

When we return home at the end of the day, only the tree of life will send its branches to us, will give us the fruits of our hands, will never block our access to it.



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Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
balashon.com

Included in the laws of the Pesach sacrifice and the preparations of the people to leave Egypt, the Torah describes this fateful night as follows:

לִיל שְׁמֵרִים הוּא לַה' לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא־הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה לַה' שְׁמֵרִים לְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדֹרֹתָם:

“That was for the LORD a night of vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt; that same night is the LORD’s, one of vigil for all the children of Israel throughout the ages.” (Shemot 12:42)

The meaning of לִיל שְׁמֵרִים - translated here as “night of vigil” - is not simple. Most explanations are based on שְׁמֵרִים deriving from the root שמר, meaning “to watch, keep, protect.” But who was “watching” who and when? Was God “watching” the Jews? Is there still “protection” on that night?

Ramban has a somewhat different understanding of לִיל שְׁמֵרִים. He disagrees with

Ibn Ezra who says that this is a night of protection:

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained that the intent of the expression, It was a night of watching unto the Eternal, is that G-d watched the Israelites and did not suffer the destroyer to come into their homes. This is not correct, since Scripture continues to state, It was a night of watching ... for bringing them out from the Land of Egypt.

Rather, Ramban claims that שְׁמֵרִים is related to observance of the commandments of Pesach night:

The intent of this is “that this night set aside by G-d to bring Israel out of Egypt is unto the Eternal. That is to say, it is to be sanctified to His Name. [It is] a night of watching for all the children of Israel throughout their generations, meaning that they are to observe it by worshipping

Him through the eating of the Passover-offering, the remembering of the miracles, and the reciting of praise and thanksgiving to His name”, just as He said And you shalt keep this ordinance (Shemot 13:10) And He further said, Observe the month of Aviv, and keep the Passover (Devarim 16:1). Many modern linguists concur and note that שמר has Arabic cognates meaning “stay awake all night” and “entertain all night.” Both of those are appropriate for our practice of staying up at night recalling the story of the Exodus.

Why is שְׁמֵרִים in the plural? There are a number of such plural words in Biblical Hebrew, found in such phrases as יוֹם כְּפָרִים and יְלֵד שְׁעֵשְׂעִים. In these cases, the plural form is used to describe abstract concepts - like “observance,” “atonement,” and “delight.”

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

The 10th plague, Makat Bechorot, striking of the firstborn, that appears in Parshat Bo, has something in common with the 4th plague, Arov (Mixture of wild animals) and the 5th plague, Dever (Pestilence) both of which appear in Parshat Vaera.

What is common to these 3 plagues?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

Ref: Rabbenu Bechaya 11:10.

Only in these three plagues, do we find that neither Moshe nor Aharon did anything to bring the plague. In all the other seven plagues, Moshe or Aharon had to do something either with their hands to bring the plague (eg. Aharon stretching his hand with the stick over the river to turn it into blood, or Moshe by throwing fistful of soot over Egypt to bring the boils etc). Only in plagues 4, 5, & 10, does Hashem bring the plague without their input.



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