



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT VAEIRA 5783 • 2023










ISRAEL
Parsha Picture
Animals in the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo









וַיָּבֵא עֶרְבַּ כְּפַד בֵּיתָהּ פֶּרְעָה
וּבֵית עֶבְדָּיו וּבְכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
תִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵי הָעֶרְבִּי:
שמות ח:כ

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrahi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrahi'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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Brit

The Revolution of Covenantal Relationships



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

Life is first and foremost about relationships.

Particularly the relationships that matter to us most – both familial – spouse, parents and children, and communal – our community and people. As Jews, this is inextricably linked with our single most important relationship - with G-d, and His with us, on both an individual and collective level.

Is there one central organizing principle of all these critical relationships?

According to Jewish tradition, there most certainly is. The *Tanach* introduces us to one of the most unique and transformative ideas in all of religious history – the concept of a *brit*, a covenant.

Mentioned 283 times in *Tanach*, this revolutionary idea creates a unique framework to define the nature of our salient relationships. We are perhaps most familiar with this concept of covenant as this is the literal meaning of one of the most widely accepted and ancient Jewish practices, male circumcision known in Hebrew as *Brit Milah* or simply by one word *Brit* – covenant.

This concept of binding covenants continues throughout *Tanach*, defining the relationship with G-d and humanity, G-d and the Jewish People as a whole, G-d and each of the founding fathers of the Jewish people; between the founders and their descendants and indeed between all members of the Jewish People and each

other for all generations. The *brit* is the paradigmatic framework of how Jews are charged to relate to each other, their historic community and Hashem.

Covenant vs Contract

The *Brit* forges a covenantal bond beyond what the rational human mind can conjure on its own. To understand this transcendental Divinely inspired concept, it must be juxtaposed with the human constructs of agreements and contracts.

One of the most influential philosophers of political philosophy, Englishman Thomas Hobbes was the first to identify the organizing principle of human society and the state as a 'the social contract'. In his 1651 book *Leviathan*, he described the way human beings create societies through a type of social contract where members of society committed to collectively protect **their own individual rights**. The main motivation of a functional society is of self-interest and self-preservation. It is driven by a fear of violence and hence people agreeing to a central governing mechanism to ensure that no one harms one another – to live and let live.

A covenant, in the Biblical context, could not be more different. While the social contract focuses predominantly on self-interest and personal benefit, the covenant focuses on the good of the collective. The focus is less on the protection of their individual rights, but more on their responsibility to society as a whole. While preserving individuality and personal dignity

in the process, the individual is driven by a commitment to a sense of a greater good. To dedicate oneself for the sake of society as opposed to utilizing society to serve oneself.

This can only be done when individuals transcend personal gain and protection of their own individual space, and rather focus on fulfilling the needs of others. Values and moral commitment are at the heart of the covenant, whereas parochial individual needs and interests are at the heart of normative agreements and contracts. Contracts protect rights, covenants delineate mutual responsibilities. Contracts are built on what each party can get, covenants on what they ought to give. Contracts are self-serving, covenants transcend the self. A contract is about 'I' and 'you', a covenant is about 'us' and 'we'.

As Rabbi Sacks has so sharply put it:

“Covenant occurs when two individuals or groups, differing perhaps in power, but each acknowledging the integrity and sovereignty of the other, pledge themselves in mutual loyalty to achieve together what neither can achieve alone. Covenant is the use of language to create a bond of trust through the word given, the word received, the word honored in mutual fidelity.

“A covenant is not a contract. It differs in three respects. It is not limited to specific conditions and circumstances. It is open-ended and long-lasting. And it is not based on the idea of two individuals, otherwise unconnected, pursuing personal advantage. It is about the 'we' that gives identity to the 'I'. There is a place for contracts, but covenants are prior and more fundamental. They form the matrix of mutuality within which contractual relationships can exist.”¹

An Everlasting Bond

The Biblical covenant is then an everlasting binding agreement. Where those who commit to it, enter a new entity of unparalleled dedication and commitment. Where the other is the focus.

G-d binds Himself in an eternal bond as a party in an agreement that He is bound

by. A Divine contract. A *brit* is not only something that binds G-d to a people, and the Jewish people to G-d, but it is something that binds all Jews across generations – all those who are yet to be born are committed to this bond.

The first covenant that G-d makes is with humanity after the flood. It is an eternal commitment never to destroy the world again. Hashem is eternally committed to believing in human beings. From here, the Divine Covenant focuses primarily on the descendants of Abraham and Sarah – the Jewish People. With Abraham, the father and founder of the Jewish People, He makes two covenants – to be an Eternal G-d to the Jews, to redeem them from Exile and care for them and to grant the Land of their fathers as an everlasting inheritance. The first covenant is known as *Brit bein Habetarim*, the Covenant of the Pieces, and the second as *Brit Milah*, the Covenant of Circumcision. In these covenants G-d commits Himself to a number of things – to give him his own children; to make a great people with two everlasting pledges – to be an eternal G-d to this People and to grant them as an eternal inheritance the Land of Canaan, to become the Land of Israel.

Multiple covenants appear at every critical juncture of Jewish history, always reinforcing and expanding on mutual commitment. Particularly at times of challenge and suffering would G-d remember His commitment and covenant to His people. At the beginning of this week's parsha, G-d responds to Moshe's plea regarding Bnei Yisrael's suffering and says that He will surely redeem them, as He remembers the covenant that He made to their forefathers. So too, later on at the end of the horrific curses in the Book of Vayikra does G-d say that He will remember the covenant made to all three of the forefathers and will not forsake His people despite anything they have done. At the foot of Mount Sinai, an additional covenant is made for the Jewish People to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Shemot 19). With the giving of the Ten Commandments and the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people commit with the eternal words of *Naaseh V'Nishmah* – “we will do and we

will listen,” committing themselves as a people to the values of the Torah (Shemot 24). Before entry into the land, as the entire new generation stands together, Moshe enacts another covenant, this time explicitly binding all Jews for all generations as part of the spiritual eternal entity of *Knesset Yisrael* (Devarim 29). Future covenants are made by Joshua once in the land, and later with King David, but already at this stage, at the precipice of the entrance to the land, the unshakeable and spiritual mutual eternal commitment has been irrevocably established.

The Foundation of Jewish Society

One of the leading American Israeli political scientists, Professor Daniel Elazar, sees in the biblical idea of *brit* not only the fundamental framework of Jewish statecraft and society building but indeed a powerful influence on Western political science:

“The covenants of the Bible are the founding covenants of Western civilization. Perforce, they have to do with G-d. They have their beginnings in the need to establish clear and binding relationships between G-d and humans and among humans, relationships which must be understood as being political far more than theological in character, designed to establish lines of authority, distributions of power, bodies politic, and systems of law. It is indeed the genius of the idea and its biblical source that it seeks to both legitimize political life and to direct it into the right paths; to use theo-political relationships to build a bridge between heaven and earth – and there is nothing more earthly than politics even in its highest form – without letting either swallow up the other.

“The covenant idea has within it the seeds of modern constitutionalism in that it emphasizes the mutually accepted limitations on the power of all parties to it, a limitation not inherent in nature but involving willed concessions. This idea of limiting power is of first importance in the biblical worldview and for humanity as a whole since it helps explain why an omnipotent G-d does not exercise His omnipotence in the affairs of humans. In

Continued on page 10

PIRKEI AVOT

The Pain, The Effort, and The Process



Rabbi Reuven Taragin
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Scan here to join
Rabbi Taragin's
daily Divrei Torah
WhatsApp group



בן היא היא אומיה, לפנים צערה אגרא: (אבות ה:כג)

Because Masechet Avot initially consisted of five *perakim*, the fifth perek's last words are also the last words of the *mesechet* and are, therefore, especially important. The last words are a three-word statement from Ben Hei Hei: "L'fum tza'ara, agra — Our reward is proportional to the effort invested, to the pain experienced in the process."¹

This is an important point that lies at the heart of *avodat Hashem*. At the Pesach seder, the *rasha*² asks his father: "Mah ha'avodah ha'zot lachem? — What is this work for you?" The Yerushalmi³ has a slightly different version of the question in which the *rasha* expresses his frustration with the difficulty of *avodat Hashem*: "Mah ha'torach ha'zeh — Why is Judaism such a *tircha*, a burden?!" Beh Hei Hei answers the *rasha*'s question by explaining that the gain is proportional to the pain. Hashem makes serving Him challenging so that the reward will be commensurate.

Fighting the Good Fight

When Ben Hei Hei taught that the reward depends on the *tza'ar*, what type of deed was he referring to?

The Yalkut Mei'am Loez saw the topic as the fulfillment of *mitzvot*⁴ and ethical principles. He explains that Ben Hei Hei concluded the *mesechet* by addressing those frustrated with their inability to properly fulfill *mitzvot* and Masechet Avot's many dictates. Ben Hei Hei raises our spirits by reminding us that our reward hinges on the amount of effort we exert, not on the degree of our success.

For this reason, the Rambam⁵ saw the one who needs to overcome his *yetzer hara* in order to fulfill *mitzvot* (and avoid *aveirot*) as greater than the *chasid* who no longer desires sin. As opposed to the "philosophers" who prefer the *chasid*, the Rambam champions the one who needs to be *koveish* (conquer) his *yetzer*. His effort and, thus, his reward is greater.⁶

This is how the Ar"i explained the significance of the *avodat Hashem* of later generations of Jews. Because our distance from the

Sinaitic revelation puts us on a lower level than previous generations, Rav Chaim Vital, the Ar"i's most prominent talmid, asked the Ar"i's what significance our lowly actions could possibly have. The Ar"i answered that our being on a lower level means that our *mitzvah* fulfillment is a greater challenge⁷ and, therefore, our success is more significant.

People are often disillusioned by their failures and the strength of their *yetzer hara*. Instead, we should appreciate how the challenges we overcome add to the value of our successes.⁸ The Ba'al HaTanya, in fact, adds that a person should realize that this may be why he was created — not for his successes, but for the sake of his struggle to succeed.⁹

The Process of Torah Learning

Many commentaries apply Ben Hei Hei's words to Torah learning.¹⁰ Rabbeinu Yonah¹¹ connects our *mishnah* to Ben Bag Bag's directive (in the previous *mishnah*): "*hafoch bah va'foch bah* — continue turning over the Torah."¹² Even if one has learned all (they think) there is to learn from a particular Torah passage, it pays to continue studying it because we are rewarded for our effort, not just our knowledge.

We emphasize this point when making a *siyum*: "*Anu ameilim v'heim ameilim. Anu ameilim u'mekablim sachar; heim ameilim v'einam mekablim sachar.*"¹³ We contrast the efforts we invest in Torah learning with those invested by others in alternative endeavors. We are rewarded; they are not.

The Chofetz Chaim asked the obvious question. Do others not receive reward for their efforts? Aren't most people paid for the products they produce and the time they invest? The Chofetz Chaim explained that, generally, people are paid for the *results* of their efforts. If their efforts are fruitful, they get paid. If not, they leave empty-handed. The *mitzvah* of *talmud Torah* is unique in that we are rewarded for the effort itself. We receive *sechar* for the time and energy we devote to Torah learning even if we are not successful in understanding or retaining the knowledge.¹⁴

These two understandings of Ben Hei Hei's statement are, of course, not mutually exclusive. His words apply equally to rewards received for both Torah learning and *mitzvah* fulfillment. The reward for both is proportional to the *tza'ar*.

No Pain, No Gain?

What does Ben Hei Hei mean by the word *tza'ar*? What type of *tza'ar* is the reward commensurate to?

Many commentaries¹⁵ interpret the word *tza'ar* in the literal sense — pain or suffering. This interpretation implies that our reward is proportional to the pain we endure.

Similarly, a *mishnah* in Avot's final perek¹⁶ emphasizes the importance of the willingness to endure pain in order to learn Torah. "*Kach hi darkah shel Torah: pat b'melach tochal, u'mayim b'mesurah tishteh, v'chayei tza'ar tichyeh* — The way of Torah is (even) eating bread with salt, rationing water, and living with pain." A person should be willing to live a life of poverty and even endure a life of pain (a life that lacks physical pleasures) if this is what his Torah learning requires.¹⁷

The midrash¹⁸ attributes this idea to Moshe Rabbeinu, who depicted the pain he had to endure in order to bring the Torah down from heaven to the Jewish People. Moshe instructed the Jews that they too needed to (be ready to) pay a similar price for Torah learning.

Though not necessarily agreeing with the saying "No pain, no gain," Moshe taught that gain hinges on the *willingness* to endure pain. Mesechet Avot teaches that reward is proportional to the actual pain we experience.

The Eved's Effort

Many other Rishonim understand the word *tza'ar* as referring to the effort involved. The Ra'avyah,¹⁹ for example, connects our *mishnah* to another teaching involving Ben Hei Hei. The gemara²⁰ relates that Ben Hei Hei asked Hillel to define the uniqueness of an *eved Elokim*. Ben Hei Hei wondered why Malachi HaNavi used both that term and the term *tzaddik* in the same *pasuk*.²¹ What is the

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HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Redemption Revisited



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

This week's haftarah (Yechezkel 28:25 - 29:21) may be divided into three sections: The first part (v. 28:25-26) may be an independent unit or it may be a continuation of the prophecy about Tzidon, but either way it is not directly connected to the pesukim which follow. The central component (29:1-15) is the prophecy concerning Egypt, and the last part is a separate prophecy but also related to Egypt; the repayment for the actions of Nevukhadretzar in Tzor. The selection of a prophecy dealing with Egypt and the plagues as the haftarah for Parashat Va'era is obvious, but why are the first two pesukim included as they do not appear to be in any way connected with Egypt.

Yehuda Shaviv z"l explained: "It seems that these two pesukim about the redemption of Israel are included in order to draw our attention to the fact that Parashat Va'era is, first and foremost, a parsha about redemption. The awesome and frightening plagues are no more than tools that spur the process on. Indeed, our parsha - more than any other - depicts the redemption as it unfolds: 'And I shall also uphold My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan... For I have also heard the cry of Bnei Yisrael... and I have remembered My covenant... And I shall take you out from under the burden of Egypt, and I shall deliver you from their servitude and I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm... and I shall take you to Me for a people, and I shall be your G-d, and you will know that I am the Lord your G-d who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt... and I shall bring you to the land... and I shall give it to you as a heritage...' (6:4-8)."

The haftarah, explains Rav Shaviv, opens with the redemption of Israel and concludes with the redemption of Israel ("On

that day I shall make the horn of the house of Israel sprout forth..." - 29:21) teaching us that this redemption is the goal and purpose for all the other events. But there is a difference between the two redemptions. The redemption from Egypt enabled the entire nation to exit one country, whereas the future redemption will require the gathering of Am Yisrael "from the NATIONS among which they were scattered."

Though different, the redemption from Egypt will serve as a paradigm for future geulah; It will provide for freedom from servitude of other powers to allow submission to Hashem, and will manifest and sanctify Hashem's name in the eyes of other nations! This idea is expressed in the parsha just before the plague of hail: "Indeed it is for this purpose that I have raised you up, in order that you may show My power, and in order that My name be proclaimed throughout the land" (9:16).

The narrative in Sefer Shemot indicates that with Israel's departure from Egypt, the Egyptian exile came to an end. This is certainly true of the physical exile, but there is some doubt as to whether it applies to their psychological exile as well. Yechezkel's prophecy comes to complement and complete the picture: After the land of Egypt is completely laid waste and her cities destroyed, and after "I will scatter Egypt among the nations and will disperse them throughout the lands", the era of redemption for Egypt herself will arrive: "For so says G-d... at the end of forty years I will gather Egypt from the nations where they were scattered. And I shall bring back the captivity of Egypt and I shall return them to the land of Patros, into the land of their origin" (29:12-14).

Rav Shaviv explains: "Just as Israel are redeemed, i.e. that they return to their land after forty years, so shall the

Egyptians return and rebuild Egypt. This is the redemption of Egypt. And what is the nature of the renewed Egyptian kingdom? 'And they shall be there in an abject kingdom. It shall be the most abject of the kingdoms, and it shall not exalt itself any more over the nations, for I shall diminish them so they shall no longer rule over the nations.' (29:14-15) How can this 'abject kingdom' be considered 'redeemed'? A profound and important principle of redemption is to be learned here. Redemption for a nation means bringing that nation to its proper proportions. An enslaved nation requires redemption, but the nation which enslaves them is also in a state of 'exile'. It is not normal or natural to be an oppressor, to bind others against their will. The return of Egypt teaches us about the significance of redemption: redemption means the return to proper and natural proportions, no more and no less."

The final portion of the haftarah is included in order to teach an additional message regarding Divine Providence: Oppression of another does not remain uncompensated. Sometimes the response is direct and obvious, other times it is indirect and hidden - but Hashem always exacts justice as part of the process of redemption! The awarding of the Egyptian bounty to Nevuchadretzar as reward for his labor in Tzor closes the circle that started with the bitter and difficult servitude of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt. Despite the great bounty with which Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, their servitude had not yet been fully compensated, and Egypt was still indebted to them. Nevuchadretzar serves as G-d's emissary to be a staff of wrath among the rebellious nations, to demand repayment by force, particularly from the nation which still has an outstanding debt - Egypt.

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

(Note: These answers were written as part of a teshuva concerning insects/worms in produce in Eretz Yisrael)

Question: Does flour need to be sifted?

Answer: The concern with flour is that a few days after the grinding process, worms will be found in the flour. These worms are very small, around 2 mm. There is a major discussion about the degree to which these worms are problematic and the topic of “tola’at shelo pirsha” (worm that never left) but we will not relate to these topics at the moment.

There are different names for different sifters. The names given relates to the number of holes per square inch. A 40 sifter means that it has 40X40 holes per square inch. Many try to use a 70 which is the best type of sifter. It is not necessary to have a 70, but one cannot use a sifter with less than 50 (and if really needed 40). Once it is lower than this, even the worms can make it through.

Question: Can I sift a lot at once and use the flour for many days?

Answer: After sifting, it takes about 24 hours for the presence of worms to return. In the winter, it takes even longer. Therefore, one can sift and use the same flour the next day without resifting. If one places the sifted flour in the fridge, we can assume it is clean for a week without needing to sift again. If one puts it in the freezer, it does not need to be resifted even after an extended period of time.

Question: Can I buy flour that does not need to be sifted?

Answer: As we mentioned, it takes 24 hours after grinding before there is a concern for worms. Therefore, one may buy flour within 24 hours of its grinding (assuming the mill is clean) without sifting. Flour that was refrigerated after grinding or put in a sealed bag also retains its status as clean, and the bags say that no sifting is necessary. One should keep these in the freezer to retain its status. It is important that the flour has a legitimate hechsher to prove its status as “pre-sifted.”

Question: Can I eat baked goods at the home of a family that does not sift their flour?

Answer: Seemingly, this is an issue as there may be worms in the cake. However, the Rashba has an important ruling that may impact this case.

In order to understand the rule, we must first understand that there are different halachic categories to define the probability of worms. One level is called “muchzak.” We refer to this in cases where in most cases there will be worms. For example, vegetables with leaves such as lettuce, cabbage, brussel sprouts, dill, celery, etc. are considered “muchzak” with worms. There is a lower category in which we do not assume it is “muchzak”, but we say there is a “miyut hamatzui” (substantial minority), and therefore still required checking. For example, rice and unsifted flour fall into this category.

While checking is required in both categories, there is a substantial difference once the food is cooked or baked. The Rashba says that if a food with a probability of “miyut hamatzui” is cooked or baked without checking, we can permit it to be eaten because there is sfeik sfeika (double doubt):

1. There may be no insect at all (because it is not considered “muchzak”)
2. If there was a worm, it may have been destroyed in the process of cooking/baking. Once the worm is not complete, it can be considered nullified within the mixture.

Therefore, assuming this is a home that keeps flour guarded in a normal fashion, then the probability of insects without sifting is “miyut hamatzui.” Once the food was baked, bedieved we can allow you to eat the baked goods based on the Rashba (SA YD 84:9).

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

תקציר פרשת וארא

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



שליטה, כבוד, כח וכדומה), יכולה להתהפך בן-רגע, להיבלע ולהיעלם.

לאור מהלך זה, נוכל לומר כי התפקיד המרכזי של האותות לא היה להביא לאמונה בה' באמצעות האותות, אלא להביע מסר, על השינויים המשמעותיים העתידיים להתרחש, כאשר יד ה' תתערב בנעשה.

העימות נעשה מול החרטומים, מאחר ומדובר בעימות דתי. החרטומים היו אמנם מכשפים טובים, וידעו לחזות את העתידות על פי המציאות הנתונה ברגע זה; אולם כוח ראייתם היה מוגבל. הם לא היו יכולים לחזות את המהפכים שה' עומד לחולל במציאות ובחוקיה. לכן הם נכשלו בפתרון חלומות פרעה – שהרי רק יד ה' היא זו שיכולה להפוך את השנים הטובות לרעות, בניגוד לכל התחזיות. ורק יד ה' יכולה להפוך עם חלש ומשועבד לעם עצמאי חזק.

ניצחון האותות הא-להיים של משה על אותות חרטומי פרעה באו לאותות לפרעה ולהבהיר לו, שיד ה' יכולה להפוך את המציאות של שלטון פרעה ומצרים על העולם ולשחרר את ישראל ממצרים.

לקרות: השנים הטובות של מצרים, שנות השובע העושר והבטחון, עתידות להתחלף בשנות רעב, מצוקה וקושי.

גם האותות שעושים משה ואהרון לפני פרעה מבטאים רעיון דומה. התנין הגדול הוא מצרים (כפי שהוא מכונה ביחזקאל ובמקורות חיצוניים נוספים), ועם ישראל כרגע הוא עץ יבש וחלש. עם ישראל, הנראה כעץ יבש ומסכן (המטה), עתיד לקום לתחייה ולהפוך אף הוא להיות לתנין. בשלב הבא מטה אהרן עתיד לבלוע את מטות חרטומי מצרים, כלומר, גאוותו של התנין הגדול תישבר, ושבירתו תבצע דווקא על ידי ישראל שנרדפו על ידו.

כאשר פרעה רואה את בליעת מטות החרטומים על ידי מטה אהרן הוא אמור להיזכר בחלום פרעה הקודם, שבו התברר כי שנים של שובע יכולות להתהפך לשנות רעב מבלי שייוותר להן זכר, והוא אמור להבין שמצב השובע הנוכחי של מצרים ועוצמת שלטונם, יכולים אף הם להיעלם בן-רגע. תחושת הביטחון הברורה והחזקה שבהווה (שובע,

ת הליך יציאת ישראל ממצרים מלא באותות מופתים ונסים. מה מטרת האותות שעשה משה לפני פרעה ולפני בני ישראל? האם הם נועדו לחזק את האמונה בה'? להוכיח שמה ואהרון הם שליחי ה'? בעיון זה נתמקד באות הפיכת המטה לתנין, בו יש עימות בין משה ואהרון לחרטומי מצרים: "וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶהָרֹן אֶת מִטְהוֹ לְפָנָי פְּרֹעֵה וְלְפָנָי עֲבָדָיו וַיְהִי לְתַנִּין: וַיִּקְרָא גַם פְּרֹעֵה לְחֻכְמִים וְלְמַכְשָׁפִים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גַם הֵם חֻרְטָמִי מִצְרַיִם בְּלִהְיֹתָם: וַיִּשְׁלִיכוּ אִישׁ מִטְהוֹ וַיְהִי לְתַנִּים וַיְבָלַע מִטְהוֹ אֶהָרֹן אֶת מִטְתָּם" (ז', י-יב).

מטה אהרון, מקל העץ היבש, הופך לתנין. אמנם גם החרטומים הופכים את מטותיהם לתנינים, אך מטה אהרון גובר עליהם, ובלוע אותם. אות זה מזכיר סיטואציה נוספת בה נוכחו חרטומי מצרים: פתרון חלום פרעה ע"י יוסף. בחלום פרעה, הפרות הדקות בלעו את הפרות השמנות, והשיבולים השדופות בלעו את השיבולים המלאות. חרטומי מצרים לא הצליחו לפתור חלום זה, אך יוסף פתר אותו נכונה, והסביר שחלום זה מסמל ומרמז את המהפך העתידי



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Q What is the most important factor when deciding to run on a crowdfunding campaign?

A The most important part of any successful campaign is leadership. Specifically, I look for three characteristics.

- 1) **Courage** - Leaders step out of their comfort zones. To outperform expectations, leaders must put themselves out there even when certain tasks don't come naturally to them.
- 2) **Humility** - Leaders know that they can't do it alone. They aren't experts in everything. Nor do they have the time to accept responsibility for every detail. Lead, but lead from a place of humility.
- 3) **Discipline** - Leaders understand that great campaigns aren't built in a day. They are built bit by bit, task by task. Leaders learn to not only live the process, but to love it as well.

If you're asking whether an ambitious campaign is right for your organization, look internally. Do you have the leadership to mobilize an army of supporters? If you do, proceed confidently because fundraising success is well within reach.

Spiritual Slavery



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

After many years of slavery in Egypt, the time has come. G-d is all-powerful so he can easily take the people out of Egypt. What is standing in the way of this revolution of leaving Egypt? Well, it's not just Pharaoh and the Egyptians who stand in the way; it's the Jewish people, too.

At the beginning of the parasha, we read some highly emotional passages where G-d speaks to Moshe. What a wonderful harbinger of things to come, what a fantastic vision. The entire past, present, and future are described with a promise of the Holy One blessed be He to bring to pass what he told to Avraham Avinu – to take the people out from slavery to freedom, to the Land of Israel. And what does the next Torah verse tell us, without any space or interruption?

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בְּן אֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵל מֹשֶׁה מִקֶּצֶר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה.

Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel, but they did not hearken to Moses because of [their] shortness of breath/spirit and because of [their] hard labor. (Exodus 6:9)

We are talking about two separate matters. Not only physical slavery (hard labor), but spiritual servitude (shortness of breath/spirit). How do we prevent ourselves, ostensibly free, from this sort of spiritual slavery today?

1. Avoid: working too much, information overload, and FOMO

In one of the famous ethical works, “The Path of the Just” (Mesilat Yesharim), by Moshe Chaim Luzzato, we find this fundamental principle: “And here truly is one of the stratagems of the evil inclination and its deviousness – to burden people with so much work (and so many distractions, I

might add) that they do not have any time to catch their breath, to look around and see where they are going.”

We know how much is happening on the Internet every minute. And much of it has to do with FOMO (fear of missing out). The Internet is primarily about distractions and you lose your breath and your spirit chasing after them, leaving you with a feeling of loss. In the midst of these distractions, we are challenged to find a place for Torah.

2. Torah

You want to avoid confusion and losing your way in this world? Torah is the one true heaven-sent device for doing so. In the words of the holy Or HaChaim, they did not listen to Moshe “perhaps because they did not hear words of Torah and therefore they were short of spirit since the Torah widens the heart and spirit of a person.”

3. Shabbat

And here's another practical piece of advice: Shabbat. We know that the children of Israel conducted a war with Pharaoh over keeping Shabbat. He permitted it, then banned it, and was shocked to discover that on Shabbat they read scrolls of the book of Genesis, fondly clinging to the promises found there. Pharaoh understood that they did not only use Shabbat for rest but that it was a holy day of recharging their spirits. The Sefat Emet, Rav Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, says this explicitly. There is one day of the week in which we can desist from hard labor and expand our shortened spirits:

“They did not hear because of their shortness of spirit and because of their hard labor.” This means that during the week

the body rules the spirit. But on Shabbat, the opposite occurs, because an extra soul descends from above and enters the Jew, who at least refrains from the 39 kinds of work forbidden on Shabbat. Therefore, Shabbat is the right time to hear the word of HaShem”.

Shortness of spirit and hard labor can prevent us, even today, from going out from slavery to freedom. There are many interpretations of this verse, but we focused today on three of them: making a place in our lives for important things despite all the distractions, learning Torah, and keeping Shabbat. This sounds simple, but this is not simple these days.



משהו מוזר קורה בפרשת השבוע: בשיא המתח, רגע לפני שמשה ואהרון יוצאים לשליחותם, להתחיל להתניע את יציאת מצרים, התורה עוצרת ומתחילה לפרט את אילן היוחסין שלהם. החל מיעקב אבינו, דור אחרי דור, עד למשה ולאהרון.

הרב שמשון רפאל הירש – שהיום הוא יום פטירתו – הסביר לפני כ-200 שנה שהתורה רוצה לנפץ אשליה רווחת, לפיה המנהיג הוא בן-האלוקים, קדוש, נישא ומרומם. זו השקפה הרסנית, והתורה טורחת לעצור כדי להדגיש: אותו משה שעשה מעשים כל כך מופלאים – הוא אנושי.

וכך הוא כתב: “משה שלנו היה אדם, נשאר אדם, ולעולם לא יהיה כי אם אדם. הכל הכירו את הוריו והורי הוריו, דודיו ודודותיו, את כל ייחוסו ואת כל קרוביו. בשר ודם, כפוף לטבע האדם על ליקוייו וחולשותיו, איש ככל יתר האנשים. עדות זו נועדה לבטל מראש ולתמיד כל האלהה מוטעית”.

אפשר ללמוד מכאן דבר נוסף: אותו כוח שהיה למשה לגאול את המציאות, נמצא אצל בני האדם. אסור להדחיק אותו ורק לחכות לנס ולחיות בחוסר מעש, צריך לפעול ולתקן. משה רבנו היה רק בן אדם, וממנו לומדים לאיזו דרגה יכול בן-אנוש להגיע, אם יתאמץ.

For the Shabbat Table



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

“These are the heads of their households...” (Shemot 6:14).

Towards the beginning of this week’s Parsha, the story in Egypt is interrupted in order to give us Moshe and Aharon’s family background. The Torah starts by listing Reuven and his children, then Shimon and his children, followed by Levi and his children, grandchildren, great grandchildren including Moshe and Aharon, and great great grandchildren (Aharon’s sons). The Torah then continues with the narrative and does not mention any of the other tribes.

Why were Moshe and Aharon not simply introduced in the classic format, “Moshe and Aharon, sons of Amram, son of Kehat, son of Levi”? Furthermore, if Torah wishes to trace the generations back to the tribes,

then surely all of the tribes should be mentioned. Why does the Torah only list the families of Reuven, Shimon and Levi?

Rashi (Shemot 6:14) suggests two answers. The first is that the whole purpose of listing the tribes is to give Moshe and Aharon’s family background. Therefore, we start with the firstborn Reuven and his children, followed by Shimon and his children and all of Levi’s generations until the families of Moshe and Aharon. Now that we have reached Moshe and Aharon, there is no need to continue with the rest of the tribes.

Rashi’s second explanation is based on the Midrash (Pesikta Rabbati Parsha 7). At the end of the book of Bereishit, Ya’akov blessed his sons prior to his death. However, rather than receiving blessings, Reuven Shimon and Levi were deeply

criticized by their father for previous events in their lives. Following this critical scene, there was a concern that these three tribes would be rejected by future generations.

The Torah therefore goes out of its way to specially mention these tribes once more and list them alongside the great Moshe and Aharon to show us that despite their wrongful behaviour and the sharp criticism that followed, “they are important”.

From this Midrash, a vital message emerges. Every single person is important and every single tribe of our nation is important – even those who we criticise and even those who believe have erred in their ways.

Shabbat Shalom!

Continued from page 4

difference between the two terms? What does the term *eved Elokim* add to *tzaddik*?

Hillel answered that a *tzaddik* reviews his Torah learning a hundred times. The *eved Elokim* goes the “extra mile” and studies it a hundred and **one** times. The *tzaddik* ensures that he understands and remembers his Torah perfectly — a level of a hundred percent. The *eved Elokim* — **servant** of G-d — sees the goal of learning as more than just knowledge. Effort is also important to him, so he continues studying even after he has mastered the material.²²

After understanding what Ben Hei Hei means by *tza’ar*, we now need to appreciate how the *sechar* is proportional to it. Next week we will *iy”H* see how and why our reward hinges upon the pain we endure and the effort we invest.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis.

1. Masechet Avot 5:23.
2. Pesach Haggadah, *Maggid: Arba Banim*.
3. Talmud Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:4.

4. See also Rabbeinu Bachya and the Bartenura, who also apply this idea to mitzvah observance. Many Rishonim link our mishnah to the fulfillment of particularly difficult mitzvot. See, for example, Rav Avraham ben HaRambam (*Teshuvot Rav Avraham Ben HaRambam*, 385) who applies our mishnah to the fulfillment of challenging *shemittah* laws.
5. *Shemonah Perakim*, Perek 6.
6. See *Sefer Chassidim* (155) who asserts (based upon Avot D’Rebbi Natan 3:6) that for one time we overcome our *yetzer* we receive a reward that is greater than what we receive for a hundred *mitzvot* fulfilled with ease. See also Tosafot and the Ritva to Kiddushin 31a who use our mishnah to explain why those who fulfill mitzvot they are commanded to fulfill are greater than those who fulfill mitzvot voluntarily. Though volunteering to fulfill is significant, overcoming the resistance (generated by the Satan) against fulfilling obligations makes their fulfillment more significant. See also Rav Avraham Schorr (*Halekach V’halibuv*) who explains that the resistance we feel towards *mitzvah* fulfillment is actually a good thing. Hashem makes things harder so we can receive a higher reward for our efforts.
7. This discussion is quoted by the Chida.
8. See Mesilat Yesharim (Perek 19) who explains that people should be happy when they face great challenges as the situation gives one the ability to show the strength of their commitment.
9. Sefer HaTanya, Perek 27.
10. See, for example, the Rambam in both his commentary to the *mishnah* and Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:6.
11. Rabbeinu Yonah to Masechet Avot 5:23.
12. Masechet Avot 5:22.
13. The words are taken from the *tefila* that Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakanah recited when he left the Beit Midrash (Masechet Berachot 28b).
14. The Shoshanim L’david adds that Ben Hei Hei (who, it seems, was a *ger*) aimed to encourage converts to not be deterred by the huge amount of effort converting requires. The arduous process is worthwhile because converts are rewarded for all the effort.
15. See Rashi, Rambam and Bartenura to Avot 5:23.
16. Masechet Avot 6:4.
17. See also Midrash Zuta (Kohelet 2:9) which understands Kohelet 2:9 as Shlomo celebrating the Torah he learned in trying circumstances as his best learning.
18. Sifri, Devarim 306.
19. Sefer Ra’avyah, Masechet Chagigah 3:995.
20. Masechet Chagigah 9b.
21. Sefer Malachi 3:18.
22. Hillel’s definition of an *eved Elokim* can help us understand why Hashem described particularly Calev, as opposed to Yehoshua, as His *eved* (Bamidbar 14:24). The Or Hachayim (*ibid.*) explains that Calev did not have Moshe praying for him and, thus, had to fight harder to resist joining the sinful spies. The hard worker is the true *eved Elokim*.

Continued from page 3

covenanting with humans, G-d at least partially withdraws from controlling their lives. He offers humans freedom under the terms of the covenant, retaining the covenantal authority to reward or punish the consequences of that freedom at some future date. By the same token, the humans who bind themselves through the covenant accept its limits in Puritan terms, abandoning natural for federal liberty – to live up to the terms of their covenants. Beyond that, the leaders of the people are limited in their governmental powers to serving the people under the terms of the covenant. Thus the idea of constitutional or limited government is derived from the idea of covenant.”²

Indeed at the core of Jewish society is the revolutionary idea of an everlasting unconditional bond between all fellow Jews. A deep sense of common fate and spiritual destiny is at the core of an inextricable bond between members of this people – living, deceased and yet to be

born – in a covenantal bond amongst them and between them and their G-d.

‘Till Death Do Us Part’

So too is *brit* the paradigm for our closest intimate interpersonal relationship. The one which most closely resembles a covenant is that of marriage. It is the hope and prayer of husband and wife, when they come together, that their union is not dependent on any conditions or changing circumstances. The commitment is for it not to be time bound but hopefully everlasting. It is built on a mutual vision and values where the ‘I’ and ‘thou’ become an ‘us’ and a ‘we’. The core of this relationship is a commitment to the vision of a greater good and a better future together. That it will weather every storm and overcome the vicissitudes of life. Such is the nature of all interpersonal and societal bonds that really matter. As the passuk explicitly states that the relationship of marriage is a conventional one: “But you ask, ‘Why?’ It

is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth... she is your partner, the wife of your covenant.” (Malachi 2:14)

One Family

The Jewish People are indeed one family. Bnei Yisrael, the Children of our forefather Israel, was forged through bonds of brotherhood, fraternity and mutual mission. We can not ever give up on each other or discard any one of us. Such is the nature of *brit* and such is the great challenge and opportunity of Jewish unity in our generation.

1. ‘The Dignity of Difference’ by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.
2. Daniel Elazar, Covenant & Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations & Jewish Expressions The Covenant Tradition in Politics, Volume 1, Introduction <https://www.jcpa.org/dje/books/ct-vol1-int.htm> Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

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Spirits in a Material World



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Torah sometimes says something of fundamental importance in what seems like a minor and incidental comment. There is a fine example of this near the beginning of this *parsha*.

In the previous *parsha*, we read of how Moses was sent by G-d to lead the Israelites to freedom, and how his initial efforts met with failure. Not only did Pharaoh not agree to let the people go; he made the working conditions of the Israelites even worse. They had to make the same number of bricks as before, but now they had to gather their own straw. The people complained to Pharaoh, then they complained to Moses, and then Moses complained to G-d. "Why have You brought trouble to this people? Why did You send me?" (Ex. 5:22)

At the beginning of Va'era, G-d tells Moses that He will indeed bring the Israelites to freedom, and tells him to announce this to the people. Then we read this:

So Moses told this to the Israelites but they did not listen to him, *because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh.* (Exodus 6:9)

The italicised phrase seems simple enough. The people did not listen to Moses because he had brought them messages from G-d before which had done nothing to improve their situation. They were busy trying to survive day by day. They had no time for utopian promises that seemed to have no grounding in reality. Moses had failed to deliver in the past. They had no reason to think he would do so in the future. So far, so straightforward.

But there is something more subtle going on beneath the surface. When Moses first met G-d at the Burning Bush, G-d told him

to lead, and Moses kept refusing on the grounds that the people would not listen to him. He was not a man of words. He was slow of speech and tongue. He was a man of "uncircumcised lips" (Ex. 6:30). He lacked eloquence. He could not sway crowds. He was not an inspirational leader.

It turned out, though, that Moses was both right and wrong, right that they did not listen to him, but wrong about why. It had nothing to do with his failures as a leader or a public speaker. In fact, it had nothing to do with Moses at all. They did not listen "because their spirit was broken and because the labour was harsh." In other words: *If you want to improve people's spiritual situation, first improve their physical situation.* That is one of the most humanising aspects of Judaism.

Maimonides emphasises this in *The Guide for the Perplexed*. The Torah, he says, has two aims: the well-being of the soul and the well-being of the body.¹ The well-being of the soul is something inward and spiritual, but the well-being of the body requires a strong society and economy, where there is the rule of law, division of labour, and the promotion of trade. We have bodily well-being when all our physical needs are supplied, but none of us can do this alone. We specialise and exchange. That is why we need a good, strong, just society.

Spiritual achievement, says Maimonides, is higher than material achievement, but we need to ensure the latter first, because "a person suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat or cold, cannot grasp an idea even if it is communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning." In other words, if we lack basic physical needs, there is no way we can reach spiritual heights. When people's

spirits are broken by harsh labour they cannot listen to a Moses. If you want to improve people's spiritual situation, first improve their physical conditions.

This idea was given classic expression in modern times by two New York Jewish psychologists, Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) and Frederick Herzberg (1923–2000). Maslow was fascinated by the question of why many people never reached their full potential. He also believed – as, later, did Martin Seligman, creator of positive psychology – that psychology should focus not only on the cure of illness but also on the positive promotion of mental health. His most famous contribution to the study of the human mind was his "hierarchy of needs."

We are not a mere bundle of wants and desires. There is a clear order to our concerns. Maslow enumerated five levels. First are our *physiological* needs: for food and shelter, the basic requirements of survival. Next come *safety* needs: protection against harm done to us by others. Third is our need for *love and belonging*. Above that comes our desire for *recognition and esteem*, and higher still is *self-actualisation*: fulfilling our potential, becoming the person we feel we could and should be. In his later years Maslow added a yet higher stage: *self-transcendence*, rising beyond the self through altruism and spirituality.

Herzberg simplified this whole structure by distinguishing between physical and psychological factors. He called the first, *Adam needs*, and the second *Abraham needs*. Herzberg was particularly interested in what motivates people at work. What he realised in the late 1950s – an idea revived more recently by American-Israeli economist Dan Arieli – is that money, salary, and financial rewards (stock options and

the like) is not the only motivator. People do not necessarily work better, harder, or more creatively, the more you pay them. Money works up to a certain level, but beyond that the real motivator is the challenge to grow, create, find meaning, and to invest your highest talents in a great cause. Money speaks to our Adam needs, but meaning speaks to our Abraham needs.

There is a truth here that Jews and Judaism have tended to note and live by more fully than many other civilisations and faiths. Most religions are *cultures of acceptance*. There is poverty, hunger, and disease on earth because that is the way the world is; that is how G-d made it and wants it. Yes, we can find happiness, nirvana, or bliss, but to achieve it you must escape from the world, by meditation, or retreating to a monastery, or by drugs, or trance, or by waiting patiently for the joy that awaits us in the world to come. Religion anaesthetises us to pain.

That isn't Judaism at all. When it comes to the poverty and pain of the world, ours is a *religion of protest, not acceptance*. G-d does not want people to be poor, hungry, sick, oppressed, uneducated, deprived of rights, or subject to abuse. He has made us His agents in this cause. He wants us to be His partners in the work of redemption. That is why so many Jews have become doctors fighting disease, lawyers fighting injustice, or educators fighting ignorance. It is surely why they have produced so many pioneering (and Nobel



When it comes to the poverty and pain of the world, ours is a religion of protest, not acceptance.

Prize-winning) economists. As Michael Novak (citing Irving Kristol) writes:

Jewish thought has always felt comfortable with a certain well-ordered worldliness, whereas the Christian has always felt a pull to otherworldliness. Jewish thought has had a candid orientation toward private property, whereas Catholic thought – articulated from an early period chiefly among priests and monks – has persistently tried to direct the attention of its adherents beyond the activities and interests of this world to the next. As a result, tutored by the law and the prophets, ordinary Jews have long felt more at home in this world, while ordinary Catholics have regarded this world as a valley of temptation and as a distraction from their proper business, which is preparation for the world to come.²

G-d is to be found in this world, not just the next. But for us to climb to spiritual heights we must first have satisfied our

material needs. Abraham was greater than Adam, but Adam came before Abraham. When the physical world is harsh, the human spirit is broken, and people cannot then hear the word of G-d, even when delivered by a Moses.

Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev said it well: “Don't worry about the state of someone else's soul and the needs of your body. Worry about the needs of someone else's body and the state of your own soul.”

Alleviating poverty, curing disease, ensuring the rule of law, and respect for human rights: these are spiritual tasks no less than prayer and Torah study. To be sure, the latter are higher, but the former are prior. People cannot hear G-d's message if their spirit is broken and their labour harsh.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Which is most important to you, your physical wellbeing, or your mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing?
- Does Judaism focus equally on the physical as the spiritual? Why?
- How can we be activists to help people with both their physical and spiritual wellbeing?

1. Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:27.
2. Michael Novak, *This Hemisphere of Liberty* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1990), 64.

The Heritage of Eretz Yisrael



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

Moreover, I established My covenant with them [Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov] to give them the Land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning, in which they sojourned. (Shemos 6:4)

Hashem told Moshe that He had made a bris (covenant) with our Avos to give Eretz Yisrael to Bnei Yisrael. Apparently, there was a need for the establishment of a bris, despite the fact that Hashem had already given the Land to Avraham when he walked around its borders, thereby acquiring it: “Arise, walk about the Land through its length and breadth, for to you will I give it” (Bereishis 13:17).

Why was this bris necessary? The Chazon Ish explains that under ordinary circumstances, when one owns property, he is able to relinquish that ownership by selling it. In addition, there is an international principle of *kibbush milchamah* (conquest in war), whereby the victorious nation acquires all of the property and land of the losing nation (Gittin 38a). As such, one might have thought that if Eretz Yisrael was passed down as an inheritance from Avraham to Yitzchak, and then to Ya'akov, and then to Bnei Yisrael, it could be sold or relinquished to another nation in battle.

As the Ramban explains numerous times in his commentary to Torah, the bris served to establish that Bnei Yisrael's possession of Eretz Yisrael is *על כל פנים* – in any event, under all circumstances. Eretz Yisrael belongs to the Jewish Nation as an eternal possession, throughout the history of the world. When a Jewish government was established in Eretz Yisrael in 1948, it was not that the United Nations or Great Britain, out of the goodness of their hearts, gave Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish Nation. Rather, the Land belonged to Bnei



A heritage is the heir's responsibility; he must transmit it in an intact fashion to the next generation, for it is the property of generations before and after.

Yisrael since the days of Avraham Avinu as a function of this bris.

The Rambam writes that the sanctification of Eretz Yisrael in the days of Ezra was predicated on “*chazakah*,” a term coined by the Rambam himself. Years ago, a visiting Rav delivered a guest shiur in Rav Soloveitchik's class, adopting the understanding, that the term *chazakah* refers to one of the methods used to acquire property, as in the Mishnah's principle “Real property [land or houses] may be acquired by means of money, a document, or *chazakah* – a proprietary act” (Kiddushin 26a). According to this understanding, the Jewish Nation lost its ownership of Eretz Yisrael during the seventy years of *galus Bavel* due to the rule of *kibbush milchamah*, and we therefore needed to effect a new acquisition of the Land via *kinyan chazakah*. With all due respect to the visiting Rav, Rav Soloveitchik argued that he was incorrect – the Jewish Nation never lost their ownership of Eretz Yisrael. What the Rambam meant by the term “*chazakah*” was settlement, not a *kinyan chazakah*. The *chazakah* at the time of Ezra was a way to sanctify, not to acquire, the Land.

In this vein, the Torah continues: “I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak,

and Ya'akov; and I shall give it to you as a heritage, I am Hashem.” (Shemos 6:8)

Hashem's raising His hand is symbolic of a *shevuah* (oath), which is tantamount to the bris mentioned above. The term *מורשה* also connotes the uniqueness of Klal Yisrael's possession of Eretz Yisrael. While it is true that Eretz Yisrael is a *ירושה* (inheritance) passed down from Avraham Avinu, *מורשה* reflects an additional facet. An inheritance is under the sole control of the heir, who is able to sell it at will. A heritage, however, is the heir's responsibility; he must transmit it in an intact fashion to the next generation, for it is the property of generations before and after (Rav Mordechai Gifter *zt”l*).

That is why the term *מורשה* appears in the Torah in only two contexts: here in reference to Eretz Yisrael, as well as in Parshas Vezos Haberachah in reference to the Torah itself: The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Ya'akov” (Devarim 33:4). The Torah must be transmitted from generation to generation, and we have no right to delete or amend parts of the Torah. We similarly have no right or ability to transfer Eretz Yisrael to others.

The status of Eretz Yisrael as a *מורשה* does not impede an individual's ability to sell his land. Rather, the *מורשה* status affects the sovereignty of the Land – namely, which nation Eretz Yisrael belongs to. The heritage of Eretz Yisrael ensures that it will always remain the national possession of the Jewish Nation.

● *Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.*

How To Receive Rebuke



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

Towards the beginning of this week's Parsha, the Torah begins listing off the lineage of the Shevatim. However, having recounted the lineage of the tribes of Reuvein, Shimon, and Levi, the Torah immediately changes track and goes back to describing the events of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt. Why does the Torah deviate to only tell us the lineage of these three Shevatim, and no more?

Rashi explains, according to the simple explanation of the verse, that the Torah lists off the lineage of the Shevatim until reaching Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon and Miriam who were part of the tribe of Levi. When reaching this point, the Torah begins to tell the story of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam in Egypt.

Nevertheless, there must be a deeper reason as to why specifically Reuvein and Shimon have their lineage listed out along with Levi. I would like to share an answer from the Sefer Chamin B'Motzei Shabbat (Shemot volume, Maimar Gimmel).

Two weeks ago, we read the Parsha of Vayechi. While reading the Parsha it was

striking to see the contrast between the *berachot* Yaakov gave to Reuvein, Shimon and Levi, and the *berachot* he gave to the rest of the brothers. In fact, it's hard not to feel the pain of Reuvein, Shimon and Levi while reading the Parsha. While all the brothers are receiving *berachot*, not just praises but *berachot* for the generations to come, Reuvein, Shimon and Levi receive rebuke. Their father gives them Mussar. Rashi points out that there was a small amount of comfort for each of them as all the *berachot* from each brother included all the other brothers as well. Nevertheless, just imagine the pain and heartbreak Reuvein, Shimon and Levi must have felt as they watched all their brothers receiving *berachot* right after they had gone through harsh rebuke.

The Medrash in Shir Hashirim Rabbah gives many explanations, but the first explanation it gives is the although Yaakov was critical towards Reuven, Shimon and Levi, they accepted the rebuke willingly which ultimately gave them the merit to have their lineage counted together with Moshe and Aharon. The Medrash explains that as a result of the rebuke,

Reuvein, Shimon and Levi were much more careful than the rest of the Bnei Yisrael to distance themselves from Avoda Zara while in Egypt. They were able to take the negative and turn it into a wonderful positive. If we can imagine the initial pain of these three brothers at the time they received their *berachot*, we are able to see just how amazing it is that they were able to turn it into something positive. They received rebuke, they had been given Mussar, but they took it well and they made sure to grow meaningfully from what had happened and ultimately to stay a step more dedicated than the rest of the Shevatim because of it.

This is a tremendous lesson for all of us. That initial negativity and rebuke remained for the next few hundred years, from the passing of Yaakov Avinu until Yetziat Mitzrayim, as a source of strength and positivity. Reuvein, Shimon and Levi used their rebuke to double up their care in serving Hashem and is the reason their lineage is delineated in our Parsha together with Moshe and Aharon.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

Charging Through Life



Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

In Jeremiah chapter 8 verse 6, the prophet Jeremiah describes how sometimes people live life like horses in a cavalry charge, going through the motions and doing what they think they have to because everybody around them is doing the same thing. We just charge on, not really thinking.

Many of us live life this way. But how do we avoid it?

The *Mesilat Yesharim* quotes this passage from the prophet Jeremiah, and says the only way out is to stop and think. We need to stop for a moment and think about where we are headed, what life is about, what our purpose is.

We read at the end of last week's parsha about how the people initially welcomed Moshe with open arms; but after Moshe's first encounter with Pharaoh, Pharaoh responded by making things worse for the people. He said, "Make the work harder for them and let them not turn to false ideas" (Shemot 5:9). Pharaoh saw the people were starting to question their status as slaves, and he was worried about this emancipatory mindset.

The *Mesilat Yesharim* says Pharaoh knew that the way to prevent the people from thinking about freedom and the important things in life was to make them so busy they didn't have time to think. And that, says the *Mesilat Yesharim*, is really when the *yetzer hara* thrives, when we are so busy we can't even stop to think. We become enslaved to the wrong path in life; we can't get our priorities straight or lift our heads up to see the bigger picture. We live life like the horses in the cavalry charge.

Pharaoh's strategy worked: we read at the beginning of this week's portion that after Pharaoh had made the work harder for them, "they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of spirit and because of hard work." Their spirits were low, they couldn't see the big picture anymore because things

were too hard and they couldn't stop to think.

The lesson that Rabbi Luzzatto gleans from this is that the only way to real freedom from the enslavement of our day-to-day lives is to have the time to stop and think. It's about finding faith and creating a connection to G-d, despite the difficulties and challenges we may be facing; to find our inspiration in Him.

Pharaoh said, "Let them not turn 'bedivrei sheker' – to false ideas." Various commentaries explain that *bedivrei sheker* means "words of emptiness." What are these "words of emptiness", these false ideas?

According to the Midrash, the people at that time had inspiring writings that they used to read on Shabbos. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, one of the great rabbinic thinkers of the 20th century, opines that this inspirational reading was from Psalms.

Every Shabbos we say psalm 92 – "The song for the day of Shabbos". But if we look through that psalm we find no further reference to Shabbos. Rather, the psalm refers to the problem of the flourishing of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. It says, don't be distressed by the flourishing of the wicked, because they flourish like grass which comes and goes quickly. But the righteous are like the cedar trees; they take a long time to flourish but they are there forever – not only in this world, but in the next world as well.

This relates to prayer as well. According to the Ba'al HaTurim, the word *yish'u* in Pharaoh's words *ve'al yish'u bedivrey sheker*, "let them not turn to false ideas," appears only in one other place in the whole of Tanach, and in that context (Shmuel II 22:42) it is talking about the people praying to G-d and not getting answered. What is the connection between these two verses? The Ba'al HaTurim says it is to teach us that when one prays to G-d one has to be honest. The key to prayer is that it must come from the

heart; it has to be sincere, not just going through the motions while our mind is elsewhere. It means having a spiritual and emotional connection to our Creator.

The *yish'u* of our verse relates not just to prayer but to Torah learning. The Midrash connects the word *yish'u* in the verse with the word *sha'ashu'im* found in psalm 119, where King David writes, "Were it not for Your Torah which is my delight (*sha'ashu'ai*), I would have been lost in my affliction." As we know, King David had a very hard life. He had many enemies. He suffered family tragedies as well. King David is saying in this verse that what got him through the challenges and difficulties, what gave him a sense of perspective, joy and inspiration, was learning Torah. That, too, enables us to take a step back. Each person on their own level can find something to learn, to get out of that cavalry charge of life and see the broader perspective and get a sense of inner peace and tranquillity. In prayer we talk to Hashem; when we learn Torah, He talks to us.

Pharaoh was saying, I do not want them praying or learning. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh comments that Pharaoh said they must not turn to "words of emptiness," because Pharaoh is coming from an anti-Torah, anti-G-d position. Pharaoh was saying, this is nothing, this is empty and therefore do not let them turn to such nonsense. But we know that prayer and Torah study are real and can uplift and transform our lives.

G-d gave the Torah for all times and it is indeed relevant in all generations. But in today's day and age especially, the Torah and its message seem even more relevant. The way that people are rushed and pressured, the cavalry charge is all the more apparent. The Torah provides the formula to enable us to step back from life and see a much bigger picture.

Lessons From the Ten Plagues



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

In this week's parsha we encounter seven of the 10 *makkot*. Several commentators have questioned why these specific *makkot* were selected, why this specific order and why did Pharaoh react differently, at times pleading with Moshe to terminate the *makka*, while on occasion, he seems to ignore the *makka*.

We will explore the thoughts of two *achronim*, the Or Hachaim Hakadosh and the Kli Yakar.

Or Hachaim: It is interesting to note that with respect to the first two *makkot*, Dam and Tzfardea, Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate the *makka*. Yet, Pharaoh's response to each *makka* differs. After the *makka* of Dam, Pharaoh returns to his palace, seemingly unconcerned. However, after the *makka* of Tzfardea, Pharaoh begs Moshe to remove the frogs. Why did Pharaoh react differently to Tzfardea and implore that Moshe remove the frogs?

The Or Hachaim suggests that Pharaoh consistently requests Moshe's intervention only when he feels his life is threatened. The *makka* of Dam was uncomfortable but not life threatening. The *makka* of Tzfardea was life threatening. Several *rishtonim* explain that this included not only frogs but also alligators and crocodiles. Even if it was just frogs, they were all over and people began choking on them. Some frogs are poisonous as well. Due to the apparent threat on his life, Pharaoh summoned Moshe to terminate the *makka*.

With respect to the third *makka*, Kinim, it was uncomfortable but not life threatening. Arov, where wild animals roamed the streets, was life threatening and so Pharaoh asked Moshe to remove them. Dever, the animals dying, was not life threatening. S'chin afflicted the body but was not life-threatening. Barad - fire and hail falling from the sky, with loud

thunder and lightning was scary and dangerous and therefore Pharaoh once again seeks refuge and sympathy from Moshe. Arbeh - locust, was life threatening as they covered the sky and were everywhere. Choshech - darkness, was dangerous but we don't see Pharaoh summoning Moshe, perhaps because he couldn't move. *Makkat Bechorot* - is the final blow, where it was life threatening to his own children and so Pharaoh demands that Moshe leave town. Once we examine each *makka* individually, we recognize the pattern - when Pharaoh fears for his life, he summons Moshe to cease the *makka*.

Kli Yakar: The Kli Yakar offers an explanation as to why in the Haggadah we group together the first three, second three and last four *makkot* - דצ"כ עד"ש באח"ב - Citing the Abarbanel, he suggests that there were three cardinal areas where Pharaoh was skeptical and doubted Hashem. First - with respect to G-d's existence. Second, with respect to *hashgacha pratit* - Divine Providence. Third - with respect to G-d's dominance over nature. Pharaoh did not believe that Hashem could change nature, but rather that G-d was controlled by nature.

Each group of *makkot* was to counteract one of these fallacies. After the first *makka*, Hashem declares: בזאת תדע כי אני ה' - from these events will be revealed G-d's existence. The assault in this group of *makkot* is on the Nile which was worshiped as a G-d by the Egyptians. By turning the Nile into blood was a direct attack on the item they deified. The frogs sprung forth from the Nile as well, to show that their G-d cannot control what was transpiring. By *kinim*, Pharaoh's magicians were unable to mimic the *makka* and admitted it was indeed an act of G-d. Therefore, the first group of *makkot*

proved to Pharaoh that there in fact is a G-d!

To disprove the theory that there is no Divine Providence - G-d states after the fourth *makka* (the first in the second group of *makkot*) למען תדע כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ - highlighting that Hashem is in fact active with respect to each individual as this group of *makkot* distinguished between the Jews and Egyptians. Arov and Dever, the wild animals and the dying animals occurred in Egypt but not in Goshen where the Jewish population resided. This is to highlight that Hashem can distinguish between individuals - there is Divine Providence. The third *makka* in this section, S'chin - boils first affected the magicians *חרטומים* and only afterwards the remaining Egyptians, again to emphasize that G-d can distinguish between each and every individual.

After the seventh *makka* (the first in the last group of *makkot*), Hashem states: בעבור תדע שאין כמוני בכל הארץ - there is no other like Hashem in the land. Each *makka* illustrates how Hashem controls nature. During this group of *makkot* the sun, which was also worshiped by the Egyptians was covered (Barad - hail; Arbeh - locust; Choshech - darkness and *Makkat Bechorot* - death of firstborn). This exemplifies G-d's dominance over nature. Hashem can cover the sun and create a situation that did not exist before or afterwards as it states with respect to the locust לא־הָיָה לוֹ אֲרֶבֶה כְּמֵהוּ וְאֶחָדָיו לֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ.

The Kli Yakar's explanation enlightens us and clarifies why these specific *makkot* were selected and their respective order. It was all part of a Divine plan to undermine the disbelievers and to portray Hashem's greatness in all respects. May we recognize and appreciate the hand of G-d in our daily lives!

Parshas Va'era: The Right Man for the Job



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshas Va'eira*, the Torah tells us of Pharaoh's refusal to set the Israelites slaves free. As a punishment for this refusal, Pharaoh and his country, his advisors and citizens, meet the beginning of the end with the first of ten plagues, *Makkas Dam* – the Plague of Blood. From the Plague of Blood, the Torah moves on and tells us of Frogs, Lice, Wild Beasts, Pestilence, Boils and Hail. Egypt is on the way to utter destruction through the mighty Hand of Hashem and His messenger, *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

And yet, when we first meet our first and greatest leader, Moshe, at the burning bush in last week's *parsha*, and then again in the beginning of this week's *parsha*, we are repeatedly told of his speech impediment.

And Moshe said to Hashem, please my G-d. I am not a man of words, not from yesterday nor from the day before yesterday, nor from the time You have spoke to Your servant – for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue (4:10).

And Moshe spoke before Hashem saying: Behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me? וְאֲנִי עֵרֶל שִׁפְתַּיִם and I am of closed lips (6:12).

And, yet, Hashem, Who has chosen Moshe for this monumental, nation-altering, destiny-changing task, knows that Moshe is the right man for the job.

How can it be that Hashem believes in Moshe – from the moment the house was filled with light when he was born (see Shemos 2:2 with Rashi there) – yet Moshe, on some level, does not believe in himself?

Perhaps the Torah is teaching us a powerful *mussar has'kel*.

We often *strive* to see the good in those around us, viewing the world, and others

– be it friends, family, neighbors, community members – with an *ayin tova*, a “good eye.” As the children of Hashem, we strive to focus on the positive, to see each member of *Am Yisrael* as crucial, as important, as necessary to the health and survival of our people!

When we see the good in others, we are united, and when we are united, we are *עם אחד* – *one nation*, *’ה עם* – *with Hashem*.

It behooves us to know what our enemies know: that despite our differences, we are all part of *’ה עם* – *the nation of Hashem*.

Rav Soloveitchik *zt”l* teaches, “When we are faced with a problem regarding the defense of Jewish rights in the non-Jewish world, all groups and movements must be united. There may not be any division in this area, because any friction in the Jewish camp may be disastrous for the entire people. In the crematoria, the ashes of the *chassidim* and pious Jews were put together with the ashes of the radicals and the atheists. And we all must fight the enemy, who does not differentiate between those who believe in G-d and those who reject Him.”

However, though we strive to see the good in others, at times we forget to see the good, the beauty, the strengths and gifts *within our very own selves*.

We think that there are too many weaknesses within, too many impediments holding us back, not enough courage to get the job(s) done.

Aharon is older than me – send him! The people will not listen to me – why should I bother going!? I am not a man of words or speech, nor am I a powerful orator who should stand before kings. How then will Pharaoh listen to me; and I am of closed lips?

Surely there is someone better, more competent, more qualified to accomplish this task.

At different times in life, we are faced with such quandaries and perhaps some measure of self-doubt... And yet, many years ago, I read a quote that made a lasting impression on me: *Within every person there are strengths he does not know he has until he is called upon to use them.*

Despite our own “blocked lips,” despite all the moments of self-doubt that stand in our way, despite the voice of the *yetzer ha'rah* within who tells us we are just not good enough, not strong enough, not wise enough, not competent enough! It is all falsehood.

R' Tzadok ha'Kohen of Lublin taught: *Just as one must believe in G-d, so too, he must believe in himself.*

We too are tasked with missions in life – perhaps not as lofty or nation-altering as the mission of *Moshe Rabbeinu* – but missions of significance and great importance, nonetheless.

While we work to see the good in those around us, let us not forget to strive to see the good within ourselves as well.

Of her mother, the legendary Rebbetzin Henny Machlis a'h of Yerushalayim, her daughter says, “I got married on a Thursday night between Yom Kippur and Succot... Yom Kippur was Wednesday. Thursday night (was) the wedding at the wedding hall. Friday night, it was business as usual (with scores of Shabbos guests at the Machlis home). Until then, I was my mother's only help in the kitchen, so my getting married left her totally on her own. That Shabbos night, we had scores of regular guests, including our fifty American relatives, on the front lawn (for *sheva*

Continued on page 20

The Rebuke of Egypt for its Haughtiness



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

Yechezkel was a prophet who lived during the time period of the destruction of the First Temple. He himself was exiled to Bavel, together with the aristocracy of Jerusalem, some eleven years before the “churban,” in what is commonly referred to as Galut Yehoyachin. It was Yechezkel's job to keep those exiled in Bavel dedicated to G-d, even though they have left Eretz Yisrael.

In the first 24 chapters of his sefer, in a series of prophecies given during the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 9th years of Tzidkiyahu, Yechezkel explains how and **why** the “shechinah” is leaving Yerushalayim and moving to Bavel. His famous vision of the “maaseh merkava” leaving Jerusalem and ‘landing’ in Bavel reflects his message that the future of Am Yisrael now lies in Bavel.

In chapters 25 through 32, Yechezkel delivers a series of prophecies that censure the many nations who neighbor Israel:

Chapter 25 Yechezkel was a prophet who lived during the time period of the destruction of the First Temple. He himself was exiled to Bavel, together with the aristocracy of Jerusalem, some eleven years before the “churban,” in what is commonly referred to as Galut Yehoyachin. It was Yechezkel's job to keep those exiled in Bavel dedicated to G-d, even though they have left Eretz Yisrael.

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In chapters 25 through 32, Yechezkel delivers a series of prophecies that censure the many nations who neighbor Israel:

Chapter 25 – Amon, Moav, Edom and Plishtim

Chapters 26-28 – The city of Tyre (on the coast of Lebanon)

Chapters 29-32 – Egypt In this unit, better known as “nv’uot ha’Amim,” these nations are warned that they will be punished for both their haughtiness and their rejoicing over the destruction of Yerushalayim.

Chapter 29 (this week's Haftara) is the first in a set of prophecies concerning Egypt, and it opens by describing the reason for the haughtiness of the Egyptian people: “I am going to deal with you Pharaoh, king of Egypt ... who said: The Nile is my own, I made it for myself.” (29:3)

Although this prophecy is given almost one thousand years after the story of the Exodus, the reason for the haughtiness of the Egyptians remains the same. They had become prosperous and powerful because of their natural resource – the Nile River. Its fertile delta and its location near the Mediterranean made Egypt a ‘superpower’ in ancient civilization.

G-d is angered by the Egyptian people at this time, just as He was at the time of the Exodus, for they relate this greatness unto themselves instead of unto G-d. Their control of this wealth and resource led to the haughtiness of Pharaoh and to his attitude that he could enslave other nations. Because of this haughtiness, Yechezkel warns: “Assuredly, thus says Hashem, Lo I will bring a sword against you, and I will cut off man and beast from you, so that the Land of Egypt will become desolate and lay in ruin, then **they shall know** that I am the Lord, **because** he boasted – The **Nile is mine**, and I made it...”

Even when Egypt will recover from this destruction some forty years later, it will no longer be a mighty empire. Instead: “... they shall become a **mamlacha shfala** – a lowly kingdom. It shall be the lowliest of all kingdoms, and **shall not lord over other nations again...**” (see 29:13-15)

In this chapter, Yechezkel mentions an additional sin of the Egyptians, this one more specific to their relationship with Am Yisrael: “And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am G-d, for you were a **staff of reed** for Bnei Yisrael.” (29:6)

What does this metaphor “staff of reed” (“mishenet kaneh”) imply? A “mishenet” (staff) is a walking stick. Usually, a walking stick is made out of strong wood, so that it will support one who leans on it. However, a walking stick made of “reed” (“kaneh”) may look like wood on the outside, but on the inside it is **hollow**. Therefore, it breaks as soon as the user leans on it. This explains the next pasuk: “When they grasped you with the hand, you would splinter ... and when they leaned on you, you would break...” (29:7)

To appreciate this metaphor, we must understand what was happening between Egypt and Israel at this time.

Chapter 29 opens with a precise date – the 12th of Av, Year 10 (since “Galut Yehoyachin”), in other words, about a year before the first Bet Ha'Mikdash was destroyed. Recall that in “Galut Yehoyachin”, the aristocracy of Yehuda was exiled to Bavel by Nevuchadnetzar, while the working class remained in Jerusalem. Bavel appointed Tzidkiyahu as a vassal king, on the condition that he remain loyal to Bavel.

Against the advice of Yirmiyahu, Yehuda joined its neighbors in a rebellion against Bavel. This rebellion was based on a false

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Every Drop Counts



Rabbi Eli Mansour

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Parashat Vaera begins with a series of promises that G-d tells Moshe to communicate to Beneh Yisrael in Egypt. One of these promises is “Ve'lakahti Etchem Li Le'am” – “I shall take you for Myself as a nation” (6:7).

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba, Parashat Naso) comments that this promise was made in reward for Abraham Abinu's hospitality to his three guests. When Abraham welcomed these guests, who were actually angels, he invited them to “take a bit of water” to wash their legs (Bereshit 18:4). In reward for this offer to “take” water, G-d promised that He would “take” Abraham's descendants as His special nation.

The Rebbe of Bobov explained the deep significance of the connection that the Midrash draws between Abraham's offer to his guests and G-d's promise to Beneh Yisrael before the Exodus. Water, the Rebbe noted, symbolizes repentance, as in the verse in Echa, “Pour forth your heart like water in the presence of Hashem.” Abraham's offer to bring the guests “a bit of water” thus represents the value that G-d ascribes to even “a bit” of repentance. While we of course ought to strive to achieve complete repentance, we must recognize that personal change and growth is a long, gradual process that we should be undergoing throughout our lifetime. We cannot make a fundamental change overnight. Change must happen incrementally, one step followed by another. And this is the message G-d

was conveying to Beneh Yisrael on the eve of the Exodus. Tradition teaches that during the period of bondage in Egypt Beneh Yisrael fell to the “forty-ninth level of impurity,” and found themselves on the brink of the fiftieth level, from which they would have been unable to recover. G-d wanted to redeem them despite their dire spiritual state, and so He gave them just two Misvot – circumcision and the paschal sacrifice – through which they could earn redemption. Even this relatively minor move upwards was very significant – significant enough for a nation on the brink of eternal spiritual destruction to suddenly be deemed worthy of a miraculous salvation. In the merit of “a bit of water,” a small move towards repentance, they were taken as G-d's beloved nation.

It is told that Rav Haim Vital, the most illustrious student of the Arizal, asked his great Rabbi how their generation of Jews could possibly earn the final redemption. After all, if Mashiah did not come during the times of the Tanna'im or the times of the Amora'im, who were far, far greater in knowledge and piety than later generations, then why would Mashiah come during the times of the Arizal and Rav Haim Vital? The Arizal answered that to the contrary, Mashiah was far more likely to come in his time than during the time of the Talmudic Sages. In periods when society is overrun by sin and impurity, making it exceedingly difficult to remain faithful to the Torah and to live lives of holiness, Misvot are especially valuable

and significant. A Misva performed under such conditions, when the atmosphere and culture draw a person away from Kedusha, is worth far more than a Misva performed under spiritually pristine conditions. And thus, the Arizal taught, the Jews of his time actually had a better chance of bringing the final redemption, as their Misvot were especially valuable.

Society has, unfortunately, deteriorated to much lower and frightening depths of depravity since the times of the Arizal – and this makes his message all the more poignant and relevant in our times. We must not despair over the dismal spiritual level of our generation, and figure that our Misvot are worth so little considering our low stature. To the contrary – our low spiritual level makes our Misvot especially precious before G-d. As in the case of our ancestors in Egypt, when even “a bit” of Teshuba sufficed to render them worthy of salvation, we can earn G-d's compassion and His miraculous redemption by working hard to do the best we can. Every drop of Teshuva, of Torah, and of Misvot is immensely powerful and significant, and makes a great impact. We should never minimize the significance of any small Misva act, of any extra bit of effort invested in prayer, of any small amount of charity we give, of any small amount of Torah that we study, or of any wrongful act that we decide to avoid, because each and every one brings us and our nation one step closer to our final redemption.

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brachos). My mother, rather than getting stressed out and complaining, said, “This is my pleasure. There's nothing I'd rather be doing.” And Sunday night was Succot,

in the Succah with a house full of guests and another *sheva brachos*. Yet my mother was always with a smile...”

If we look beyond our limitations, the possibilities for success abound. *For just as one must believe in G-d, so too, he must believe in himself.*

The Fulfillment of Hashem's Promises



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
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At the beginning of the parsha, Hashem tells Moshe (Shmos 6:3) “I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov with the name ‘Keil Shakai,’ but My name “YKVK” [the four-letter name of Hashem] did not become known to them.” Rashi explains this pasuk as follows: “It does not say ‘I did not make My name known to them.’ Rather it says ‘My name did not become known to them.’ They did not recognize My attribute of truth personified by my name is YKVK, which implied my trustworthiness to fulfill my word; because I made promises to them but did not fulfill them [in their lifetime].”

Rashi makes a similar comment on the pasuk (Shmos 11:2) “Please speak into the ears of the nation and let them borrow, each person from his neighbor...,” where he explains: “The word ‘נָא’ means ‘please’ [as if to say] ‘Please tell the people [to borrow the Egyptians’ wealth] so that the Tzadik Avraham should not say that Hashem fulfilled his promise (Bereishis 15:13) “And they will enslave them and oppress them” but he did not fulfill His promise “and after that they shall go out with great wealth.”” What is the meaning of Rashi’s comments on these psukim? Did the Avos have such little faith in Hashem that they needed proof and reassurances that Hashem would fulfill his promises?

The Avos certainly had perfect faith that Hashem would fulfill His promises. Nevertheless, until one witnesses the fulfillment of a promise with his own eyes, something is still missing. One cannot sing until he has actually experienced redemption. As the pasuk (Tehilim 13:6) says, “I sing out to Hashem when He does kindness to me.” When can a person sing to Hashem? When “גָּמַל עָלַי,” He does good with the person. When one actually experiences a redemption, he can sing to Hashem. The

Avos believed that their children would be redeemed, but they did not fully comprehend Hashem’s kindness until His promises began coming to fruition at the time of Moshe.

The time of the Avos was a time of potential, a time of promises, but Moshe’s time was the beginning of the time of the actualization of that potential. There are no songs in the book of Bereishis. In Moshe’s time, where (Mechilta Beshalach 3) “[a simple] maidservant by the sea saw what Yechezkel and the other prophets did not see,” the Jewish people were able to sing about the actualization of Hashem’s kindness, as it says (Shmos 15:1) “Then Moshe sang...”

The Ohev Yisroel of Apt, asks why Yaakov Avinu never attempted to kill Eisav his brother by using Hashem’s name, just as Moshe killed the Egyptian later on. He answers that Hashem’s name was not fully revealed in Yaakov Avinu’s time. His time was one of promises, of potential, but not actualization. Yaakov Avinu therefore did not fully comprehend Hashem’s name and could not access its full power, “My name ‘YKVK’ did not become known to them.”

The time of the Avos was a time of collecting promises for the future (Tehilim 13:6), “I trust in Your kindness,” in Hashem’s promises for the future. The time of their children, however, was a time of the revelation of the fulfillment of those promises, a full recognition of the truth of Hashem’s kindness, “My heart rejoices in Your salvation.” As the Ramban explains in his introduction to the book of Shmos, “This [the book of Bereishis, the story of the Avos] was a type of formation of their descendants... to hint and make known the everything that would happen to them in the future. After the formation period was completed, another book [Shmos] began with the actualization of those hints.”

The Avos believed in Hashem’s promises and Hashem even appeared to them with the name Hashem, but they never experienced the actualization of those promises in the physical world. they could not say “I sing out to Hashem when He does kindness to me.”

The prophet Yeshaya (43:21) reveals the purpose of the creation of the Jewish people: “I formed this nation, they will relate My praises.” Our job is to recognize Hashem’s kindness when we witness its actualization and relate His praise.

This difference between the way of the Avos and the way of the children exists today as well on several levels. The way of the Avos is revealed with respect to children and young adults. Their lives are filled with promise for the future. Their time is the period of formation, when they clarify their faith and work toward what they can achieve and attain in the future. They daven, learn, and work on their midos, but everything remains in a state of hope and expectation. They do not yet get to enjoy the sweetness of a full Jewish life. This recognition takes time to attain.

It is the same with the earlier generations. Our parents and grandparents lived through the valley of the shadow of death. All they had was hope for the future. They were unable to sing to Hashem, even if they believed that everything would turn out for the best. They had to wait many years before they were able to witness the actualization of their hopes as they began to watch their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren learning Torah and growing up in the right way.

May we soon merit to see the actualization of all of Hashem’s promises to us with the arrival of the complete redemption, may it come soon in our days.

Between Men and Women



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

“Amram took Jochebed his aunt as a wife, and she bore him Aaron and Moses.”

This is the story recorded in this week's Torah portion, Vaeira. Amram, in other words, married his father's sister. Both Amram's father and his wife were daughters of Levi, the third son of the Jacob-Leah dynasty.

Now, as we know, the marriage of an aunt and a nephew would, in time, become prohibited for the Jewish people and would be defined in the Torah as an immoral and un-G-dly union. An uncle may marry his niece, but an aunt cannot marry her nephew. So why would Amram and Jochebed, two of the great people of Israel at the time, enter into a relationship that would later become forbidden for all of their offspring?

True, during that time, prior to the giving of the Torah, this type of marriage was not forbidden. Still, Amram and Jochebed were fully aware that this union would one day become forbidden and that their grandparents observed the Commandments even before they were officially presented to the people of Israel. Why, then, would they subject themselves to a problematic relationship?

The enigma deepens considering the fact that it was this marriage that gave rise to little Moses, the messenger who would transmit G-d's law to Israel, including the instruction against marrying one's aunt. Yet Moses himself is born precisely from such a relationship! How do we understand the fact the giver of the Torah was the child of a marriage forbidden in the Torah?

To understand this, we must first attempt to comprehend why the Torah permits the marriage of an uncle with his niece while prohibiting the union of an aunt with her nephew?

One of the answers to this question has to do with some of the physical, psychological and mystical differences between the masculine and feminine genders.

Jewish mysticism teaches that a woman's uniqueness lies in her ability to accept and internalize, while a man's fulfillment lies in his ability to project and bestow.

This is expressed, of course, in the physical structures of their bodies and in the nature of their physical union, where the man protrudes and projects while the woman accepts and internalizes. But the biological differences reflect their psychological and spiritual structures as well.

A man's primary satisfaction lies in his power to give, to bestow and to project, while a woman experiences deep joy and serenity in her ability to be there and take it in. Man often feels the urge to change a situation and rectify a problem, while women see the experience of "receiving" as an end in and of itself.

This does not mean to say that a woman does not cherish the opportunity to influence, give and transform. Yet women accomplish these objectives by internalizing rather than by overwhelming; through silence more than through noise; by being rather than by projecting. The Kabbalah states that the souls of most men originate within G-d as a creator, while the souls of most women stem from G-d as an essential being. For man to feel fulfilled he must create, transform, rectify; for woman to be fulfilled she must be.

The solution to this conflict of nature lies not in denying that there is a difference, but rather in each party knowing that there is a difference, and respecting the space and individual nature of the other person.

This is the deeper, mystical reason for the Torah's prohibition against the marriage of an aunt with her nephew. A marriage

between an aunt and a nephew, which would by nature and instinct place the husband in the role of recipient and his wife in the position of the projector and giver, may hinder the full expression of both the wife and her husband. A man must be allowed to project and give, while a woman must be allowed to "be there," to accept and internalize.

This is true about most marriages. Yet our teacher Moses needed to come from a very different type of relationship—a relationship in which the recipient (represented by the woman) will be the giver (the aunt), and the projector (represented by the man) will become the recipient (the nephew). Why? Because Moses, the "man of G-d," was chosen as the Divine messenger who would, for the first time in human history, share with the Jewish people and the world the Divine perspective on life and reality, the G-dly blueprint for life embodied by the Torah. Moses served as the ultimate teacher, mentor and leader, sharing the eternal truths of morality and G-dliness with an otherwise directionless universe, giving human history the dignity of having a moral and Divine purpose.

The main characteristic required to become a conduit for G-d's word is surrendering the ego. In Moses' transmission of Torah from G-d to the Jewish people, a fundamental change was required: The "woman" needed to assume the role of leadership and seniority over the "man." The "woman" needed to be the aunt, and the "man" the nephew. The prerequisite for becoming a conduit for Torah and Divine wisdom lies not in one's ability to project and give, but rather in one's power to accept, receive and internalize.

This is true for every teacher of Divine truth. A rabbi who sees his primary role as a teacher rather than a student—a student of truth and a recipient of ideas and

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Va'era: Strengthening Emunah



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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Rebbe Yisrael Abuchatzeira, zy'a, known as *Sidna* Baba Sali, was one of the great holy-men in modern Jewish history. The name of this beloved and revered Moroccan tzaddik, *mekubal* and miracle worker, means "Our Master, the Praying Father", due to the extraordinary miracles that happened as a result of his prayers and blessings. He truly operated from a supernal realm, and acted in mysterious, hidden, holy ways.

Countless petitioners, Jews of all backgrounds and persuasions, made the pilgrimage to the Southern town of Netivot, where the holy Baba Sali shared Torah, dispensed advice, *tikunim* and *berachos*. The *tzadik's* blessings were famously accompanied by a shot (or full glass!) of *מאחיה*, Moroccan *mahia arak*, an ancient alcoholic beverage sacredly distilled with anise extract. The Baba Sali explained that the word *arak*, ע"ר"ק is *roshei teivos* (an acronym) for *Aseh Ratzon Kono*, "Do the will of one's Creator." Read backward, the same letters mean *Kabel Rinat Amecha*, "Accept the prayerful song of Your People."

As the Baba Sali grasped the bottle of *mahia*, his hand would be covered with a towel to conceal the channel of the heavenly *shefa*. And as the *arak* flowed, so did the miracles. A virtual flood of astounding cures and healings, financial successes, miraculous pregnancies and *yeshuot* were poured out for the Jewish People, strengthening their *emunah* in Hashem.

Rav Mordechai Eliyahu zt'l, who would later serve as *Rishon leTziyon*, Israel's Sefardic Chief Rabbi, was a dedicated Talmid and *shamash*, personal attendant of the Tzadik. In the course of one of the more well-attended seudot hosted in the home of the Baba Sali, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu saw with his own eyes how the Baba Sali

poured literally hundreds of *l'chaims* from the same, single bottle of *mahia arak*. Overwhelmed by the extraordinary sight, Rav Eliyahu excitedly burst out, "Baba Sali! Forgive my impudence in questioning your holy ways...but why turn heaven and earth upside down, change the laws of nature and make such a miracle...why expend such merit and *kochos ha-nefesh* in pouring shots of *mahia*?!"

The great sage and holy man smiled blissfully: "Is there anything greater in this world or the next than the *zechut* of *לשמוח יהודי ולהחיות אותו*, bringing joy to a Jew — giving him a *L'chaim*, a little bit of life, to restore his soul? What else ought a miracle be enacted for?"



The Torah's account of *Yetziyas Mitzrayim* is filled with a litany of miracles, signs and wonders. From Moshe's revelation at the *Sneh Bo'er*, the Burning Bush, to Am Yisrael's sustenance with manna from Heaven, the story of our redemption is replete with *nissim g'laim*, open miracles.

Our sedra in particular has numerous accounts of Hashem's overturning nature. When Aharon and Moshe seek to prove themselves as emissaries of a higher power, Aharon provides a *mofeis* and a series of miracles before Pharaoh and his sorcerers (7:9) The first set of *Makkos*, seven devastating plagues, rained havoc upon Egypt, turning the world upside down and inside out for the sake of the Jewish People.

In each of the plagues, Egyptian society experienced an upending of the natural order and clear revelations of the might and presence of the Ribbono shel Olam. Each plague was spread out over the period of about a month, with weeks of forewarning, prior notice of the severity of

the punishments and the nature of what was going to unfold (*Mishnah Eduyos*, 2:10). Over and over again, the sole purpose of the *Makkos* was stated: "...So that you shall *know* that I am God". The continued enslavement of Am Yisrael, the gratuitous brutality of *gezeiras Pharaoh*, was thus a conscious denial of Hashem's *hashgacha* — a rebellion against G-d.

Just as the higher intention of the *Makkos* was to awaken '*daas*' and bring about awareness of Hashem, increased awareness of and closeness to Hashem is the underlying purpose of every true miracle. The Exodus culminates in *Kriyas Yam Suf*, when *Klal Yisrael* experience collective Divine revelation, literally pointing with their fingers and exclaiming, *זה א-לוי*, "This is my G-d!"

In the worldview of the great Rebbe Menachem Mendel Kotzk, zy'a, truth, authenticity and honest inner work is paramount. The Kotzker and his spiritual heirs eschewed the role of miracles in cultivating God-awareness and *Yirat Shamayim*. The Kotzker cites a mishnah in *Mesechet Megillah* (6b): *יגעתו ומצאתי תאמין*, "If someone tells you 'I toiled and I found success,' believe him (*taamin*, have *emunah* in him)." Only through requisite hard work and toil, *yegiah*, in Torah will we 'find' and internalize *emunah*. Faith that is 'felt' only through witnessing miracles does not have lasting power.

In a similar vein, the Kotzker Rebbe shares an insight from Maariv Tefillah:

עשה לנו נסים ונקמה בפרעה ואותות
ומופתים באדמת בני חם

"He performed miracles for us and vengeance upon Pharaoh, signs and wonders in the land of Cham (Egypt)."

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Hashem's Hand

Mrs. Shira Smiles

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In response to Paroh's plea to end the plague of hail, Moshe Rabbeinu reports that he will pray to Hashem to remove the hail (Shemot 9:29). The narrative continues and we are told that the flax and barley were stricken and broken by the icy fireballs, yet the wheat and spelt were left unharmed. The Ramban and others maintain that Moshe added these particulars in his conversation with Paroh. Why? Further, the Torah explains the reason the wheat and spelt were spared was because they were afeilot. Rashi understands this to mean not yet ripened and quotes the midrash saying that it was 'pilei plaot,' wonderful things happened with these crops. What is Rashi adding by quoting this midrash?

Rabbi Yosef Sorotzkin in Meged Yosef explains that Moshe Rabbeinu was telling Paroh the reason he still did not believe in Hashem even after all these plagues. Every natural phenomenon can be explained by some scientific understanding. The fact

that the wheat and spelt were not affected could be explained by their late ripening; they were not yet fully grown and strong. However, one with the eyes of emunah can see the great miracle here and will take pause to consider the source. Paroh chose to see the crops' survival as nature, not as a wondrous thing.

The Maharal explains the passuk, "How great are your ways Hashem... a simpleton will not know, and a fool will not understand" (Tehillim 92:6-7) as reflecting this idea. What are the wondrous ways of Hashem? That a commonplace event which is a miracle from Above can be viewed by some as simply nature, devoid of Hashem's Hand. Rabbi Tatz in World-mask comments that the word for nature, teva, is related to the word, matbeah, an embossed coin, and tovea, to drown. The choice is in the observer, one can see something as bearing the stamp of the Divine or can drown in the ignorance of truth.

Rav Ezrachi in Birkat Mordechai sees an even deeper message being conveyed to Paroh. Paroh's intransigence was his hallmark. Moshe Rabbeinu was highlighting the limitation of this middah.

The flax and barley which stood strong and upright were decimated. The wheat and spelt were more pliable since they had not fully ripened hence, were able to withstand the strong winds and storm. The message is clear. When one is flexible and adaptable, one can more easily withstand onslaughts in life. To be amenable is not a weakness rather it is a sign of strength and resilience. This was the 'wondrous' thing Hashem did, He allowed these two plants to survive the hail to teach Paroh and us this lesson.

Indeed, this is Chazal's advice, one should be soft as a reed, and not hard as a cedar tree. To withstand life's myriad challenges, we can develop our flexibility, be open to the views of others and adaptable to the changes we encounter.

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feelings that transcend him—is not qualified as a rabbi. If I wish to be a teacher of Torah, I must acknowledge that I do not own this wisdom. I am merely a humble

recipient who craves to learn from everybody and from everything the truths of life, of G-d, of justice.

Moses, the ultimate teacher and leader of all time, needed to be born from a marriage in which the recipient reigned supreme.

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"...Signs and wonders are meaningful באדמת בני חם, in lowly, foreign lands. However, for true growth and long lasting impact on a Yid, there is no substitute for hard work, *limud haTorah* and personal effort."

■ ■ ■

This Shabbos marks Rosh Chodesh Shevat, the day upon which Moshe Rabbeinu began relating *Sefer Devarim*, also called *Mishneh Torah*, "The Review of the Torah",

to the Jewish people (*Devarim* 1:3). While reviewing the major experiences in the desert, this 'additional' sefer also offers a strong dose of mussar and encouragement to strengthen our faith.

May this new month awaken in us increased commitment to *limud haTorah*. And with hearts filled with faith and glasses overflowing with *mahia*, may we merit the miraculous and revealed

blessings of the true *tzadikim*. And may we, through strong emunah, know Hashem.

"It is not me! It is their emunah that makes the miracles." — Baba Sali, zy'a

■ ■ ■

In honor of the Hilulah of Sidna
Baba Sali, this week on 4 Shevat

זכותו יגן עלינו ועל כל ישראל אמן

The Big Protest



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

So how many were really there? In whose name were they protesting? And how should we respond?

The first demonstration in history, takes place right in our parsha: “Now the overseers of the Israelites found themselves in trouble... they came upon Moses and Aaron standing in their path,”... Datan and Aviram, the mythological protesters, block the way of the leaders Moshe and Aharon, and they come in the name of justice, “And they said to them, ‘May G-d look upon you and punish you’” “What disturbed them? The way we are now seen in the eyes of the enlightened world: “For making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers”. Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch interprets, “You have destroyed the impression that Pharaoh and his followers had on our existence, that is, from now on Pharaoh and his followers will consider us as people to be condemned, rotten in moral, social and utilitarian terms. Although they abused us, they allowed our existence for the good of the state, but now that you are awakening among us the ideas of liberation, in their eyes we are people who are shirking their duty, who want to party and will no longer work for the country. With this you have given



Prayer is the oldest mass demonstration in history. At least three times a day it asks for order in the order of prayer, it asks for judgment, it asks for redemption.

them a sword, reasons to kill us.” Isn’t that amazing?! The immorality, the evasion, the not seeing the good of the country... an ancient protest.

And what will the attacked leader do now?

“Then Moses returned to G-d.” He has something to say to them, the demonstrators, but he will return to the place we probably all need to remember: the Great Leader of the capital.

Moshe will not be intimidated by the demonstrators, he will not keep counting how many there are and wishing them harm. He will know that there are those who protest in the name of morality and justice, and that there are those who will turn to G-d directly and pray.

Prayer, says Rabbi Hirsch, is the basis for the idea of criminal justice. The person praying will try to bring justice to light, to distinguish the good from the bad, but above all he wants justice to be seen, for all to see, not just done.

“For the fathers,” G-d says in our parsha, “I was not seen. They believed in me even though I did not keep my promises. Now justice must also be seen. Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.”

Prayer is the oldest mass demonstration in history. At least three times a day it asks for order in the order of prayer, it asks for judgment, it asks for redemption.

G-d has given us the right to demonstrate before Him every day our protest for justice, our hope for peace, and our refusal to give up love. Without being publicized on social media, every day crowds will gather in fixed places, at fixed times, in the heat and in the rain, to demonstrate for peace, for Him to return judgment, for Him to have an opinion, for Him to heal this nation, all of us together.

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hope that Egypt would defeat Bavel and come to the aid of its neighbors.

In Yirmiyahu 37:1-10, we even find an instance when the Babylonian siege on Yerushalayim was lifted due to an Egyptian attack! This led to such high hopes in Yehuda (that Egypt would bring salvation) that false prophets such as Chananya ben Azur predicted the imminent fall of Bavel and the return of Galut Yehoyachin within two years.

Nonetheless, as Yirmiyahu had forewarned, Egypt retreated and Bavel returned in the ninth year to continue the siege that ultimately led to the destruction of the Temple and Galut Tzidkiyahu. Yechezkel comments on this reliance on Egypt, that caused Yehuda to revolt. Egypt, however, faulted on its treaty, like a “mishenet kaneh.” This fiasco led to the final exile of Yehuda and Churban Ha’Bayit.

Later in the Haftara, Yechezkel notes that this prophecy concerning Egypt is about to come true, as Bavel marches its army to Tyre to conquer Egypt. As throughout Yechezkel, the underlying theme is always “v’yadu ki **any Hashem**”. These prophecies, when they come true, will ultimately lead Am Yisrael (and all mankind) to recognize that He is G-d. Mankind is responsible for its deeds and G-d will bring justice.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
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At the end of Parashat Vaera, we read the story of the seventh plague – hail. The devastating hail killed all living things outside – people, animals, and plants. This included the crops of flax and barley, since they had already sprouted. But Moshe told Pharaoh that there remained crops that had not been damaged:

וְהַחֹטֵה וְהַכֹּסֶם לֹא נָכוּ כִּי אֶפְיֵלֶת הִנְהָ:

Some translate the verse (Shemot 9:32) as:

“But the wheat and the spelt were not stricken, for they are late-ripening.”

Others have a different translation for the second grain:

“But the wheat and the emmer were not hurt, for they ripen late.”

Why are there two different translations for the grain תְּמָתָה? Those who translate

it as “spelt.” follow the ancient Greek Septuagint translation, as well as medieval rabbis like the Radak. More recent scholars note that spelt wasn’t found in the region in biblical times, and therefore prefer to identify תְּמָתָה as “emmer.” Emmer was a variety of wheat grown in ancient Egypt, and so is a good match for תְּמָתָה.

Despite the scholarly preference, the plural form found in rabbinic Hebrew, תְּמָתָהִים, is used to refer to spelt in modern Hebrew. However, תְּמָתָה, does not mean spelt (or emmer) today, but rather buckwheat. How did we arrive at the confusing situation where the single form of a word refers to one grain and the plural refers to another?

Well, to be precise, buckwheat isn’t a grain at all, but rather a seed that is similar to

other grains when prepared for eating. And it was never found widely in the Land of Israel in ancient times, originating in China. It only arrived in Europe in the 1400s. However, when it did arrive there, many of the Europeans mistakenly believed it came from the Holy Land, and some thought it was the unfamiliar תְּמָתָה. This identification eventually passed over to the Jews of Europe as well, some of whom adopted the Hebrew name תְּמָתָה to refer to buckwheat. And while it’s indeed strange to have תְּמָתָה refer to buckwheat and תְּמָתָהִים to spelt, living languages don’t always follow the most logical path. Today you can find both products near each other in the same Israeli supermarket, even produced by the same company.

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

My name and my grandfather’s name both appear in the Parsha.
The letters of my name are all contained in my grandfather’s name.
Who am I and who is my grandfather?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

וְהָאֵלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָאֵלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָאֵלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְהָאֵלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָאֵלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָאֵלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל

Ref: 6:23

I am the son of your daughter, who is the daughter of your daughter.
My name is Levi



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