

Potomac Torah Study Center

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Mevarchim HaHodesh (Rosh Hodesh Shevat is Sunday night and Monday)

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We celebrate the return of our living hostages and mourn those of our people who perished during the last two years. May a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Note: we shall be traveling in a “foreign” land (Los Angeles) for the next two weeks. Because of our travels, I shall be unable to post Devrei Torah for the next two weeks. Anyone who wishes to see my archives during this time may do so at PotomacTorah.org .

Note: because I was ill all week, I was unable to prepare a complete package of material this week. I am recycling my introduction from 5784, with a few minor changes.

Vayera opens the third day after Avraham circumcises himself and all the men in his extended household. God informs Avraham that He is about to destroy Sodom and a few surrounding towns because the people there are evil. Avraham understands that Hashem must have told him of these plans because He wants Avraham to argue and try to save the people. Avraham argues that God should save Sodom if there are fifty people in the town who are innocent of the evil crimes. (The Midrash explains that the primary evil is a total absence of kindness, justice, caring for the needy (chesed)). When God agrees, Avraham bargains him down to requiring only ten innocent adults to decide to save the town. (By saving the town, Avraham means not to destroy the city and everyone in it – thus saving the guilty along with the innocent. The reason is that the innocent people should have an opportunity to teach the others so that over time the guilty will repent and become worthy.)

Why does Avraham stop at ten innocent people and not bargain any lower? There must be enough worthy individuals to be role models to influence the guilty to become better people. The question is how many would be sufficient? We know from parshat Noach that he and his family were not enough to make a difference after the flood. The generations after Noach continue to sin until the incident at Shinar, or the Tower of Babel. God sees the people suppressing other cultures and languages to force a common language and culture. The people reject the natural gifts from God (such as stones for building), make their own substitutes (bricks), and build towers to glorify themselves rather than trying to come close to God. Noach and his family are eight individuals. Avraham could conclude from this evidence that eight worthy individuals are not sufficient to influence an evil community to reform. Asking God to save Sodom if it has eight innocent people is a losing argument.

Avraham bargains Hashem down to ten innocent individuals. Lot's family consists of ten individuals: Mr. and Mrs. Lot, two unmarried daughters, two sons-in-law (thus two married daughters), and two sons. (Rabbi David Fohrman discusses evidence in the text to prove that the Lot family comes to these ten individuals.) By bargaining down to ten, Avraham provides a way for the Lot family to have an opportunity to survive and to save even the evil residents of Sodom. The story of Lot's interactions with the people of Sodom and with his family members shows that Lot is unable to convince even his own family members to reform, let alone the other residents of Sodom.

In his parsha class recently, Rabbi Nissan Antine raised the question of how the Sodom incident relates to the war against Hamas. We Jews believe that God can decide when a community is so evil that it must be destroyed, and when it is appropriate for God to destroy any innocent people along with the guilty. However, in the war against Hamas, it is the Israeli leaders and IDF who are making decisions and fighting Hamas. Do humans have the right to risk the lives of innocent civilians when trying to eliminate the evils of Hamas? We humans cannot tell whether any given individuals are terrorists or innocent civilians (except for known terrorist leaders).

Avraham, who tries to model his life on chesed (kindness) in every way, must join the war of the five kings against the four kings to rescue Lot, whom the four kings take hostage. To save Lot, Avraham must intervene and save the King of Sodom, an evil ruler in an evil city. Fighting evil sometimes requires good people to go to war, and sometimes the allies of good people are not themselves the best role models. Avraham refuses to accept any reward or payment for his part in winning the war. He only asks for Lot and his family. Lot, however, decides to return to Sodom rather than to return with Avraham.

Another issue of humans deciding whether they may engage in war arises in Yehoshua, chapter 2. God had promised Avraham that his descendants would take over Canaan when the current residents had become evil enough to be kicked out. That time comes with Yehoshua. Since humans lead this war, should they kill all the people or save the innocent?

Before initiating the invasion of Canaan after the death of Moshe, Yehoshua sends two spies to investigate the security of Jericho and the spirit of the citizens. The spies gain their information from Rahab, the inn keeper whose property is in the city walls. The spies decide that Rahab and her family are innocent and should be saved. Rahab provides information to save the spies and answers their questions in exchange for a guarantee to save herself and her family in the invasion. (Chazal state that Rahab converts, marries Yehoshua, and that her descendants include several prophets.)

Rabbi Antine in a previous shiur concluded that when humans lead a war against evil, halacha requires that they warn civilians (innocents) about their coming invasion and give them an opportunity to escape. The IDF is doing exactly what halacha demands by announcing in advance where and when it is attacking and telling civilians to leave those areas. Israel has been warning the people of Gaza to leave the area around Gaza city, where Hamas has built hundreds of miles of tunnels and left traps with explosives to kill invaders. Hamas has been building its military bases and weapon stockpiles under hospitals, schools, and nursing homes to use the weak and needy civilians as shields for the terrorists. The goal for Hamas is to guarantee that it will be impossible to wipe out terrorists without killing numerous civilians – especially babies, young children, nursing mothers, and elderly – in the process. Hamas is also hiding approximately 220 hostages, presumably in similar locations, to see than the IDF can only wipe out Hamas by killing hostages at the same time. While halacha requires doing all we Jews can to save innocent and defenseless civilians during war, Hamas tries to ensure that as many of the innocent as possible will be killed to fill television and newspapers will ugly stories.

The lessons of Vayera are as relevant today as they ever have been. I hope that this discussion proves useful when we encounter anti-Semites claiming that Israel's ill treatment of poor Palestinians has forced them to initiate the October 7 attack and that Israel is responsible for brutal deaths. The real evil in our world comes from "intellectuals" who argue that others deserve the land of Israel, that the Jews stole the land (ignoring that JNF started funding purchases of land from Arabs in the 19th Century), and that we Jews have no right to any of the land in the Middle East. Anti-Semites are physically attacking Jews all over the world, threatening college students, and making Jews afraid to go out in public. During the time of the Nazis, and earlier during the times of the pogroms and the Crusades, Jews did not have a single place open to Jews. Today we have one safe home – Israel. We must save this home for us, our children, and our grandchildren.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was a child when the allies fought the evil of the Nazis. He frequently identified and spoke out against evil in our midst, such as anti-Semitic incidents in our Maryland community and the oppression of our people for many years under the Soviet government. I suspect that Rabbi Cahan never imagined the brutality and evil that Hamas has illustrated in the past month or the extent of the uprising of anti-Semitic attacks all over the world. When I was young, I took for granted the concept that times are getting better and mankind is making progress. Looking back over recent decades, a time of increasing extremism in many aspects of life (such as politics and religion), and increased danger to our people and civilization in general from Hamas, Russia, China, and Iran – to name a few – it is difficult to remain optimistic. We need to call out against evil and set positive examples, hopefully to do our part to improve our world.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Parshat Va'era: God's Awesome Power in Nature

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

In Parshat Va'era, God begins to inflict the ten plagues on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Our Sages teach that each plague has symbolic significance, not only in its content but in where and how it strikes. The very first plague, that of blood, for example, was not introduced in the throne room or Egyptian halls of state. Rather, Moshe was commanded to intercept Pharaoh in his morning descent to the Nile river. The significance of this setting is explored by the commentaries, emphasized by themes in the haftara, and brought home by events occurring around the world today.

It is fitting that the first plague, turning Egypt's water into blood, results from an encounter on the bank of the Nile, the life source of the civilization there, in the early morning. God specifies both the place and the time at which Moshe should confront Pharaoh: *"Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Place yourself by the bank of the Nile where you will encounter him, taking in your hand the staff ..."* 7:15(. Why did this meeting need to occur in the morning? The Midrash)Shemot Rabba, Va'era 9(provides some background:

"By the bank of the Nile" – Why did Pharaoh go out to the water? Because that villain glorified himself as a god, declaring that he never needed to relieve himself. Therefore, he went out in the

morning]when he would not be observed[. You, Moshe, confront him when he is taking care of his needs.

Pharaoh's early visit to the Nile was not an innocent morning constitutional. It was part of his elaborate deception of the Egyptian people. In order to emphasize his power and standing among the people, he claimed to have supernatural divine powers that made it unnecessary for him to perform normal bodily functions. To maintain this fraud, Pharaoh would steal out in the early hours of the morning to relieve himself in the Nile at a time when no one would observe him.

Moshe's interception of Pharaoh during this ritual intended to disarm and humiliate the monarch, exposing his presumption and hubris for all the world to see. When the Almighty's power revealed Pharaoh's charade, everyone – Israelite and Egyptian alike – could see that God's strength, witnessed through the might of nature, dwarfs any plots and schemes that human beings might devise. The plague of blood thus not only demonstrated God's superiority over Pharaoh, but instilled a lasting sense of awe and humility in all those who saw the Nile running red.

Our haftara also takes up this theme of measuring God's power against the insolent hubris of human beings. In this prophecy, Yechezkel cartoonishly portrays the Pharaoh of his own time as an arrogant crocodile: *"Behold, I am upon you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, great crocodile crouching in his Nile streams who says, 'It is mine, this Nile; I made it for myself"*)Ezekiel 29:3(. This Pharaoh's haughty attitude, which Yechezkel mocks, echoes that of his predecessor hundreds of years earlier, when such ridiculous claims about creating the Nile and controlling it were belied by the plagues of blood and frogs detailed so vividly in our parsha. In this haftara, God similarly pledges to smash the later Pharaoh's arrogance by turning the power of the Nile against him: *"I will fix hooks into your jaw; I will make the fish from your Nile stick to your scales; I will drag you up out of your Nile"*)v. 4(.

This prophecy shows how the arrogance of mankind is revealed when we witness God's control over nature. It is a lesson that is still audible and visible today. The power of nature created by God has been especially clear in recent weeks as winter weather has wreaked havoc in the United States, Europe and the Middle East. In Israel, storms with high winds and torrential rain have taken at least two lives, as well as torn apart human-built structures and disrupted countless people's plans in several cities. Powerful rains and snowstorms also caused deaths, major damage, closures and travel disruptions across the United States and Europe.

Through the power of nature, God reminds us that while humanity is given dominion in the world, we are not its true masters. We remain subservient to God, albeit with capacity in the creative process. No matter the heights of human creativity, cleverness, and achievement, we are not gods, and our futures remain at the mercy of the Almighty. This awe-filled recognition of God that we are enjoined to preserve echoes in both the closing verse of the haftara and the opening verse of the parsha: *"And they will know that I am the Lord"*)Ezekiel 29:21(; *"I am the Lord,' He said to him"*)Exodus 6:2(. When we maintain the proper sense of perspective, when we understand that our own efforts and talents have efficacy and meaning when directed in God's service rather than against it, we know that He is the Lord and we are His junior partners.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Freedom and Truth

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh, if not a lie, then less than the full truth? Here is the conversation between him and Pharaoh after the fourth plague, arov, "swarms of insects" [1]: Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land." But Moses said, "That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as He commands us." Exodus 8:27-28

Not just here but throughout, Moses makes it seem as if all he is asking for is permission for the people to undertake a three-day journey, to offer sacrifices to God and then (by implication) to return to Egypt. So, in their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron say: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival to Me in the wilderness.'"

Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go."

Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword." Ex. 5:1-3

God even specifies this before the mission has begun, saying to Moses at the Burning Bush: "You and the elders of Israel will then go to the king of Egypt. You must tell him, 'The Lord, God of the Hebrews, revealed Himself to us. Now we request that you allow us to take a three-day journey into the desert, to sacrifice to the Lord our God'" (Ex. 3:18).

The impression remains to the very end. After the Israelites have left, we read: The king of Egypt received news that the people were escaping. Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds regarding the people, and said, "What have we done? How could we have released Israel from doing our work?" Ex. 14:5

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At no stage does Moses say explicitly that he is proposing the people should be allowed to leave permanently, never to return. He talks of a three-day journey. There is an argument between him and Pharaoh as to who is to go. Only the adult males? Only the people, not the cattle? Moses consistently asks for permission to worship God, at some place that is not Egypt. But he does not speak about freedom or the Promised Land. Why not? Why does he create, and not correct, a false impression? Why can he not say openly what he means?

The commentators offer various explanations. Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800-1865) says that it was impossible for Moses to tell the truth to a tyrant like Pharaoh. Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenburg (Germany, 1785-1865, Ha-Ktav ve-ha-Kabbalah) says that technically Moses did not tell a lie. He did indeed mean that he wanted the people to be free to make a journey to worship God, and he never said explicitly that they would return.

The Abarbanel (Lisbon 1437 – Venice 1508) says that God told Moses deliberately to make a small request, to demonstrate Pharaoh's cruelty and indifference to his slaves. All they were asking for was a brief respite from their labours to offer sacrifices to God. If he refused this, he was indeed a tyrant. Rav Elhanan Samet (Iyunim be-Parshot Ha-Shevua, Exodus, 189) cites an unnamed commentator who says simply that this was war between Pharaoh and the Jewish people, and in war it is permitted, indeed sometimes necessary, to deceive.

Actually, however, the terms of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh are part of a wider pattern that we have already observed in the Torah. When Jacob leaves Laban's house, with all his family, we read: "Jacob decided to go behind the back of Laban the Aramean, and did not tell him that he was leaving" (Genesis 31:20). Laban protests this behaviour:

"How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war! Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing!" Gen. 31:26-27

Jacob again has to tell at best a half-truth when Esau suggests that they travel together after the brothers' reunion: "You know that the children are weak, and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. If they are driven

hard for even one day, all the sheep will die. Please go ahead of me, my lord" (Gen. 33:13-14). This, though not strictly a lie, is a diplomatic excuse.

When Jacob's sons are trying to rescue their sister Dina who has been raped and abducted by Shechem the Hivite, they "replied deceitfully" (Gen. 34:13) when Shechem and his father proposed that the entire family should come and settle with them, telling them that they could only do so if all the males of the town underwent circumcision.

Earlier still we find that three times Abraham and Isaac, forced to leave home because of famine, have to pretend that they are their wives' brothers not their husbands because they fear that otherwise they will be killed so that Sarah or Rebecca could be taken into the king's harem (Gen. 12, Gen. 20, Gen. 26).

These six episodes cannot be entirely accidental or coincidental to the biblical narrative as a whole. The implication seems to be this: Outside the promised land Jews in the biblical age are in danger if they tell the truth. They are at constant risk of being killed or at best enslaved.

Why? Because they are powerless in an age of power. They are a small family, at best a small nation, in an age of empires. They have to use their wits to survive. By and large they do not tell lies but they can create a false impression. This is not how things should be. But it is how they were before Jews had their own land, their one and only defensible space. It is how people in impossible situations are forced to be if they are to exist at all.

No-one should be forced to live a lie. In Judaism, truth is the seal of God and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. But when your people is being enslaved, its male children murdered, you have to liberate them by whatever means are possible. Moses, who had already seen that his first encounter with Pharaoh made things

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worse for his people – they still had to make the same quota of bricks but now also had to gather their own straw (Ex. 5:6-8) – did not want to risk making them worse still.

The Torah here is not justifying deceit. To the contrary, it is condemning a system in which telling the truth may put your life at risk, as it still does in many tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. Judaism – a religion of dissent, questioning, and “arguments for the sake of heaven” – is a faith that values intellectual honesty and moral truthfulness above all things. The Psalmist says: “Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully.” Psalms 24:3-4

Malachi says of one who speaks in God’s name: “The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips” (Malachi 2:6). Every Amidah ends with the prayer, “My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech.”

What the Torah is telling us in these six narratives in Genesis and the seventh in Exodus is the connection between freedom and truth. Where there is freedom there can be truth. Otherwise there cannot. A society where people are forced to be less than fully honest merely to survive and not provoke further oppression is not the kind of society God wants us to make.

[1] Some say the arov was a plague of wild animals.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

What Is a Fitting Legacy for My Children and Grandchildren?

“And I will bring you unto the land concerning which I raised My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for a heritage (morasha): I am God.” (Exodus 6:8)

Every parent would like to leave an inheritance to their children and grandchildren; some even work their entire lives, denying themselves vacations and little luxuries, in order to amass some sort of nest-egg as an inheritance. And others live in disappointed frustration because they fear they will not have the wherewithal to leave behind a sizeable “will and testament.” What does our Torah have to say about a proper bequest for future generations?

The Bible has two cognate words which relate to bequest: morasha and yerusha. Morasha – which appears for the first time in the Torah in the portion of Va’era with regard to the Land of Israel and only once again, with regard to Torah itself, “Moses prescribed the Torah to us, an eternal heritage (morasha) for the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4) – is generally translated as “heritage”; yerusha is

translated as “inheritance” and is the frequently found form for everything except Torah and Israel.

It is interesting to note that in Webster’s Dictionary, the words “heritage” and “inheritance” are virtually synonymous. The lead definition for heritage is “property that is or can be inherited.” The Hebrew of the Bible, however, is precise and exact. The use of different words clearly suggests a difference in meaning. The different contexts in which the two words “morasha” and “yerusha” appear can be very revealing about different kinds of bequests – and even different kinds of relationships between parents and children, different priorities handed down from generation to generation, which these bequests engender. Let us explore four different possible distinctions in meaning between yerusha and morasha, inheritance and heritage, which should provide important instruction to parents in determining their bequests to their children.

First, the Jerusalem Talmud speaks of yerusha as something that comes easily. A person dies, leaving an inheritance, and the heir is not required to do anything except receive the gift. But just being there is not enough when it comes to morasha. The added mem in this term, suggests the Jerusalem Talmud, is a grammatical sign of intensity, the pi’el form in Hebrew grammar. In order for an individual to come into possession of a morasha they have to work for it. An inheritance is what you get from the previous generation, without your particular input; a heritage requires your active involvement and participation. A yerusha is a check your father left you; a morasha is a business which your parents may have started, but into which you must put much sweat, blood and tears.

This will certainly explain why morasha is used only with regard to Torah and the Land of Israel. The sages remark that there are three gifts which God gave the Jewish people that can only be acquired through commitment and suffering: “Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come” (Berakhot 5a). We understand that neither Torah nor the Land of Israel is acquired easily, passively. The Babylonian Talmud, confirming our earlier citation from the Jerusalem Talmud, specifically teaches that “Torah is not an inheritance,” a yerusha, which comes automatically to the child of the Torah scholar. All achievement in Torah depends on an individual’s own efforts. A student of Torah must be willing to suffer privation. Maimonides writes that on the path of Torah acquisition a person must be willing to eat only bread and drink only water, even snatching momentary sleep on the ground rather than in a comfortable bed (Laws of Torah Study 3:6).

Likutei Divrei Torah

Indeed, no one can merit the crown of Torah unless they are willing to destroy their desire for material blandishments while in pursuit of Torah expertise (ibid. 12). Similarly, the Land of Israel cannot be acquired without sacrifice and suffering. The final test in the life of Abraham and the source of Jewish claim to Jerusalem is the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah; the message conveyed by the Bible is that we can only acquire our Holy Land if we are willing to place the lives of our children on the line. Nothing is more apparent in modern Israel today. A heritage comes hard, not easily, and our national heritage is Torah and Israel.

The second distinction between the terms is not how the gift is acquired but rather how it may or must be dispersed. Even the largest amount of money inherited (yerusha) can be squandered, or legitimately lost. In contrast, a morasha must be given over intact to the next generation. Its grammatical form is hif’il, and it literally means “to hand over to someone else.” Silver is an inheritance, and can be invested, lent out, or melted down or used in whatever way the heir desires; silver Shabbat candlesticks are a heritage, meant to be passed down from parent to child and used from generation to generation.

Third, one must have the physical and objective inheritance in one’s possession in order to give it to one’s heir; that is not necessarily the case with regard to a heritage, or morasha. Jewish parents bequeathed the ideals of Torah and Israel to their children for four thousand years, even when they were living in exile far from the Promised Land and even if poverty and oppression made it impossible for them to be Torah scholars. Jewish mothers in Poland and Morocco sang their children to sleep with lullabies about the beauty of the Land of Israel and the paramount importance of Torah scholarship, singing “Torah is the best merchandise” and Jerusalem the most beautiful city. Paradoxically, one can pass on a morasha (heritage) even if one doesn’t have it oneself!

And finally, a yerusha is a substantive object whereas a morasha may be an abstract idea or ideal. There is a charming Yiddish folk song in which the singer “laments” that while his friends’ wealthy parents gave them automobiles, his parents could only give him good wishes: “Go with God.” While his friends’ parents gave them cash, his parents gave him aphorisms: “Zai a mensch – be a good person.” However, whereas the automobiles and cash were quickly dissipated, the words remained – and were passed on to the next generation.

The truth is that an inheritance pales in comparison to a heritage. The real question must be: Will you only have a transitory

inheritance to leave your children, or will you merit bequeathing an eternal heritage?

The Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

From Success to Self-Worship

In preparation for this week's parsha column, I did a search for famous quotes about success. I found hundreds of examples of high-sounding praises of success, ranging from Winston Churchill's, "Success consists of going from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm," to Benjamin Disraeli's, "Success is the child of audacity."

My own experience with successful individuals is based upon both my career as a psychologist and my years as a pulpit rabbi.

Long ago, I was part of a mental health clinic in suburban Washington, D.C. The clientele consisted mainly of "high profile" government officials whose identity I am forbidden to disclose to this very day. From those famous, colorful, and, yes, successful clients, I learned much about the downsides of success.

As a rabbi, I would often wish success, or *hatzlacha*, to individuals who sought my blessing in their professional careers or for personal projects. I cannot tell you how many of those individuals returned to me with the following complaint: "Rabbi, I credit you with the success I have achieved, but you failed to warn me of the challenges that inevitably accompany the achievement of success."

In this week's Torah portion, *Va'era* (Exodus 6:2-9:35), we encounter the Pharaoh of ancient Egypt, a very successful and extremely powerful man. With his success came the cruel arrogance and unbending stubbornness which eventually led to his downfall.

The Midrash Rabbah (section 8, paragraph 3) informs us that so great was his success that he declared himself to be a god and indoctrinated his subordinates to worship him as a deity.

He went so far as to convince others that he was beyond human bodily needs and that the River Nile, the ultimate symbol of the Egyptian religion and culture, was his own creation.

The great Mussar Master, Rabbi Chaim Zeitchik, of blessed memory, waxes eloquent in his description of the moral and psychological flaws of those who are inebriated by their success in life. I should mention that Rabbi Zeitchik was a student of the Novardik Yeshiva in pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe, a disseminator of its teachings who spent the Holocaust years as a prisoner in Siberia and who left behind a treasure trove of brilliant moralistic essays. Many of those

essays are included in a collection entitled *Ohr Chadash*.

He reflects upon the above midrash as follows:

"The humans who made gods of themselves were drunk with success, crazed by their astounding achievements in life and by the extent of their capabilities. Their reign was so effective that they began to believe in their own powers and became certain that they were unique individuals, unlike all others. They experienced themselves as messengers from above, as possessors of hidden knowledge. They were convinced that they were granted divine authority and magical abilities to rule the world."

Rabbi Zeitchik apparently had a thorough mastery of midrashic literature, for he can draw from a wide reservoir of such sources to prove his major thesis: Success breeds arrogance and self-centeredness, which surprisingly transmute into literal self-worship.

Thus, he cites the Midrash Yalkut Ezekiel, chapter 28 item 367, which enumerates four historic figures who made gods of themselves and were harmed in the process. Besides the Pharaoh of Egypt mentioned earlier, the list includes Hiram king of Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and Yehoash king of Judah.

He comments elaborately on all four of these self-proclaimed deities, but I found his analysis of Yehoash's illusion of grandeur particularly insightful.

You may recall from your study of the Book of Kings that Yehoash was confined as a youth in no less a secret hiding place than the Holy of Holies, the inner Temple sanctuary which was off limits to all but the High Priest on Yom Kippur.

Yehoash had a mentor, Yehoyada, whose tutelage he followed punctiliously, always doing what was correct in the eyes of the Lord. But the midrash relates that upon Yehoyada's death, the princes of the tribe of Judah gathered about Yehoash and declared him divine. They insisted that all who entered the Holy of Holies were punished by death, but that he hid therein for several years and survived. They, therefore, concluded that he must be a god.

Tragically for all involved, Yehoash concurred with their conclusion and accepted the mantle of the divine god. Rabbi Zeitchik maintains that we need not be astonished that a disciple of Yehoyada who kept all the Almighty's mitzvot impeccably would suddenly revert to blatant, and senseless, idolatry and declare himself a god.

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We can understand this seemingly inexplicable transformation of Yehoash, argues Rabbi Zeitchik, if we but consider Yehoash's life experience from his childhood until his mentor's death. It was a life of success, indeed miraculous success. What greater success can a person enjoy than survival in the attic of the Holy of Holies, a chamber even more sacred than the Holy of Holies itself? Such success could easily have gone to Yehoash's head and lead him to affirm that he had divine powers and could be called a god.

We can, nevertheless, wonder about his compliance with his royal advisors. Are we not to assume that his teacher Yehoyada, who taught him all there is to know about the sin of idolatry, had also instructed him not to make a god of himself?

To answer this question, Rabbi Zeitchik refers us to a work by Rabbi Yonasan Eybeschutz, an outstanding Torah scholar of the eighteenth century. The work is a commentary on the haftarat entitled *Ahavat Yonasan* and can be found in the haftarah for Parshat Shekalim.

There, Rabbi Eybeschutz explains that of course Yehoyada taught his royal pupil all about the prohibitions of worshipping false gods. But Yehoyada could not imagine in his wildest dreams that a person could come to think of himself as God. He could not imagine that a normal human being could be foolish enough to become so crazed, so possessed by the demon of excessive success, that he would come to consider himself a god.

Little did Yehoyada know that there are indeed such individuals, people so drunk by their mundane successes that they consider themselves godlike. He could not conceive of flesh and blood humans who feel that they are immune to error and need never consult others for advice and who identify as quasi divine beings to whom we all owe unquestioning loyalty and total obedience.

Whereas the midrash only identifies four such individuals, history and current events indicate that success can overwhelm reason and result in people in power who think of themselves as gods and demand that others assent to their delusions.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Key to Solving Personal Challenges Is to Help Someone Else With That Challenge

A wealthy Jew who had fallen on hard times once came to the Chasam Sofer (Rav Moshe Schreiber 1762-1826; Pressburg) and asked him for a bracha (blessing) or an eitzah (idea) to help him recoup his money. The Chasam Sofer told him that he should give money to another Jew who has fallen on hard times.

This Jew was not thrilled with the eitzah given him by the Chasam Sofer. He suggested: Maybe the honorable Rav did not hear what I said. I said that I have fallen on hard times. I need an eitzah and I need a bracha. What are you telling me? To give out money now? I don't have any spare money at this time! I am facing bankruptcy as it is.

The Chasam Sofer told him that there is a pasuk in the Torah that teaches us that this is the appropriate eitzah when a person has fallen on hard times. Which pasuk in the Torah? The pasuk in Parshas Vaera says, "V'gam (And I have also) heard the screams of the Children of Israel" (Shemos 6:5) The Chasam Sofer asked what the word v'gam implies. Who else heard it other than the Ribono shel Olam? What does it mean "And I also heard...?" The Chasam Sofer answered that it must be that in Mitzrayim, every Jew, when he heard his fellow Jew cry out in pain from the work, felt badly for that other Jew. He then cried not only for himself, but he cried for the other Jew as well.

Therefore, "I also heard the crying..." means that I heard Jews crying for the pain of other Jews. The Chasam Sofer said that we see from here that the path to inspire the Ribono shel Olam to have mercy and save a person from the troubles he is in, is to become a partner and to feel mercy and try to do something about someone else's problems. That is the segula – to give to someone else. You will get out of your financial hole however you will get out of it. But the eitzah is that "v'gam ani sha'mati."

The Meshech Chochma (Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk 1843-1926) says the same idea in different words and in a different context. The pasuk says "Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon and commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." (Shemos 6:13) Chazal say that Moshe commanded them regarding the law of freeing slaves (after six years). While still in Mitzrayim, the Ribono shel Olam gave Moshe the parsha of shiluach avadim! The Meshech Chochma notes that this seems like a most inappropriate context for commanding these yet-Jewish slaves to send their own slaves free! Who had avadim?

The Meshech Chochma says that wherever the Yiden (Jews) found themselves, there have always been wealthier Yiden and less wealthy Yiden. There is always someone who figures out an angle how to make more money. The wealthier Yiden in Mitzrayim bought Jewish slaves from the Egyptians. These Jewish slaves worked for their Jewish owners. Moshe Rabbeinu tells these people, do you know how the Ribono shel Olam is going to emancipate us? When you go ahead and free your slaves,

that will elicit from the Ribono shel Olam to free His slaves as well.

This is the same idea that the Chasam Sofer expresses. A person needs to do more than be aware of his brethren's pain. He must actually feel that pain and do something about it! This is the way to elicit that same response from the Ribono shel Olam for yourself.

An incident is brought from the Rebbe of Zlotshov. After a day of hard work in a concentration camp, the Rebbe came to his barracks and was about to eat his daily ration of bread. He noticed another Jew lying on his 'bed' who was literally dying of hunger. This Rebbe took his own portion of bread and gave it to this Jew. The Jew gave him a bracha: "I bentsh you that you should get out of this place alive."

This was no minor act of sacrifice on the part of the Rebbe. It is not like if you skipped supper one night, you could make up for it with a larger meal for breakfast the next morning. Now the Rebbe was lying there on his bad, famished. He said to the Ribono shel Olam "I received a bracha from this person, but I am not going to make it either!"

At that moment, a kapo walked into the barracks and saw the Rebbe of Zlotshov and noticed the dire condition he was in. The kapo had a sack of sugar cubes in his pocket and he gave the sugar cubes to the Rebbe. The Rebbe said that those sugar cubes saved his life, and he felt that the bracha of the Jew to whom he gave the piece of bread was fulfilled. He received those sugar cubes in the merit that he shared his last piece of bread with that other person. "Anyone who has mercy on his fellow creature, has mercy upon himself from Heaven." (Maseches Shabbos 151b).

This is the same concept as the Rabbinic teaching: "Someone who prays on behalf of his friend and he needs the same thing – he will be answered first." (Bava Kamma 92a). If your daughter needs a shidduch, daven that someone else's daughter should find a shidduch. If a person needs a refuah, pray for the refuah of someone else. The nature of human beings is not to do that. "I have enough tzores (suffering). I have my own problems!" However, that is not the right attitude. The right attitude is that even if you have your own problems, the 'key' to getting out of those problems is to do something for someone else.

This is the lesson of "v'gam (and also) I heard the cries of Bnei Yisrael."

Current Pain Sometimes Mitigates Much Greater Pain Later

The beginning of Parshas Vaera is really a continuation of the end of Parshas Shemos.

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Parshas Shemos ends with Moshe Rabbeinu saying to the Ribono shel Olam "From the time I came before Pharaoh, he has made matters worse for this nation and You have not saved Your nation." (Shemos 5:23). The Ribono shel Olam's response to Moshe's complaint is at the beginning of Parshas Vaera: The Avos (Patriarchs) did not have such complaints (when things were apparently not going as I promised) and you complain about such matters.

The Medrash says, on the pasuk where Moshe complains that matters have been made worse, that the Ribono shel Olam responded to Moshe with a pasuk from Koheles: Tov achris davar m'reishiso. (Koheles 7:8) The literal interpretation of this pasuk is that the end of something is better than its beginning. However, the Sefas Emes interprets differently.

The Sefas Emes says that Moshe Rabbeinu was correct. "What You are doing to this generation of people is too much! You have caused too many bad things to happen to these people." The Sefas Emes concurs: The people did not deserve all these tzores (suffering). So why did the Ribono shel Olam do it? He did it because He knew that the tzores now would mitigate or erase future tzores. Therefore, in the larger picture, it was worth it for them to suffer now beyond what they deserved, in order to save future generations from even worse tzores.

We shared a similar thought several weeks ago: When Yosef met Binyomin, he started crying because of the Beis Hamikdash that would be destroyed in the future. At that time, we asked why Yosef was crying THEN about the Beis Hamikdash? He is finally reunited with his brother Binyomin after all these years. Why is he thinking about the Beis Hamikdash at specifically that moment? We mentioned an insight from the Sefas Emes along the same lines: If Yosef would have been able to hold out longer and put the shevatim (tribes) through greater pain and anguish, the Batei Hamikdash would not have been destroyed.

This means that the shevatim had been experiencing a kaparah (atonement) for what Klal Yisrael was destined to undergo in future generations. Had they suffered more now, then in the future, Jewish history would have been different. They would no longer have needed to endure the tzores that came to them in later generations. But since Yosef could not hold back any longer, their tzores at his hands was capped and the balance was held in abeyance for the times when the Batei Mikdash would be destroyed.

This is the way the Ribono shel Olam sometimes works. One generation needs to

suffer or one person needs to suffer or one family needs to suffer to save them from far greater tzores. Even though the pain right now is terrible, it saves them from worse pain in the future. Sometimes a person needs to undergo a very painful operation but it saves him from future pain. If he does not undergo this medical procedure now, it is going to be much worse for him in the future. On a very basic level, this is the case with inoculations. A person receives a flu shot or a pneumonia vaccine. It hurts now, but that pain pales in comparison to what would be if someone would not receive the shot. This is a very simplistic example, but it is the reality: The pain now sometimes precludes much greater pain.

This, the Sefas Emes explains, is the meaning of this pasuk in Koheles: *Tov achris davar m'reishiso*. The achris (end of the story) is sometimes better because of what happened earlier on. This is what the Ribono shel Olam says to Moshe Rabbeinu: You are right. I have dealt out too much punishment to this nation. They don't deserve it. But this is saving Klal Yisrael from terrible things in the future.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

This coming week, we will commemorate the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In anticipation of that moment, the Torah, at the beginning of Parshat Va'era, gives an important message to us.

Hashem gives a promise that He will deliver the people of Israel from Egypt with these words: "Vehotzeti etchem mittachat sivlot Mitzrayim." "I will bring you out from the burdens of Egypt."

The Chiddushei Harim brilliantly explains that the term "sivlot" – burdens, representing the suffering of our people – comes from the same root as two other words. One is "savlanut" (patience), and the other is "suylanot" (tolerance).

He explains that sometimes, under the crushing weight of oppression, when one recognises that one is exceptionally weak, one exercises patience. One says, "Let's wait for a time when we'll be stronger, and then we will stand up to the oppressor." And, in the course of time, when that doesn't happen, then the "savlanut" becomes translated into "suylanot." One becomes tolerant of an awful situation, and it becomes a way of life.

So, the Torah here conveys to us a critically important message: in the face of wickedness, there is no room for patience. We cannot wait. Immediately, we need to tackle the oppressor in order to neutralise the threat, and there most definitely is no place for tolerance when we are confronted by intolerance and evil.

So, at a time when we recall those horrific events of over 80 years ago, when some six million precious Jewish souls were murdered, let us guarantee that in the face of any evil in the future, we will stand firm, and we, together with others, will not allow such oppression to take place.

The message of our parsha to us is: Never again!

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Long and Winding Road to Redemption - Rabbi Shai Welfeld

Parshat Shemot concludes with Moshe Rabbeinu's initial attempt to free the Israelites from Egypt—a mission that seems to end in failure, as it leads to an even harsher reality for the Israelites. In his anguish, Moshe turns to God with pointed words:

"Why have You done evil to this people? Why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this people, and You have not saved Your nation!" (Shemot 5:22-23)

What was Moshe thinking? After all, God had already informed him that the redemption of the Israelites would be a prolonged process. What changed to provoke such a strong and accusatory response toward Heaven?

It seems that upon arriving in Egypt, Moshe was confronted with the Israelites' immense suffering under Egyptian oppression and was deeply moved by their cries of pain. He struggled to understand why the redemption process needed to be drawn out. Could God not save Israel immediately? After all, it is said that God's salvation comes in the blink of an eye!

In response to Moshe's outcry, Parshat Va'era opens with God reaffirming the promise He had made to Moshe at the burning bush. This time, however, God expands on the nature of Israel's redemption:

"Therefore, say to the children of Israel: I am God, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt, and I will save you from their labor. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you unto Me as a nation, and I will be to you as a God, and you shall know that I am the Lord, your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of Egypt." (Shemot 6:6-7)

These verses, famously associated with the "Four Expressions of Redemption" (vehotzeti, vehitzalti, vega'alti, velakachti—"And I will bring out"; "And I will save"; "And I will redeem"; "And I will take"), are often

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understood as describing one redemption with four facets. However, our Sages offer an alternative perspective:

"From where do we derive the obligation for the four cups [at the Seder]? Rabi Yochanan, in the name of Rabi Benaiah, teaches: From the four redemptions—"I will bring you out, I will save you, I will redeem you, and I will take you." [1]

In contrast to the concept of the "Four Expressions of Redemption," which suggests a single redemption with various facets or components, Rabi Yochanan views these as four distinct redemptions.[2] Each one stands as an independent event, worthy of being called "redemption," and is therefore commemorated with a cup of gratitude at the Seder table.[3]

If we carefully examine the plain meaning of the verses, it becomes evident that each stage of redemption, though incomplete, represents a distinct and meaningful unit, deserving of recognition in its own right.

"I will bring you out" (vehotzeti): This initial stage alleviates the Israelites' suffering under Egyptian oppression, even though their labor continues.

"I will save you" (vehitzalti): This phase ends their labor entirely, yet they have not yet achieved freedom.

"I will redeem you" (vega'alti): At this stage, the Israelites are freed from the status of slaves, transforming them into free individuals.

The first three stages of redemption revolve around a common theme: the liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage. However, the redemption does not conclude here. This brings us to the ultimate stage:

"I will take you unto Me as a nation" (velakachti): This final phase grants the Israelites a unique calling. It unfolds at Mount Sinai, where they receive the Torah and are consecrated as God's chosen people.

Yet Moshe's question still resonates: Why is the redemption of Israel structured as a series of partial stages rather than a single, complete redemption that occurs immediately?

God, in outlining the four stages of redemption, conveys to Moshe that Israel's redemption cannot happen instantaneously because the people are not yet ready to be redeemed in a single moment. Once it becomes evident that the purpose of redemption is not solely to change the Israelites' physical condition but to transform their inner character and bring them to the state of "and you shall

know that I am God," the necessity of a gradual process becomes unmistakable. An immediate redemption from Egypt, without this transformative journey, would simply not be feasible.

This is confirmed later in the text when Moshe conveys God's words to the Israelites: "But they hearkened not unto Moshe for impatience of spirit, and for cruel bondage." (Shemot 6:9)

If the Israelites were unable to listen to Moshe, how could they have been prepared to receive the Torah immediately upon being freed from Egypt? The redemption process was not delayed because of God but because of the Israelites 'unpreparedness. Step by step, God guided them away from Egypt, bringing them closer to Mount Sinai and eventually to the Land of Israel.

The necessity of each stage of redemption becomes evident only at the end of the process. The Netziv, in his commentary on the Torah, identifies the fifth stage of redemption as *vidatem*—"and you shall know"—in contrast to the traditional view that associates the final stage with *veheveti*, "and I will bring."^[4]

Reflecting on this verse reveals an intriguing detail: "And you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of Egypt." Why does God describe the Israelites 'ultimate realization as recognizing that He brought them out from under the burdens of Egypt? Why not state more simply, "And you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt"?

God completes the circle of redemption by returning to the first stage: "I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt." This initial act of redemption was the starting point of the Israelites' journey. Only after experiencing all four stages, could they look back and fully comprehend the necessity of "I will bring you out," along with the significance of each subsequent stage they underwent to arrive at their current state.

We are privileged to live in an era of redemption. Rabi Yochanan's teaching reminds us that God's redemption is not immediate because the Jewish people need time to grow into it. Today, we recognize that while altering physical circumstances is an essential beginning, it is far from sufficient.

God has blessed us with the ingathering of exiles, the reestablishment of a strong and flourishing state, and the revival of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. These accomplishments represent earthly redemption, but they are not the ultimate goal, nor even the central purpose. What remains is the spiritual

redemption of the Jewish people: the internal transformation of individuals and society in accordance with the ways of Torah. Only then can we truly fulfill our mission of creating a dwelling place for God in this world.

[1] Talmud Yerushalmi, tractate of Pesachim 10:1. Also appears in Shemot Rabbah [6:4]: "Four expressions of Redemption are expressed here "And I shall take out; and I shall save; and I shall redeem; and I shall take".

[2] These words of Rabi Yochanan align with his approach in the tractate of Berachot (4b), where he asserts that even a partial redemption is still considered "redemption". "Rabi Yochanan held that redemption also occurs in the evening, though complete redemption does not come until the morning." A deeper exploration of this idea lies beyond the scope of this discussion (ve'ein kan mekom leha'arich).

[3] For further elaboration, see the commentary of the Torah Temimah on Shemot, Chapter 6, Note 5.

[4] Ha'amek Davar on Shemot 6:7 on the words *Vidatem*, "And you will know".

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig - Sharing the Pain

I. "These are the names of the sons of Levi in order of their birth: Gershon, Kehas, and Merari" (Shemot 6:16). The Shelah asks, why does it say "the names of" regarding Levi's sons and not regarding Reuven and Shimon's sons (6:14:15)? The Shelah explains that Shevet Levi did not suffer in galus. Levi knew this and wanted to include himself in the distress of the community (l'hishtateif b'tza'ar ha'tzibbur). Therefore, he called the names of his sons after the galus: Gershon, as they were geirim (strangers) in a land not theirs (see Breishis 15:13); Kehas, as their teeth were kaihos - set on edge (see Rashi Vayikra 26:20); and Merari, as the Mitzrim embittered (vayemararu) their lives (Shemot 1:14). From here one learns to join in the pain of the community even if the suffering does not touch him.

These names were given before galus Mitzrayim (Breishis 46:11). Presumably, Levi was not only privy to the ensuing galus, but also to the fact that his descendants would be spared (see Rashi Shemot 5:4).

II. The phrase "in order of their birth" (letoldosam) is also unique to Shevet Levi. Perhaps, the three names reflect the three stages of galus. The galus lasted two hundred and ten years (Rashi Breishis 42:2). As long as Levi himself was alive, there was no slavery (Rashi Shemot 6:16). This period, which lasted ninety-four years (Sifsei Chachamim), is represented by Gershon, as they lived in a land not theirs. The remaining one hundred and sixteen years of slavery were not identical. Initially, their teeth were set on edge from the hard labor (Shemot 1:11), corresponding to Kehas. The bitterness intensified thirty years later, the third stage represented by Merari. Amram, son of Kehas, named his daughter

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Miriam (from mar), because of the increased bitterness. This period lasted eighty-six years, which was Miriam's age at yetzias Mitzrayim (Yalkut Shimoni 165, see Zayin Ra'anah note 8).

III. The legacy of Levi, passed down to Kehas and Amram, who named Miriam based on the suffering which did not reach him, extended to Moshe Rabbeinu as well. On his first very first foray outside of Pharaoh's house, Moshe saw the suffering of his brethren (Shemos 2:11). He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them (Rashi).

Remarkably, in his comment on "G-d (Elokim) saw B'nai Yisrael, and G-d knew" (Shemos 2:25) Rashi uses a similar expression: "He focused His heart upon them, and did not hide His eyes from them." Hashem was responding to the crying out of B'nai Yisrael because of their suffering (Shemos 2:23). Similarly, "He will call me and I will answer him, I am with him in distress (imo Anochi b'tzara)" (Tehillim 91:16). Thus, Moshe fulfilled imitatio dei, by being in distress over Am Yisrael's suffering. IV. The very next passuk (3:1) begins: Moshe was grazing the sheep of Yisro. The Medrash Raba (2:2) relates the Moshe had mercy on a wayward sheep and carried it on his shoulder. Hashem said, as a result, "You will shepherd my flock Yisrael".

Earlier, Moshe saved Yisro's daughters from the shepherds who drove them from the well (Shemos 2:17). They reported to Yisro, "A Mitzri man saved us from the shepherds" (2:19). The Medrash (Breishis Raba 36:3) teaches: Moshe is greater than Noach. Noach descended from "ish tzaddik" (Breishis 6:9) to a drunkard - "ish ha'adama" (9:20). Moshe ascended from "ish Mitzri" (Shemos 2:19) to "ish Elokim" (Devarim 33:1), a man of G-d.

The Meshech Chochma (Breishis 9:20) explains the contrast: Noach was self-absorbed in his righteousness and did not rebuke his generation. Moshe was forced to flee Mitzrayim because he did intervene to save a fellow Jew (Shemos 2:11-15, see Rashi 2:15). [Alternatively, he saved Yisro's daughters who called him *ish Mitzri*.] Logically, one focused on his own service of Hashem would reach greater heights than one who sacrifices himself for the needs of others. Yet, the Medrash teaches, the opposite is true. Noach, the "tzaddik in peltz", who ignored his surroundings, became a drunkard. Moshe, who cared for anyone who suffered: Bnai Yisrael, a victim of a Mitzri's beating (Shemos 2:11,12), damsels in distress, and even a wayward sheep, reached the highest level attainable, a man of G-d. In contrast to Noach, he saved his entire generation (Medrash Devarim Raba 11:3).

V. Today marks 28 months since the pogrom of 22 Tishrei, Simchas Torah 5784, Oct. 7, 2023. The atrocities of rapacious murderers are unprecedented since the Holocaust. Ever since then, the soldiers and citizens of Israel have suffered terribly: lives and limbs lost, homes abandoned, missiles and drones from faraway foes forcing millions into protected rooms. As Mitzrayim of old, they, our enemies, have embittered our lives. Now, as then, we have cried out to Hashem to end our suffering.

We, American Jewry, like Levi, must include ourselves in the suffering of our embattled Israelis, even if it does not reach us. Like Moshe, we must focus our eyes and hearts to be distressed over them.

The exponential rise in antisemitic acts and rhetoric reminds us that we, too, are in galus. We represent Gershon, strangers even in this kingdom of kindness (Igros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 2:29), notwithstanding unprecedented wealth and prominence.

All our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land have suffered, in vastly varying degrees, during these difficult wartime months, set on edge reminiscent of Kehas. And thousands ofacheinu B'nei Yisrael, batzara u'bashivya, in distress and in captivity, and their families, are victims of life-ending and life-altering terror, tragedies corresponding to Merari.

May Hashem respond to the sincere crying out of worldwide Jewry sharing the distress, past and present, in Eretz Yisrael, as He did in Mitzrayim. May He focus His heart and His eyes upon Klal Yisrael, even as we focus ours on the victims of terror and trauma. "As in the days when you left the land of Mitzrayim show them (Am Yisrael and/or our enemies) wonders" (Micha 7:15, see MHK edition).

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez - Self-Destructive Hatred

All those who hate and wish to destroy the Jews never end up destroying them, but rather only destroy themselves.

There is something about hatred in general, and Jew-hatred in particular, which is self-destructive. Where do we see this? In this week's parasha, Pharaoh is prepared to watch his entire country be destroyed in his mad hatred of the Jews. Moshe comes to him and gives him a chance, saying he should let the Jewish people go or there will be plagues, and Pharaoh isn't moved.

The plagues destroy their water source, agriculture, the entire economic infrastructure, cause diseases to the Egyptian people. Incredibly, in his blind hatred of the Jewish people, Pharaoh continues until in every Egyptian household the firstborn will die. He

later, in Parashat Beshalach, foolishly sends the entire Egyptian army to chase after the Jewish people in the desert, and the war ends when every single Egyptian soldier is drowned in the sea.

Hitler came to rid the world, especially Germany, of the Jews, and he committed such horrific acts killing six million – a third – of our people. He destroyed the entire continent, 40 million Europeans died including 8 million Germans. Hitler cowardly took his life when the Russian army was approaching from the east and the Allies approaching from the west, pulverizing Germany until there was nothing left. Because he came to destroy – he himself was destroyed. *[Excerpted]*

Torah.Org Dvar Torah **by Rabbi Label Lam**

A Shower of Goodness

HASHEM said to Moshe, "Pharaoh's heart is heavy; he has refused to let the people out. (Shemos 7:14)

Here is a \$64,000 question! Why is Pharaoh refusing to let the Jewish People go? Why is he so contrary to the notion of letting the Jewish People exit Egypt? From the very beginning of Shemos, the original problem that was clearly articulated by Pharaoh is that the Jewish People were becoming too numerous and there was a legitimate concern that their population would explode to the point where the Egyptians would be forced out of their own country by this foreign entity. That was the Jewish problem back then and his final solution was to reduce their numbers. Their plan failed because "the more they were oppressed, the more they increased". Now, comes along Moshe and he makes them an offer they should not be able to refuse. Essentially, Moshe is offering to take the problem off of Pharaoh's hands.

That should be a welcome relief but rather it is met with a stubborn unrelenting refusal. Even to the point of bringing total destruction to his own country in the form of the devastating Makos/Plagues he remains unyielding. Why? What is his gain in retaining the Nation of Israel? The Talmud tells us, "AIN ADAM CHOTEH V'LO LO" – "A person does not make a sin unless he gets something from it?" There must be a benefit or a motive. What animates his unmovable denial? This is a basic fundamental question that calls out for a plausible answer. What's his motivation?

I did see a piece in Lekutei Maharan, from Rebbe Nachman, that might have relevance here, and provide a window into Pharaoh's thinking/mindset. In piece number 113 he quotes from the 3rd Chapter of Pirke Avos 3:16; "He used to say: everything is given against a pledge, and a net is spread out over

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all the living; the store is open and the storekeeper allows credit, but the ledger is open and the hand writes, and whoever wishes to borrow may come and borrow; but the collectors go round regularly every day and exact dues from man, either with his knowledge or without his knowledge, and they have that on which they [can] rely [in their claims], seeing that the judgment is a righteous judgment, and everything is prepared for the banquet."

Seeking the meaning of the statement here, "the collectors are collecting with his knowledge and without his knowledge". He quotes the Baal Shem Tov; "That before any serious decree comes to the world, G-d forbid, all the nations are gathered together to adjudicate the judgment. Even the one about whom and at whom the decree is aimed is asked first. Certainly, if they would ask him explicitly about him, he would refuse and say the judgment is not fitting for him. He would rebuttal the accusation and declare it unjust. So, they ask him about a similar situation, and he provides the final approval to the judgment against him, and that seals his fate.

So too, we find by Dovid HaMelech when he was approached by the Navi Nosson and he told him the story of how a man that had one was taken advantage of by another man that had a big flock. Dovid agreed in principle that the one with many sheep was wrong, and so Nosson pointed out to Dovid that he had done so in the incident with Batsheva. The judgement was made by Dovid with the declaration of his own mouth. That's what it means that theses collectors are collecting with and without the person's knowledge. It is with their knowledge that they decide their own fate, but it is without their knowledge because they do not know at the time that it is on themselves that they are passing judgment..."

With this in mind, I can imagine that Pharaoh is consciously or unconsciously asked by the highest heavenly court, "What should be done to a nation that rebels against its master? He thinks that it must be about the Jewish People, but in reality, it is about him. He is the one who states so boldly, "Who is HASHEM that I shall listen to His voice!?" So, he declares with certitude, "They must be brought to their knees and be made to submit".

So, Pharaoh himself brought all of what he intended for the People of Israel on his own head, and in doing so he taught us a powerful and important lesson for all time. The Talmud tells us, "With the measurement that we judge others, we are judged!" Looking kindly at and wishing only good for others invites upon us a shower of goodness.

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

The Vatican Commission and its Omission -

Last week, the Catholic Church released the report of the "Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews," in implementation of the decision of the Second Vatican Council of 1965. Just yesterday, in a meeting between the Pope and a number of Jewish leaders, this document was given further, oral confirmation.

The reactions to the documents were more or less predictable. In Catholic and more assimilationist Jewish quarters, there was an expression of great satisfaction. The Orthodox "establishment" in Israel responded with outrage. IJCIC (the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultations) came out with a more balanced but, somewhat surprisingly, sharply annoyed reaction.

There are three major areas that ought to be discussed with regard to this development: anti-Semitism, the State of Israel, and purely religious relationships. In considering the Vatican statement, which clearly and unambiguously rejects anti-Semitism, one must look at it, as it were, bifocally: from both a historical and a contemporary perspective.

Historically, this is unquestionably a most welcome development. The Church is clear, humane, and sympathetic in its attitude to Jews and in its contrition for the long history of anti-Semitism which has afflicted it. Compare it to close to 2000 years of religiously inspired anti-Semitism, and you appreciate that this kind of statement is indeed a watershed. Who would have thought, a mere forty or fifty years ago, that the same Church whose priests were regularly preaching anti-Semitic sermons at Easter and other occasions, would now disavow the same teaching of hatred? And yet, history does not stop at any point; it includes contemporary life as well. And if we view this statement from a contemporary vantage, then we must remember that 35 to 30 years ago there occurred the most disgraceful and horrendous episode in the history of mankind, the Holocaust. From this Holocaust, no matter what the present Pope says about his former chief, Pope Pius, the Church emerged tainted and morally compromised. Maybe Pius did help save a few individual Jews here or there. But only Heaven knows how many thousands upon thousands of Jews owe their death to his passivity and indifference. No whitewash can ever make us forget or forgive the Pope of Silence.

Therefore, the statement against anti-Semitism by itself, as mere words, is no longer adequate. It is too late for that! At this stage of history, no statement can do, because the abhorrence of anti-Semitism by those historically guilty of it must now be expressed in the form of compensation.

What compensation do I have in mind? Simply this: to affirm forthrightly the right of

the Jewish people to the Land of Israel! Why specifically this form of "compensation"? Because of the rational and reasonable Jewish doctrine of *מִדְאָתָן נְגָד* principle of moral equivalence: the punishment must fit the crime, and the repentance must be appropriate to the sin. For the last eighteen centuries, the Church has pointed to the People of Israel as prodigals, as renegades, as deicides. They "proved" our "guilt" by pointing to us as "the wandering Jews," by our exile from the Land of Israel. They seized upon our separation from the Land to intensify their anti-Semitism. Hence, if they wish to atone for this heinous, age-old sin, then they must, once and for all, acknowledge our unquestioned right to return to that land.

And this, indeed, is one of the two points for which the Jewish groups have faulted the Vatican Commission: one, an error of commission, and the other, an error of omission. The error of omission was: there was no mention of the State of Israel in the document. It is a most grievous and deplorable failure.

If I could overlook the role of the Church in World War II, I would be willing to dismiss the angry statements of Minister Raphael and Chief Rabbi Goren as extravagant overreactions. But not now.

It is true, the Church has thorny political problems because of the pressure of the Arab countries, and the need for it not to antagonize them. I might add, as a member of IJCIC who dealt with the Protestant groups, the World Council of Churches, that the Protestants are farworse in this respect. They are much more willing to "sell out" their relationship with Jews, and to forget their participation in the Holocaust, in order to win a few souls and make inroads in the Middle East.

But with all our sympathetic understanding for the Church's political problems, and they are many, simple justice cries out in the words with which God challenged Abel, the first, *fratricide* in history, "קֹל דָם אֲחִיךָ צַעַקִים אֲלֵי מִן הָאָדָם" The voice of the blood of your brother calls out to me from the earth on which it was spilled." Oceans of Jewish blood call out to the Catholic Church to atone for its sins in the only way open to it. And there is no answer... The second area concerns an error of commission, its statement on religious relationships. The report asks for dialogue in the fullest sense. Yet the Church will not renounce its conversionist goals. It disguises it in a number of euphemisms: it calls upon the Church to continue to "preach," "witness," "teach." True, it insists that this be done with "the strictest respect for the religious liberty" of Jews. But still, the missionary element is not given up. Moreover, with all its demands that it purge itself of the vicious distortions of the *Humash* (which it calls the "Old Testament"), the document implies that it, and by extrapolation

Likutei Divrei Torah

all of Judaism, is inadequate without the "New Testament."

Jewish groups in the United States have responded rather petulantly: How is dialogue possible if one partner of the dialogue does not renounce his intention to convert the other? I agree and I disagree with these Jewish groups. More precisely, because I agree, I disagree.

Yes, genuine dialogue is impossible if any one side seeks not to understand but to convert the other. But in this I disagree with my Jewish friends: they are upset, and I am not. I am not disturbed because I never approved of theological dialogue with other faiths!

Frankly, if the Catholic would ask me for my advice, I would tell them that they are wasting time and effort in trying to convert Jews. First of all, their success is extremely limited. The real danger of conversion to Jews comes from the evangelistic fundamentalist Protestant sects, from the Ashrams of various Oriental religions, and the heartless and soulless secularism which swallows up so many Jews. Furthermore, the Catholics have so much of a job to do in converting Christians to Christianity, that they ought not to spend any more time and effort in trying to convert Jews to Christianity.... I have the same argument against Jews who constantly counsel us to undertake drives to proselytize non-Jews to Judaism: We have enough of a task in making Jews Jewish, that we have little time or energy or effort left for making non-Jews Jewish.

But, if the Catholic Church is evangelical, and if the belief of Catholics calls upon them to attempt to convert Jews – without inquisitions and force and bribery and the exploitation of human misery – that is their prerogative. We have no right to demand that they change their theology to accommodate us, even as we have every right and obligation to resist and to counter them on the same level as they make their efforts.

Similarly, they have a right to think whatever they want about the "Old Testament" – and we assuredly shall deny any relationship between their scriptures and ours. We shall never "negotiate" towards a belief that the "Old Testament" is either illuminated, cancelled, or fulfilled by the "New Testament!"

Does this preclude religious dialogue? Yes, it does. But it does not preclude reciprocal human relations, respect, mutual efforts, towards the goal of a humane society which will be based on the dignity of man, on justice, on compassion.

It is fascinating that the two major points we have been discussing, the Land of Israel and the Torah of Israel, are related to each other by a *midrash* tradition which applies to this morning's reading.

We read that in bringing the message of divine redemption to his enslaved brothers, Moses said on behalf of the Lord: *וְהִבְאֵר אֶתְכֶם וְנֹתֵן לְכֶם מִרְשָׁה אֲבִי הָאָרֶץ...* And I shall bring you to the Land.... And I shall give

it to you as an inheritance, I am the Lord.”“ An old tradition relates the word **מִורשָׁה**, inheritance or heritage, in the verse just quoted to the same word in the verse at the end of Deuteronomy: **תּוֹרָה צָה לֹן מִשְׁה מִרְשָׁה קְהִלָּה** “**בְּקַעְעַי** Moses commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.”

The same word **מִרְשָׁה** appears in both verses. The two heritages, the Land of Israel and the Torah of Israel, are inextricably linked to each other.

Deny one, and most assuredly the other will be denied to you. Reject the relationship of the people to the Land, and there can be no Jewish religion – Jews in the Diaspora must remember this. Reject the Torah of Israel, and the People will never remain in the Land – and this is something the Jews in the State of Israel must understand.

Each of them, Land and Torah, is an inheritance of Israel and Israel alone. Non-Jews may visit and live in Israel, they may read and believe words of the Torah, but both the Land and the Torah give themselves wholly only to the People of Israel.

Interestingly, the Church too accepts this linkage that is implied in the tradition or As I said before, the Church interpreted the loss of the Land of Israel, the end of independence, as the loss of that other “inheritance,” the Torah and the chosenness of Israel. It interpreted exile from the Land as rejection by G-d. In our days, the equation reads as well in the other direction: the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the return to the “inheritance” of the Land in our days, has created enormous theological problems for the Church, as their age-old attack on that other **מִרְשָׁה**, the Torah, has begun to crumble! So, despite the many welcome features of this Vatican statement, the old confrontation of Judaism and Christianity remains unresolved.

We will not compromise our **מִרְשָׁה** (inheritance) of the Land Israel by surrendering the State which we won in blood and tears – blood and tears necessitated to such a great extent by the stance of the Church. And we will never compromise the integrity of our other **מִרְשָׁה**, that of the Torah. We are not interested in internationalizing Jerusalem, which the Vatican has long demanded. And we are not interested in the common spiritual patrimony of our faiths, the “Judeo-Christian heritage,” whether in prayer or in any other cultic experience, which the Vatican now suggests.

When the Pope asks for a dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, we must respectfully but firmly decline. When he asks for a dialogue between Jews and Christians, we can respond that for the purpose of social goals, we accept with alacrity. Jews and Christians can and should have civilized and humane relations. They should work side by side to correct the ills of the world, to build a good

society – without blurring profound religious differences and distinctions.

We affirm that our twin heritage, our double **מִרְשָׁה**, will retain our undiminished commitment. What we receive from the past, we will pass on to our children and children’s children – to the end of time.

It is our confidence that the Christian world, which challenges our right to either or both of these “inheritances,” will eventually concede our unimpeachable claim to both – when the exile will have come to an end, when the redemption will have come to an end through our righteous Messiah, **מִשְׁיחַ צְדָקָנוּ**.

Vaeira 2007

by **Rabbi Berel Wein**

Stubbornness can be a virtue or a terrible character defect. When it is a virtue, we call it tenacity. When it is a defect, it is just plain foolish and counter productive. Pharaoh's stubbornness, as exhibited in this week's parsha, is an example. His advisers inform him that Egypt is headed for disaster because of his stubbornness, but he refuses to give in to the reality of the series of plagues that threaten to decimate Egyptian society.

The Torah tells us that his tenacity was reinforced by the fact that God hardened his heart. The commentators, especially Maimonides, judge that to mean that the Lord gave him the courage of his convictions not to be influenced by the events transpiring in his country but to continue on his evil path to enslave the Jewish people.

Hardening his heart did not influence Pharaoh's choices in the matter. It merely allowed him to transform what previously appeared to be tenacity into ultimate foolishness and disaster. Hitler, Stalin, Mao and other such leaders displayed this same reckless stubbornness over the past century, resulting in the destruction of societies and the deaths of tens of millions of people.

Because of his behavior, Pharaoh becomes the paradigm for the self-destructive trait of foolish stubbornness. The Jewish people are also characterized as being a stubborn people. This trait has served us as well when we were and are tenacious in preserving our values and traditions. It is a foolish trait when we continue the policies and misbegotten certainties that have always led to our tragedies and misfortunes. Rashi and Midrash teach us the source of Pharaoh's suicidal stubbornness. It lay in his belief in himself as a god – arrogant and convinced of his own infallibility. People who are never wrong never have to change their policies, beliefs or behavior.

I am reminded of a sign that I once saw on the desk of a prominent public figure that said: "Don't confuse me with the facts; my mind is already made up!" He was joking about it (I think) but that danger lurks in all of us. Once we are convinced of the absolute rectitude of our position, we not only are tenacious in maintaining it, we become downright blindly stubborn. Moshe meets Pharaoh at the river's edge where he went to perform his bodily functions. Pharaoh is exposed there - not as a god but only as a mortal man. Moshe means to teach Pharaoh that the justification for his stubbornness – his sham sense of infallibility – is itself false. A little humility on the part of Pharaoh would have saved himself and Egypt a great deal of grief. That is why the Torah stresses that the desired quality for true leadership is humility.

Moshe becomes the paradigm for humility just as Pharaoh – his arch-nemesis – is the paradigm for arrogant stubbornness. This lesson of wise tenacity versus foolish stubbornness exists in all areas of human life and society – family, community, national policy and personal development. May we be tenacious enough in life to avoid foolish moments of harmful stubbornness.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

[CS – late breaking dvar torah added:
from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
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date: Jan 15, 2026, 2:49 PM

subject: **Rav Frand - Learning Kovod Shamayim from the Tzfardeia**

Learning Kovod Shamayim from the Tzfardeia

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1365 – Giving the Benefit of the Doubt – Does it Apply to Everyone? Good Shabbos!

Learning Kovod Shamayim from the Tzfardeia

The pasuk in Parshas Vayera says, "And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Say to Aharon 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the

canals, and over the reservoirs, v'ha'al es hatzefardiim (and raise up the frogs) over the land of Egypt.'" (Shemos 8:1)

The Baal Haturim, in a classic comment, notes that the word v'ha'al appears exactly twice in Chumash. Once here – "v'ha'al es hatzefardiim" – and again in connection with the death of Aharon: "Take Aharon and Elazar his son, v'ha'al osam (and bring them up) to Hor Hahor." (Bamidbar 20:25).

Like many comments of the Baal Haturim, this observation is a riddle. If there are only two times in the Torah that the word v'ha'al appears – once regarding the tzefardiim (frogs) and once when Aharon died – there must be some kind of connection between the two. Here the Baal Haturim does us the favor of explaining himself (which he doesn't always do).

The Baal Haturim cites the famous Gemara (Pesachim 53b): "What did Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya see that motivated them to be willing to give up their lives by allowing themselves to be thrown into a fiery furnace? They made a kal v'chomer for themselves from the tzefardiim. The pasuk says, "...they shall ascend and come into your house and your bedroom and your bed, and into the house of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls." (Shemos 7:28) Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya reasoned: If the tzefardiim, who were not commanded to make a kiddush Hashem (sanctify G-d's name), nevertheless (assuming that they jumped into heated ovens) they allowed themselves to die, giving up their lives to fulfill the word of Hashem, then we, who are commanded in the mitzva of kiddush Hashem, must certainly be prepared to give up our lives.

This was the kal v'chomer that Chananya, Mishael and Azarya made for themselves: If the tzefardiim jumped into the oven when they had the option of jumping elsewhere (the house, the bedroom, the beds, etc.), we certainly must be prepared to jump into Nevuchadnezzar's furnace!

The Baal Haturim explains the relationship between the two occurrences of the word v'ha'al in Chumah as follows: The Medrash says that all the tzefardiim from the second plague died (Shemos 8:9-10) except for the tzefardiim who jumped into the ovens. They survived. The Baal Haturim says: Moshe and Aharon who had the opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem (by speaking to the rock at Mei Meriva) and did not do so, died. This is what the two v'ha'als have to do with each other.

The truth is that Tosfos asks the following question in Maseches Pesachim: Why does the Gemara say that Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya decided to give up their lives based on learning a kal v'chomer from the tzefardiim? This is Hilchos Kiddush Hashem 101: There are three cardinal sins for which a person is required to give up his life rather than transgress those aveiros. They are Avodah Zarah, giluy arayos, and shefichas dominim (idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder). This is basic halacha which does not require a logical kal v'chomer derivation from tzefardiim!

Tosfos answers that this wasn't really Avodah Zarah. The statue they were asked to bow down to was not really an idol. It was merely a statue Nevuchadnezzar made of himself for his own honor. Strictly speaking, it was not Avodah Zarah so there was no ye'hareg v'al ya'vor (martyrdom) requirement. Why then were they prepared to give up their lives if there was no halachic requirement to do so? The Gemara explains that it was because they made a kal v'chomer from the action of the tzefardiim: The tzefardiim also had the option of jumping into the beds or bathtubs, but they chose to jump into the ovens, risking death, so we will do the same!

Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz (1887-1964) was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Brooklyn. He was responsible for bringing over the Mir from Europe. He once made an interesting observation: The truth of the matter is that people should have given their lives to not bow down to the statue of Nevuchadnezzar for the simple reason that albeit it wasn't Avodah Zarah, bowing down to a human statue still reflects a lack of kavod Shamayim (honor of Heaven). If all the Jews would bow down to the statue of this midget (which is how the Gemara refers to

Nevuchadnezzar) and no one would make a statement and stand up for kavod Shamayim, that itself is a chilul Hashem! Everyone should have asked themselves, "Hey, at least one of us needs to object to this brazen offense to kavod Shamayim!" Someone needs to make a statement. But everyone could say: Yes. SOMEONE needs to make a statement but it doesn't need to be ME that makes that statement. I don't need to give up MY life. No one wanted to be the person who made that statement.

However, Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya said to themselves: Remember the tzefardiim. They also had options: The Ribono shel Olam said: Jump into the houses, and into the bedrooms, and into the beds. And also jump into the ovens. Each tzfardeia could have argued: "Let some other tzfardeia jump into the oven! Why do I need to jump into the oven?" Said Rav Kalmanowitz – this is the lesson over here. There is always someone else that can do anything. Everyone else can always say "Let that other fellow do it." But Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya learned from the tzefardiim that you grab the opportunity to be mekadesh shem Shamayim. The person who decides to do it receives eternal reward. That is what we learn from the tzefardiim.

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Parshat Va'era: What Is a Fitting Legacy for My Children and Grandchildren?

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone"And I will bring you unto the land concerning which I raised My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for a heritage (morasha): I am God." (Exodus 6:8)

Every parent would like to leave an inheritance to their children and grandchildren; some even work their entire lives, denying themselves vacations and little luxuries, in order to amass some sort of nest-egg as an inheritance. And others live in disappointed frustration because they fear they will not have the wherewithal to leave behind a sizeable "will and testament." What does our Torah have to say about a proper bequest for future generations?

The Bible has two cognate words which relate to bequest: morasha and yerusha. Morasha – which appears for the first time in the Torah in the portion of Va'era with regard to the Land of Israel and only once again, with regard to Torah itself, "Moses prescribed the Torah to us, an eternal heritage (morasha) for the congregation of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4) – is generally translated as "heritage"; yerusha is translated as "inheritance" and is the frequently found form for everything except Torah and Israel. It is interesting to note that in Webster's Dictionary, the words "heritage" and "inheritance" are virtually synonymous. The lead definition for heritage is "property that is or can be inherited." The Hebrew of the Bible, however, is precise and exact. The use of different words clearly suggests a difference in meaning. The different contexts in which the two words "morasha" and "yerusha" appear can be very revealing about different kinds of bequests – and even different kinds of relationships between parents and children, different priorities handed down from generation to generation, which these bequests engender. Let us explore four different possible distinctions in meaning between yerusha and morasha, inheritance and heritage, which should provide important instruction to parents in determining their bequests to their children.

First, the Jerusalem Talmud speaks of yerusha as something that comes easily. A person dies, leaving an inheritance, and the heir is not required to do anything except receive the gift. But just being there is not enough

when it comes to morasha. The added mem in this term, suggests the Jerusalem Talmud, is a grammatical sign of intensity, the pi'el form in Hebrew grammar. In order for an individual to come into possession of a morasha they have to work for it. An inheritance is what you get from the previous generation, without your particular input; a heritage requires your active involvement and participation. A yerusha is a check your father left you; a morasha is a business which your parents may have started, but into which you must put much sweat, blood and tears. This will certainly explain why morasha is used only with regard to Torah and the Land of Israel. The sages remark that there are three gifts which God gave the Jewish people that can only be acquired through commitment and suffering: "Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come" (Berakhot 5a). We understand that neither Torah nor the Land of Israel is acquired easily, passively. The Babylonian Talmud, confirming our earlier citation from the Jerusalem Talmud, specifically teaches that "Torah is not an inheritance," a yerusha, which comes automatically to the child of the Torah scholar. All achievement in Torah depends on an individual's own efforts. A student of Torah must be willing to suffer privation. Maimonides writes that on the path of Torah acquisition a person must be willing to eat only bread and drink only water, even snatching momentary sleep on the ground rather than in a comfortable bed (Laws of Torah Study 3:6). Indeed, no one can merit the crown of Torah unless they are willing to destroy their desire for material blandishments while in pursuit of Torah expertise (ibid. 12). Similarly, the Land of Israel cannot be acquired without sacrifice and suffering. The final test in the life of Abraham and the source of Jewish claim to Jerusalem is the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah; the message conveyed by the Bible is that we can only acquire our Holy Land if we are willing to place the lives of our children on the line. Nothing is more apparent in modern Israel today. A heritage comes hard, not easily, and our national heritage is Torah and Israel.

The second distinction between the terms is not how the gift is acquired but rather how it may or must be dispersed. Even the largest amount of money inherited (yerusha) can be squandered, or legitimately lost. In contrast, a morasha must be given over intact to the next generation. Its grammatical form is hif 'il, and it literally means "to hand over to someone else." Silver is an inheritance, and can be invested, lent out, or melted down or used in whatever way the heir desires; silver Shabbat candlesticks are a heritage, meant to be passed down from parent to child and used from generation to generation.

Third, one must have the physical and objective inheritance in one's possession in order to give it to one's heir; that is not necessarily the case with regard to a heritage, or morasha. Jewish parents bequeathed the ideals of Torah and Israel to their children for four thousand years, even when they were living in exile far from the Promised Land and even if poverty and oppression made it impossible for them to be Torah scholars. Jewish mothers in Poland and Morocco sang their children to sleep with lullabies about the beauty of the Land of Israel and the paramount importance of Torah scholarship, singing "Torah is the best merchandise" and Jerusalem the most beautiful city. Paradoxically, one can pass on a morasha (heritage) even if one doesn't have it oneself!

And finally, a yerusha is a substantive object whereas a morasha may be an abstract idea or ideal. There is a charming Yiddish folk song in which the singer "laments" that while his friends' wealthy parents gave them automobiles, his parents could only give him good wishes: "Go with God." While his friends' parents gave them cash, his parents gave him aphorisms: "Zai a mensch – be a good person." However, whereas the automobiles and cash were quickly dissipated, the words remained – and were passed on to the next generation.

The truth is that an inheritance pales in comparison to a heritage. The real question must be: Will you only have a transitory inheritance to leave your children, or will you merit bequeathing an eternal heritage?

Shabbat Shalom

The Separation Fence: The Prohibition of Participating in an Intermarriage Wedding, and the Obligation to Reprove
Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Revivim

An intermarriage wedding is a forbidden event, and one may not participate in it * The Torah commands us to protest someone committing a transgression, and to rebuke him * Conversion judges must be Torah scholars, to ensure that the conversion procedures are carried out according to halakha * A foreign worker may place tefillin on a paralyzed person * The mitzvah is not to tie the tefillin, but that the tefillin be bound upon his arm and head * Out of respect for the tefillin, it is forbidden to enter a bathroom or bathhouse with them

Participation in An Intermarriage Wedding

Q: "Shalom honored Rabbi... I request practical guidance on an issue that troubles me, and gives me no rest. A friend from reserve duty is getting married. A good man. He was wounded in military activity, and is struggling to return to life. He is the son of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother. He identifies himself as Israeli, but as he said, the conversion process weighs heavily upon him; it is difficult for him to learn the blessings by heart and to commit before a rabbinical court to keep Shabbat, and therefore, he does not intend to convert. According to him, he feels Jewish even without conversion, and he even underwent circumcision when he was born.

He is engaged to a girl of... origin; her grandfather, of blessed memory, was among the rabbis of the community. His fiancée is traditional, and says that in her eyes, he is Jewish. They were careful to schedule the wedding at a place that serves kosher food.

The wedding is in about a month. My friend invited me, and very much expects me to come to his wedding, and I do not know what to do. I fear that if I do not come, he will notice my absence, and be hurt. Is it better to make an excuse and say that it doesn't work out for me to come, or to attend?

In truth, the event is a distressing case of intermarriage. On the other hand, in the couple's consciousness, the marriage is not intermarriage, and they are unintentional sinners because of their mistaken understanding. Moreover, perhaps the event itself is not entirely negative, since their children will be Jewish, and the problem of mixed marriage will not continue into the next generation. With blessing that Hashem give you, honored Rabbi, the strength to continue clarifying serious halachic matters truthfully, and that your words spoken with fear of Heaven, and seeking truth, be heard."

It is Forbidden to Participate — But Suggest Conversion

A: Since this wedding involves an intermarriage, which is a prohibited event, one may not participate in it. The Torah commands us to protest against one who transgresses, and to rebuke him, as it is said (Leviticus 19:17), "You shall surely rebuke your fellow, and you shall not bear sin because of him." All the more so, it is forbidden to participate.

Explain to him that despite your love for him, you will not come to his wedding, because it is forbidden according to the Jewish faith. But together with this, since you are a Talmid Chacham (Torah scholar) — and presumably in your unit there are additional Torah scholars — suggest to him that you, together with two other Torah scholars from your unit, convert him before the wedding. As I explained in my book "Masoret HaGiyur", many rabbis ruled in such a situation to convert him, since the groom possesses a Jewish identity, and through conversion, one prevents intermarriage. All the more so when, as a family, they will keep Jewish tradition. According to halakha, any three Torah scholars are authorized to perform a conversion. If he agrees, study the laws of conversion and convert him before his wedding, and you will find a rabbi who, based on that conversion, will agree to perform for them chuppah and kiddushin according to the law of Moshe and Israel.

Who is Halachically Qualified to Perform Conversions?

Q: Who is permitted to perform a conversion? Any Torah scholar?

A: Some poskim (Jewish law arbiters) say that any Jew who observes Torah and mitzvot is fit to serve as a conversion judge (Rambam, Issurei Bi'ah 14:6; Sefer Mitzvot Gadol; Orhot Chaim; Yam shel Shlomo; Binyamin Ze'ev; Shulchan Aruch 268:3). The opinion of most halachic authorities, however, is that conversion judges must be Torah scholars in order to ensure that they carry out the procedures of conversion

properly, and adequately evaluate whether to accept the convert (Behag, Rif, Ra'avan, Ri, Riaz, Rokeach, Rosh, Rabbeinu Yerucham, Agudah; Tur 268:2; Rama 268:2). This is also the ruling of many later authorities (Levush 268:2; Aruch HaShulchan 8; Rabbi Chaim Palaggi, Lev Chaim III:28, and others).

However, be-di'avad (after the fact), all poskim agree that if the conversion judges were valid witnesses, and were not known to deliberately violate commandments, the conversion is valid.

For this purpose, the definition of "Torah scholars" is: one who knows how to study Torah and has significant Torah knowledge and, of course, has studied the laws of conversion. Certainly, ramim (yeshiva teachers) in religious high schools, are considered Torah scholars.

Nevertheless, Jewish custom is that the local rabbis bear responsibility for conversion, so that acceptance of converts will be broadly agreed upon by the community. But in a pressing situation, in order to prevent intermarriage, and to avoid terrible rifts and great pain in a Jewish family, one should follow the halakha that any three Torah scholars are permitted le-chatchila (from the outset) to convert (see Peninei Halakha: Laws of Conversion 4:2:3).

The Guidance of the Rayatz Lubavitcher Rebbe

The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, one of the leaders of the ultra-Orthodox world, gave similar guidance on this matter. In 5708 (1948), while in New York, his disciple, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Feldman, wrote to him about the spiritually low state of the community he served, due to the harmful influence of Reform rabbis. He also related that he had turned away a non-Jewish woman who wished to convert in order to marry the son of a community member, and they went instead to convert under the Reform.

In his response, dated 4 Menachem Av 5708 (Igrot, vol. 9, p. 713), the Rayatz wrote regarding conversion: "Concerning his community member... who came to him upset and worried, revealing his great anguish that his son had joined with a non-Jewish woman and wanted to marry her, and that he, the father, could influence them so that she would convert — and my dear friend (the Rebbe writes to his disciple) avoided involvement and pushed him off with various excuses, and they went to the Reform — "this was not good, and it is a great error on his part that must, if possible, even retroactively, be corrected. And in the future, he must involve himself in such matters, and study the laws at their source, the laws of converts in the Tur and Beit Yosef, and afterwards in the Shulchan Aruch with its commentaries, and he should be proficient to carry this out practically, and he should choose two Jews who keep Shabbat and mitzvot, from whom he will form a beit din, and study the book Tiv Gittin, so that he may arrange divorces properly."

The matter of converting the non-Jewish woman was important to the Rayatz, and fourteen days later he sent another letter (ibid., p. 714): "I am interested to know whether you have taken any steps to repair the omission of not converting the non-Jewish woman, and if not — perhaps you can find some pretext and method to correct the matter according to the Torah." The same is evident from additional letters. As I showed in my book "Masoret HaGiyur" 26:31 (p. 757), it is evident that these converts did not intend to observe a fully religious lifestyle but, at most, to be traditional. Nevertheless, the Rayatz's consistent stance was that if they wish to convert, they should be converted in order to prevent assimilation.

The Conduct of the Emissary Rabbi Feldman

It is worthy of note that Rabbi Kalman Davidson transmitted a written testimony from a Haredi American rabbi who immigrated to Israel and asked to remain anonymous, who knew Rabbi Menachem Mendel Feldman well (the Rabbi whom the Rayatz directed in the above letters). He testified that Rabbi Feldman told him: "He, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, encouraged his emissaries to convert all who came to them, with minimal demands and inquiry consisting only of ensuring that the candidate for conversion rejects Christianity." He further testified: "When I was in Baltimore, Rabbi Feldman asked me to participate with him in a conversion that was conducted according to the process I described."

May a Foreign Worker Put Tefillin on a Disabled Person?

Q: Our father suffered a stroke and became paralyzed in his hands, and cannot put on tefillin himself, but his mind is completely lucid. He wishes to pray, and put on tefillin, and asks whether specifically a Jewish man, obligated in tefillin, must put them on him, or whether his wife may do so, or even a foreign worker.

A: Even a foreign worker may put tefillin on him, because the mitzvah is not the act of tying the tefillin, but that the tefillin be bound upon his arm and head, as it is stated: "And it shall be for you as a sign upon your hand and as a remembrance between your eyes" (Exodus 13:9). And what is said, "You shall bind them as a sign," means that through the tying the tefillin will be a sign — not that the tying itself constitutes the mitzvah (so wrote Maharshal Gaon, vol. 1, Orach Chaim 9). Of course, a woman may also place tefillin on him (based on Avodah Zarah 39a; Mahari Assad Orach Chaim 19, and others).

Entering a Restroom with Tefillin in a Handbag

Q: When I am traveling with tefillin in a bag, may I enter the restroom with the bag?

Answer: Out of respect for the tefillin, it is forbidden to enter with them into a restroom or bathhouse, whether one is wearing them, or holding them in his hand. However, in times when it was customary to wear tefillin all day, they were sometimes forced to be lenient due to concern that the tefillin might be stolen, but when at home, they were careful not to enter the restroom or bathhouse with tefillin (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 43:7; Mishnah Berurah 24).

One who is on the road and has tefillin in his hand, or in his bag, and needs to enter the restroom — if possible, it is preferable to leave them with a friend, and then enter the restroom. If not, he should enter with the bag into the restroom, because the tefillin are concealed in a pouch within a pouch, and the second pouch is not their regular pouch (Machztit HaShekel; Mishnah Berurah 43:24). That is: the first pouch is the tefillin bag itself, and the travel bag is the second pouch, which is not their usual pouch. One may also place the tefillin in an additional plastic bag, and then enter the restroom.

Respect for Tefillin Placed in a Bag or Suitcase

One who places tefillin in a bag should place them above the clothes and items there, but if his intention is to protect them, he may place them among the clothes and items. One who places tefillin in a suitcase should place them in the most protected and respectful manner. One may place the bag or suitcase containing the tefillin on the ground, but should not sit on it, or rest his feet on it — unless the bag or suitcase is large, and he knows that the tefillin are on the other side (Shulchan Aruch 40:3, 5; see Mishnah Berurah 13).

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Of Lice and Men

Vaera

The dust of the earth was turned to lice all across Egypt. The magicians tried to produce lice with their sorcery, but they could not. Meanwhile the lice still infested people and animals alike.

"This," the magicians told Pharaoh, "is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was toughened, and — as the Lord had predicted — he would not listen to them.

Exodus 8:12-15

Too little attention has been paid to the use of humour in the Torah. Its most important form is the use of satire to mock the pretensions of human beings who think they can emulate God. One thing makes God laugh — the sight of humanity attempting to defy heaven:

The kings of the earth take their stand,

And the rulers gather together against the Lord and His anointed one.

"Let us break our chains," they say,
"and throw off their fetters."

He who sits in heaven laughs,
God scoffs at them.

Psalm 2:2-4

There is a marvellous example in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people in the plain of Shinar decide to build a city with a tower that "will reach heaven." This is an act of defiance against the Divinely given

order of nature ("The heavens are the heavens of God: the earth He has given to the children of men"). The Torah then says, "But God came down to see the city and the tower . . ." (Gen. 11:5). Down on earth, the builders thought their tower would reach heaven. From the vantage point of heaven, however, it was so minuscule that God had to "come down" to see it.

Satire is essential in order to understand at least some of the plagues. The Egyptians worshipped a multiplicity of gods, most of whom represented forces of nature. By their "secret arts" the magicians believed that they could control these forces. Magic is the equivalent in an era of myth to technology in an age of science. A civilisation that believes it can manipulate the gods, believes likewise that it can exercise coercion over human beings. In such a culture, the concept of freedom is unknown.

The plagues were not merely intended to punish Pharaoh and his people for their mistreatment of the Israelites, but also to show them the powerlessness of the gods in which they believed ("I will perform acts of judgement against all the gods of Egypt: I am God", Ex. 12:12). This explains the first and last of the nine plagues prior to the killing of the firstborn. The first involved the Nile. The ninth was the plague of darkness. The Nile was worshipped as the source of fertility in an otherwise desert region. The sun was seen as the greatest of the gods, Re (and Pharaoh was considered to be his child). Darkness meant the eclipse of the sun, showing that even the greatest of the Egyptian gods could do nothing in the face of the true God.

What is at stake in this confrontation is the difference between myth — in which the gods are mere powers, to be tamed, propitiated or manipulated — and biblical monotheism in which ethics (justice, compassion, human dignity) constitute the meeting-point of God and humankind. That is the key to the first two plagues, both of which refer back to the beginning of Egyptian persecution of the Israelites: the killing of male children at birth, first through the midwives (though, thanks to Shifra and Puah's moral sense, this was foiled) then by throwing them into the Nile to drown.

That is why, in the first plague, the river waters turn to blood. The significance of the second, frogs, would have been immediately apparent to the Egyptians. Heqet, the frog-goddess, represented the midwife who assisted women in labour. Both plagues are coded messages meaning: "If you use the river and midwives — both normally associated with life — to bring about death, those same forces will turn against you." An immensely significant message is taking shape: Reality has an ethical structure. If used for evil ends, the powers of nature will turn against man, so that what he does will be done to him in turn. There is justice in history.

The response of the Egyptians to these first two plagues is to see them within their own frame of reference. Plagues, for them, are forms of magic, not miracles. To Pharaoh's magicians, Moses and Aaron are people like themselves who practice "secret arts". So they replicate them: they show that they too can turn water into blood and generate a horde of frogs. The irony here is very close to the surface. So intent are the Egyptian magicians on proving that they can do what Moses and Aaron have done, that they entirely fail to realise that far from making matters better for the Egyptians, they are making them worse: more blood, more frogs.

This brings us to the third plague, lice. One of the purposes of this plague is to produce an effect which the magicians cannot replicate. They try. They fail. Immediately they conclude, "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:15).

This is the first appearance in the Torah of an idea, surprisingly persistent in religious thinking even today, called "the god of the gaps". This holds that a miracle is something for which we cannot yet find a scientific explanation. Science is natural; religion is supernatural.

An "act of God" is something we cannot account for rationally. What magicians (or technocrats) cannot reproduce must be the result of Divine intervention. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that religion and science are opposed. The more we can explain scientifically or control

technologically, the less need we have for faith. As the scope of science expands, the place of God progressively diminishes to vanishing point. What the Torah is intimating is that this is a pagan mode of thought, not a Jewish one. The Egyptians admitted that Moses and Aaron were genuine prophets when they performed wonders beyond the scope of their own magic. But this is not why we believe in Moses and Aaron. On this, Maimonides is unequivocal:

Israel did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the signs he performed. When faith is predicated on signs, a lurking doubt always remains that these signs may have been performed with the aid of occult arts and witchcraft. All the signs Moses performed in the Wilderness, he did because they were necessary, not to authenticate his status as a prophet . . . When we needed food, he brought down manna. When the people were thirsty, he cleaved the rock. When Korach's supporters denied his authority, the earth swallowed them up. So too with all the other signs. What then were our grounds for believing in him? The Revelation at Sinai, which we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears . . .

Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 8:1

The primary way in which we encounter God is not through miracles but through His word – the Revelation – Torah – which is the Jewish people's constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of God. To be sure, God is in the events which, seeming to defy nature, we call miracles. But He is also in nature itself. Science does not displace God: it reveals, in ever more intricate and wondrous ways, the design within nature itself. Far from diminishing our religious sense, science (rightly understood) should enlarge it, teaching us to see “How great are Your works, O God; You have made them all with wisdom.” Above all, God is to be found in the Voice heard at Sinai, teaching us how to construct a society that will be the opposite of Egypt: in which the few do not enslave the many, nor are strangers mistreated.

The best argument against the world of Ancient Egypt was Divine humour. The cultic priests and magicians who thought they could control the sun and the Nile discovered that they could not even produce a louse. Pharaohs like Ramses II demonstrated their godlike status by creating monumental architecture: the great temples, palaces, and pyramids whose immensity seemed to betoken Divine grandeur (the Gemara explains that Egyptian magic could not function on very small things). God mocks them by revealing His Presence in the tiniest of creatures. “I will show you fear in a handful of dust”, writes the poet, T. S. Eliot.

What the Egyptian magicians (and their latter-day successors) did not understand is that power over nature is not an end in and of itself, but solely the means to ethical ends. The lice were God's joke at the expense of the magicians who believed that because they controlled the forces of nature, they were the masters of human destiny. They were wrong. Faith is not merely belief in the supernatural. It is the ability to hear the call of the Author of Being, to be free in such a way as to respect the freedom and dignity of others.

Where Does my Shemoneh Esrei End?

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: Slow on the draw

“The other day, I was finishing Shemoneh Esrei as the chazzan began Kedushah, but I had not yet recited the sentence beginning with the words *Yi'he'yu Leratzon* when the tzibur was already reciting *Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh*. Should I have answered Kedushah without having first said *Yi'he'yu Leratzon*?”

Question #2: A proper ending

“Someone told me that I am not required to say the prayer *Elokai, netzor leshoni meira* at the end of Shemoneh Esrei. Is this a legitimate practice? Why don't the printers tell us this?”

Question #3: Responding in kind

“If I am reciting the *Elokai Netzor* at the end of Shemoneh Esrei while the chazzan is already beginning the repetition, should I be reciting *Amein* to his *Berachos*?”

Answer: Historical introduction

To help us fulfill our daily obligation of praying, the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, the great leaders of the Jewish people at the beginning of the Second Beis Hamikdash period (who included Ezra, Mordechai, and Daniel), authored what we call the “Shemoneh Esrei” or the “amidah,” which consisted, originally, of eighteen blessings. A nineteenth beracha, which begins with the word *velamalshinim* (or, in the *Edot Hamizrah* version, *velaminim*), was added later by the *Sanhedrin* when it was located in *Yavneh*, after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, about 400 years after the original *Shemoneh Esrei* had been written (*Berachos 28b*).

Standardized versus subjective prayer

People sometimes ask why our prayers are so highly structured. One of the answers to this question is that it is far more meaningful to pray using a text that was written by prophets and great Torah scholars than one's own text. The Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, who authored the *Shemoneh Esrei*, included among its membership some of the greatest spiritual leaders of all history and also the last prophets of the Jewish people, Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Others note that most individuals have difficulty in structuring prayer properly, and therefore the *Shemoneh Esrei* facilitates the individual's fulfilling the Torah's mitzvah of prayer by providing him with a beautifully structured prayer (*Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 1:4*).

In addition, our prayers are fixed, rather than individualized, out of concern that someone may request something that is harmful to a different individual or community, something that we definitely do not want in our prayer (*Kuzari 3:19*). The *Shemoneh Esrei* is written in a way that it protects, and beseeches on behalf of, the entire Jewish community. We thus link ourselves to the Jewish past, present and future each time that we pray.

In addition, the halachos and etiquette of prayer require that one not supplicate without first praising Hashem, and that the prayer conclude with acknowledgement and thanks (*Brachos 32a; Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 1:2*). When Moshe Rabbeinu begged Hashem to allow him to enter the Chosen Land, he introduced his entreaty with praise of Hashem. From this we derive that all prayer must be introduced with praise. We also learn that after one makes his requests, he should close his prayer with thanks to Hashem. All these aspects of prayer are incorporated into the *Shemoneh Esrei* and may be forgotten by someone composing his own prayer.

When may I entreat?

There are numerous places in the organized prayer where one may include personal entreaties, such as during the beracha that begins with the words *Shema koleinu* (*Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 1:9*). In addition to the fact that one may include personal supplications in many different places in the *Shemoneh Esrei*, after the *Shemoneh Esrei* -- meaning after one has completed *Hamevarech es amo Yisroel bashalom* -- is an ideal place to add one's own personal prayer requests. The Gemara (*Berachos 16b-17a*) lists many tefillos that different *tanna'im* and *amora'im* added after their daily *Shemoneh Esrei*. Several of these prayers have been incorporated into our davening – for example, the *Yehi ratzon* prayer recited by *Ashkenazim* as the beginning of *Rosh Chodesh bensching* was originally the prayer that the *amora Rav* recited at the conclusion of his daily prayer. Two of the prayers quoted in the Gemara *Berachos* form the basis of the prayer that begins with the words *Elokai, netzor leshoni meira*, “My G-d, protect my tongue from evil,” which has now become a standard part of our daily prayer. This prayer, customarily recited after *Hamevarech es amo Yisroel bashalom* and before taking three steps back to end the prayer, was not introduced by the Anshei Keneses Hagedolah, and, indeed, is not even halachically required. This prayer contains voluntary, personal entreaties that became standard practice. One is free to add to them, delete them, or recite other supplications instead.

The questions quoted as the introduction to our article relate to the laws that apply to the end of our daily prayer, the *Shemoneh Esrei*. As we are all aware, Chazal established rules governing when we are permitted to interrupt our davening and for what purposes. However, the status and laws of the end of our *Shemoneh Esrei* are not mentioned explicitly by

Chazal, and are based on interpretations of halachic authorities. This article will provide background information that explains which rules are applied here, when they are applied and why.

Introducing and concluding our prayer

The Gemara (Berachos 4b and 9b) teaches that the Shemoneh Esrei must be introduced by quoting the following verse, Hashem, sefasei tiftach ufi yagid tehilasecha, “G-d, open my lips so that my voice can recite Your praise” (Tehillim 51:17), and that it should be concluded with the verse Yi’he’yu leratzon imfrei fi vehegyon libi lifanecha, Hashem tzuri vego’ali, “The words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart should be acceptable before You, G-d, Who is my Rock and my Redeemer” (Tehillim 19:15). These two verses are considered an extension of the Shemoneh Esrei (tefillah arichta), a status that affects several halachos, some of which we will soon see.

Before or after Yi’he’yu Leratzon

The first question we need to discuss is whether personal supplications recited after the completion of the Shemoneh Esrei should be included before one recites Yi’he’yu Leratzon or afterwards. When the Gemara ruled that one should recite Yi’he’yu Leratzon after completing the Shemoneh Esrei, does this mean that one may not insert personal requests before saying Yi’he’yu Leratzon?

This matter is debated by the Rishonim. The Raavad prohibits uttering anything between the closing of the beracha Hamevarech es amo Yisroel bashalom and the recital of the verse Yi’he’yu Leratzon. In his opinion, reciting any supplication or praise at this point is a violation of the Gemara’s ruling that one must immediately recite Yi’he’yu Leratzon. This approach is quoted and accepted by the Rashba (Berachos 17a).

On the other hand, Rabbeinu Yonah (page 20a of the Rif, Berachos) notes that one may insert personal supplications even in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei. Therefore, inserting personal requests before Yi’he’yu Leratzon is also not a hefsek, an unacceptable interruption.

What about Kedushah?

The later authorities discuss the following issue: According to the conclusion of Rabbeinu Yonah, who permits reciting personal supplications before one has recited Yi’he’yu Leratzon, may one also answer the responses to Kedushah, Kaddish, and Borchu before one has said this verse?

The Rema (Orach Chayim 122:1) rules that since one may insert personal requests before Yi’he’yu Leratzon, one may also answer Kedushah or Kaddish. Many disagree with the Rema concerning this point, contending that although inserting a prayer prior to reciting Yi’he’yu Leratzon does not constitute a hefsek, one may not insert praise at this point (Divrei Chamudos, Berachos 1:54; Pri Chadash 122:1). Their position is that one may insert entreaties at many places in the Shemoneh Esrei, but adding anything else that is unauthorized, even praise, constitutes a hefsek. It is for this reason that someone in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei may not answer Kedushah or the other important responses of the prayer.

The plain reading of the Tur agrees with the Rema’s understanding of the topic (Maamar Mordechai; Aruch Hashulchan 122:6; although we should note that the Bach does not understand the Tur this way).

To sum up

Thus far, I have mentioned three approaches regarding what one may recite after having completed Hamevarech es amo Yisroel bashalom, but before one has said Yi’he’yu Leratzon.

(1) One may not insert anything (Raavad and Rashba).

(2) One may insert a personal supplication, but one may not answer Kaddish or Kedushah (Rabbeinu Yonah, as understood by Divrei Chamudos and Pri Chadash).

(3) One may even answer Kaddish or Kedushah (Rabbeinu Yonah, as understood by Rema).

How do we rule?

Among the early codifiers we find all three approaches quoted:

(1) The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 122:1, 2) and the Bach conclude, like the Rashba and Raavad, that one may not insert or recite anything prior to saying Yi’he’yu Leratzon.

(2) The Divrei Chamudos rules that one may recite personal supplications before one says Yi’he’yu Leratzon, but one may not answer Kedushah or Kaddish.

(3) The Rema permits even answering Kedushah or Kaddish before saying Yi’he’yu Leratzon. This is the approach that the Mishnah Berurah (122:6) considers to be the primary one and is also the way the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (18:15) rules. The Rema mentions that some communities had the custom of not reciting Yi’he’yu Leratzon until after they completed saying Eloki Netzor and whatever other personal supplications the individual chose to recite.

Notwithstanding this custom, many authorities suggest reciting Yi’he’yu Leratzon immediately after completing the words Hamevarech es amo Yisrael bashalom, since this procedure allows someone to answer Kedushah according to all opinions and avoids any halachic controversy (Divrei Chamudos; Magen Avraham).

At this point, we can address the first question asked above:

“The other day, I was finishing Shemoneh Esrei as the chazzan began Kedushah, but I had not yet said the words Yi’he’yu Leratzon when the tzibur was already reciting Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh. Should I have answered Kedushah without having first said Yi’he’yu Leratzon?”

Most Ashkenazic authorities conclude that one who has not yet recited Yi’he’yu Leratzon may answer the first two responses of Kedushah, that is, Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh and Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo. Sefardic authorities, who follow the ruling of the Rashba and the Shulchan Aruch, prohibit responding before saying Yi’he’yu Leratzon.

After saying Yi’he’yu Leratzon

Thus far, we have discussed what one should do prior to reciting the verse Yi’he’yu Leratzon. Now we will begin discussing the laws that are effective after one recites this verse.

All authorities agree that once a person has recited the verse Yi’he’yu Leratzon, he may add personal prayers to the extent that he wishes. Many authorities hold that it is preferable not to recite supplications when, as a result, one will be required to respond to Kedushah or Kaddish while praying (Rashba and Shulchan Aruch, as explained by Maamar Mordechai). This idea will be explained shortly.

Amein during Eloki Netzor

At this point, we will address one of the other questions asked in our introduction:

“If I am reciting the Eloki Netzor at the end of Shemoneh Esrei while the chazzan is already beginning the repetition, should I be reciting Amein to his Berachos?”

If this person was following the custom mentioned by the Rema and had as yet not recited Yi’he’yu Leratzon, he may not respond amein to someone else’s beracha. Even if he has recited Yi’he’yu Leratzon, it is unclear whether he may respond amein to Berachos, as I will explain.

First, an introduction: In general, the different parts of the davening have varying status regarding which responses are permitted. For example, it is prohibited to interrupt in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei, even to respond to Kaddish or Kedushah. On the other hand, the birchos keri’as shema have less sanctity than does the Shemoneh Esrei, and therefore, someone in the middle of reciting birchos keri’as shema may respond to Borchu, and to some of the responses of Kaddish and Kedushah. Specifically, he may answer amein, yehei shemei rabba... and the amein of da’amiran be’alma in Kaddish, and may answer Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh... and Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo of Kedushah. In addition, he may answer amein to the Berachos of Hakeil hakodosh and Shomei’at tefillah, but he may not answer amein to any other beracha, to the other responses of Kaddish, or to say Yimloch of Kedushah.

The question at hand is: What is the status of davening after one has recited Yi’he’yu Leratzon? May one answer Kedushah or say amein at this point? There are no allusions in Chazal to direct us what to do, but there is a somewhat oblique allusion in a different context that may impact on this topic:

“If he erred and did not mention Rosh Chodesh [i.e., he neglected to say the passage of Yaaleh Veyavo, or neglected to mention Rosh Chodesh while reciting Yaaleh Veyavo] while reciting Avodah [i.e., the beracha of Shemoneh Esrei that begins with the word Retzei], then he returns to

the beracha of Avodah. If he remembers during hodaah [i.e., the beracha that begins with the word Modim], then he returns to the beracha of Avodah. If he remembers during Sim Shalom, then he returns to the beracha of Avodah. If he completed Sim Shalom [i.e., recited the closing beracha], then he returns to the beginning [of the Shemoneh Esrei] (Berachos 29b).

The Gemara teaches that someone who forgot to say Yaaleh Veyavo at the appropriate place in Shemoneh Esrei must return to the words Retzei in order to say Yaaleh Veyavo. However, if he completed reciting the Shemoneh Esrei, then he repeats the entire Shemoneh Esrei. What is the definition of "completing the Shemoneh Esrei?"

The Gemara presents three rules:

- (1) If he took three paces back, he has completed the Shemoneh Esrei, and must begin from the beginning.
- (2) If he finished Shemoneh Esrei and whatever supplication he recites, he must begin from the beginning.
- (3) If he is still reciting his supplications, he goes back only to Retzei (Berachos 29b).

We see from this Gemara that reciting the supplications at the end of davening is still considered to be part of the prayer. Does this mean that it has the same rules as being in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei itself? The Rishonim discuss the issue. The Rashba (*Shu't* 1:807; 7:405) rules that once one said *Yi'he'yu Leratzon*, the laws of *hefsek* follow the rules of someone who is in the middle of reciting the *birchos keri'as shema*. Therefore, he may answer *amein*, *yehei shemei rabba...* and *amein* to *da'amiran be'alma* in *Kaddish*, and may answer *Kodosh, kodosh, kodosh...* and *Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo* of *Kedushah*. In addition, he may answer *amein* to the *Berachos* of *Hakeil Hakodosh* and *Shomei'a Tefillah*.

Answering *Amein*

May one answer *amein* to a "regular" beracha, once one has recited the verse *Yi'he'yu Leratzon*? The Taz (122:1) notes what appears to be an inconsistency in the position of the *Shulchan Aruch* on this matter. To resolve this concern, he explains that there is a difference between someone who usually recites supplications after completing his Shemoneh Esrei, who should not recite *amein*, and someone who does so only occasionally, who should. Someone who recites supplications only occasionally may interrupt for other matters once he says *Yi'he'yu Leratzon*, since for him reciting *Yi'he'yu Leratzon* is considered the end of his formal prayer. Since today it is common practice to include *Elokai Netzor* or other supplications at the end of our daily *tefillos*, we should not respond *amein* at this point (*Mishnah Berurah* 122:1). However, other authorities rule that once one has said *Yi'he'yu Leratzon*, one may answer *amein* to all berachos (*Aruch Hashulchan*; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*).

After completing his supplications

Once someone has completed reciting his supplications and recited *yi'he'yu leratzon*, he is considered to have finished davening completely, and he may now answer any responses that one usually recites, including even to answer *Boruch Hu uvaruch Shemo* when hearing a beracha (*Maamar Mordechai*; *Mishnah Berurah*). This is true, even though he has not yet taken three steps backward.

Conclusion

Rav Hirsch, in his commentary to the story of *Kayin* and *Hevel* in *Parshas Bereishis* (4:3), makes the following observation: "Two people can bring identical offerings and recite the same prayers and yet appear unequal in the eyes of G-d. This is made clear in connection with the offerings of these brothers. Scripture does not say: 'G-d turned to the offering by *Hevel*, but to the offering by *Kayin* He did not turn.' Rather, it says: 'G-d turned to *Hevel* and his offering, but to *Kayin* and his offering He did not turn.' The difference lay in the personalities of the offerers, not in their offerings. *Kayin* was unacceptable, hence his offering was unacceptable. *Hevel*, on the other hand, was pleasing, hence his offering was pleasing."

The same is true regarding prayer: the Shemoneh Esrei itself, the *Netzor leshoni* addition, and the personal supplications that different people recite may appear identical in words, but they are to be recited with

emotion, devotion and commitment. *Tefillah* should be with total devotion in order to improve ourselves, to enable us to fulfill our role in Hashem's world.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vaera

Lost in Egypt

Negotiating redemption is not a simple process. You must deal with two different sides and send two different messages to opposite parties. First, you must speak to the oppressors. You must be demanding and firm. You can not show weakness or a willingness to compromise. Then you have to inform to the oppressed. That should be easy: in a soft and soothing manner you gently break the news that they are about to be liberated. They will surely rejoice at the slightest hint that their time has finally come. That is why I am struck by a verse in this week's portion that directs Moshe to send the exact same message to Pharoh and the Jewish people, as if Pharoh and the Jews were of one mind, working in tandem. Exodus 6:13 "Hashem spoke to Moshe and Ahron and commanded them to speak to the children of Israel and to Pharoh the King of Egypt, to let the children of Israel leave Egypt" I was always perplexed by this verse. How is it possible to encompass the message to the Jews and Pharoh in one fell swoop? How can you compare the strong demand to Pharoh to the soft, cajoling message necessary for the Jews? Pharoh, who does not want to hear of liberation, has to be warned and chastised and even plagued. The Jews should jump at the mention of redemption! Why, then, are the two combined in one verse and with one declaration? There are those who answer that the Jews in this verse actually refer to the Jewish taskmasters who were appointed by Pharoh as *kapos* to oppress their brethren. Thus the equation is clearly justified. However, I would like to offer a more homiletic explanation:

There is a wonderful story of a poor farmer who lived under the rule of a miserable *poritz* (landowner) in medieval Europe. The evil landowner provided minimal shelter in exchange for a large portion of the farmer's profits. The farmer and his wife toiled under the most severe conditions to support their family with a few chickens that laid eggs and a cow that gave milk. Ultimately, time took its toll and hardship became the norm. The farmer and his wife had their bitter routine and never hoped for better. One day the farmer came back from the market quite upset. "What's the matter?" cried his wife, "you look as if the worst calamity has happened." "It has," sighed the anxious farmer. "They say in the market that the *Moshiach* is coming. He will take us all to the land of Israel. What will be of our cow and our chickens? Where will we live? Who will provide shelter for us? Oy! What is going to be?" His wife, who was steeped with faith in the Almighty, answered calmly. "Don't worry my dear husband. The Good Lord always protects His people. He saved us from Pharoh in Egypt, He redeemed us from the evil Haman and has protected us from harsh decrees throughout our exile. No doubt he will protect us from this *Moshiach* too!"

Hashem understood that the Jewish people were mired in exile for 210 years. They had decided to endure slavery rather than abandon it. Moshe had to be as forceful with those he was planning to redeem as he was with those who had enslaved them. Often in life, whether by choice or by chance, we enter into situations that we ought not be in. As time progresses, however, we get accustomed to the situation, and our worst enemy becomes change. We must tell the Pharoh within each of us, "let my people go!" Let us not continue on the comfortable path but rather get on the correct one. That message must be told to the victim in us with the same force and intensity as it is told to the complacent. Good Shabbos c1996 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Va'era

Who Are The Most Important People?

In *Parshat Va'era*, on the eve of the redemption of our people from Egypt, the Torah provides us with a genealogical account of the tribes of

Israel - starting with Reuven the first born, and then Shimon, and then Levi. Then the Torah stops. The other nine tribes are left out. How can we understand this?

Rashi gives two great peirushim. In his first commentary, Rashi says that this entire passage comes to provide context for the birth and leadership of our two great leaders, Moshe and Aaron. Seeing as they came from the tribe of Levi, once we reach the tribe of Levi, that's where the Torah stops. If that is the case, I sense there's a weakness possibly in Rashi's peirush here. Because why then must the Torah tell us about Reuven and Shimon?

It could just speak about Levi. And that's perhaps why Rashi himself offers a different peirush to us. He says as follows: there are three tribes that people may expect to be left out, because they might think they're not important enough: Reuven and Shimon and Levi. Why?

Their ancestors were criticised by Yaakov on his deathbed at the end of the Book of Bereishit - because Reuven took one of his concubines and because of what Shimon and Levi did in the city of Shechem. So, we might think that these tribes are tainted, that they're not important enough. Rashi says, “**רְבִיעַת מִבְּנֵי שֵׁת**” because these three tribes are also important.

That's why they are the ones to be listed. Let no one ever think that there are those within the people of Israel who are not important enough. What is interesting is that the Hebrew word “**רָבִיעַת**” “important” comes from the term “**רָבִיעַת**” which means “to think” - indicating that importance is a figment of our imagination.

Throughout Tanach, the whole Bible, Hashem gives descriptive terms, adjectives to people: **צָדִיק**: righteous. **רָשָׁע**: evil. **עָוֹן**: bad. **טוֹב**: good. On no single occasion does Hashem use the term “**רָבִיעַת**” “important” for a person. That's a term that we use. Because in our mindset, often it's important to know who the important people are. But let's never forget the teaching that comes from Rashi's second peirush: and that is that in truth, every single person is important.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rav Kook Torah

Va'eira: Priceless Jewels on Tattered Clothes

Every year at the Passover seder, we read Ezekiel's allegorical description of the Israelites in Egypt:

“You grew big and tall. You came with great adornments and were beautiful of form, with flowing hair. But you were naked and bare.” (Ezekiel 16:7)

The prophet portrays a striking paradox. The Israelites had become large and numerous, yet at the same time, impoverished and barren. Physically, Jacob's family of seventy had developed into a nation. Despite persecution and oppression, they multiplied. Morally and spiritually, however, they were “naked and bare.”

What, then, are the “great adornments” the verse mentions? What were these “jewels” of Israel?

Two Special Jewels

These “jewels” symbolize two special traits of the Jewish people. The first is a natural propensity for spirituality, an inner desire never to be separated from God and holiness.

The second is an even greater gift, beyond the natural realm. It is the unique collective spirit of Israel, which aspires toward a lofty national destiny. Even in their dispirited state as downtrodden slaves in Egypt, their inner drive for national purpose burned like a glowing coal. It smoldered in the heart of each individual, even if many did not understand its true nature.

For the Hebrew slaves, however, these special qualities were like priceless diamonds pinned to the threadbare garments of a beggar. The people lacked the basic traits of decency and integrity. They were missing those ethical qualities that are close to human nature, like clothes worn next to the body.

Without a fundamental level of morality and proper conduct, their lofty aspirations for spiritual greatness had the sardonic effect of extravagant jewelry pinned to tattered clothes. “You came with great adornments, but you were naked and bare.”

The Cost of Being First

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

While returning to school from a class trip, a third-grade student from Yeshivat Noam in Paramus was severely injured when a rock was thrown at her school bus on the New Jersey Turnpike. As the buses traveled near the Teaneck Road exit, a large rock shattered a window and struck the young girl in the head. What initially appeared to be a minor injury quickly turned into a nightmare. A CAT scan revealed bleeding on the brain and the child now required surgery. Baruch Hashem the surgery was successful and she is recovering.

It was frightening. It was horrifying. And it understandably shook our community to its core.

Almost immediately, social media erupted. Though the school and law enforcement explicitly stated that they did not yet know the nature or motive of the incident (and there were no external markings on the bus that identified it as a bus with Jewish students), many online rushed to label it a horrific antisemitic attack. Predictably, the declarations followed. This is the end of Jewish life in America. Jews are no longer safe. History is repeating itself before our eyes.

Two days later, an arrest was made.

Authorities announced that the suspect, already charged in a series of rock-throwing incidents across Bergen County, was not motivated by antisemitism. He was mentally unstable. State police revealed that he had been awaiting trial for similar acts, including an aggravated assault in Bogota that had already landed him in jail. Court records showed multiple additional charges after his release, including alleged assaults on law enforcement officers, criminal mischief, and trespassing.

This was not a hate crime. It was a tragic act of violence committed by someone deeply unwell.

Just a few months earlier, a remarkably similar story unfolded. In October, a rabbi in New Jersey was attacked outside his home. Surveillance footage showed bystanders rushing to help as the rabbi and a good Samaritan suffered minor injuries. Within minutes, the internet declared with certainty that a rabbi putting up his sukkah was attacked in broad daylight by an antisemite.

Strong statements followed. Dire warnings were issued. Fear spread. But once again, the facts told a different story. Police stated clearly, “This was a random act of violence. No words were exchanged prior to the assault, and there is no indication that this attack was motivated by race, religion, or ethnicity.” The suspect had a criminal record. There was no evidence of a hate crime. The rabbi was not putting up his sukkah. And yet the online verdict had already been rendered.

I do not share these stories to minimize or dismiss the very real and deeply disturbing rise in antisemitism. The statistics are undeniable. The threats are real. The actual, horrific acts of violence that have occurred are too painful and numerous to count. We must remain vigilant, courageous, and vocal. We must call out hatred, confront it, and fight it legally, morally, and spiritually.

The rush to assume motive is understandable. After October 7th (and the response to it), comedian Jim Gaffigan captured a feeling many Jews recognized when he quipped, “Does anyone else feel the need to call all their Jewish friends and say, ‘Okay, you weren’t being paranoid?’”

And yet, Torah does not ask us only to feel. It asks us to think. To pause. To reflect.

Our rabbis begin Pirkei Avos with the teaching: *hevei mesunim b'din*, be slow to judgment. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that one who is quick to judge is called a sinner. Even if he believes he is speaking truth, his error is not considered accidental. It is closer to willful wrongdoing, because he failed to reflect. A hasty mind, Rabbeinu Yonah teaches, lacks the depth required to truly know.

Technology has reshaped how we process reality. Information travels instantly. Opinions spread faster than facts. There is a cultural race to be first, to alert, to alarm, to analyze, to advise, often without the patience to gather, to listen, to learn. This is dangerous for the content creator and the content consumer alike. And despite repeated examples, we seem unwilling to slow down.

We are watching this same phenomenon play out now as the public rushes to conclusions about the incident involving the death of Renee Nicole Good at the hands of an ICE agent in Minneapolis. Before full video evidence emerged, before facts were established, before investigations concluded (or were even conducted!), each side hurried to condemn or defend, to accuse or absolve, filtered entirely through preconceived narratives. We saw not events, but reflections of our own assumptions.

Hevei mesunim b'din.

This teaching is not about passivity. It is about discipline. It is not a call to ignore injustice, but a demand to pursue truth responsibly. A Torah-guided life insists that moral clarity must be built on factual clarity. Outrage untethered from truth does not heal the world. It fractures it further.

The Torah's insistence on deliberation is not antiquated wisdom. It is desperately needed guidance for a hyperconnected, emotionally charged age. Being slow to judgment does not make us naive. It makes us trustworthy. It makes our voices credible when real hatred appears, when genuine threats emerge, when antisemitism unmistakably reveals itself.

If we cry wolf every time, if we speak with certainty before we know, then when the wolf truly comes, our warnings lose their force.

We owe it to the victims of real hate. We owe it to our community. And we owe it to the Torah that demands integrity not only in what we believe, but in how we arrive there.

Hevei mesunim b'din. In a world rushing to conclusions, have the courage to pause.

Parshas Va'eira

Rav Yochanan Zweig

Group Therapy

And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, and gave them a charge to Bnei Yisroel [...] (6:13).

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashana 3:5) derives from this possuk a fascinating teaching: R' Shmuel son of R' Yitzchak asked, "With what did he charge Bnei Yisroel? He charged with the mitzvah of shiluach avadim (freeing one's slaves)." Remarkably, according to the Talmud Yerushalmi, the very first mitzvah that Hashem asked Moshe to command the Jewish people was to free their slaves.

At a glance, this can be difficult to comprehend: Why would the mitzvah of freeing one's slaves have the importance of being the first mitzvah given to the nation as a whole? One would expect that perhaps the mitzvah of Shabbos or keeping kosher or family purity laws would take precedence.

Furthermore, none of the Jews had any slaves at this point nor could the law even be observed until they settled in their homeland of Eretz Yisroel! Why charge them with a mitzvah that cannot be fulfilled at that time and why give it the importance of being the first mitzvah they are commanded to do?

Psychological studies show that those who were abused as children have a tendency to become abusers themselves. Obviously, not everyone abused as a child becomes an abuser; but studies show that there is a threefold higher risk for abused children to become abusers later in life. Psychologists have offered a few possible reasons for this link. One of the prevailing theories is that children rationalize this abuse by thinking that abuse is normal behavior. So as they mature they don't fully understand that abusive behavior is wrong, and therefore don't have the same barriers in place to prevent such behavior.

This is problematic for a few reasons: 1) if someone experienced something difficult or painful he should be more sensitive to it, and thereby take extraordinary measure to ensure that he does not cause the same pain to another, particularly a child and 2) this reasoning doesn't explain why they would have a stronger tendency toward deviant behavior. At some point in their lives they would certainly learn that society considers such abuse wrong. Why shouldn't that be enough to stop them?

A much more compelling theory is that an adult who has unresolved issues from being abused as a child acts out as a way of coping with the feelings of helplessness experienced as a child. In other words, those abused become abusers to prove to themselves that they are no longer helpless victims. By becoming abusers, they psychologically reinforce within themselves that they are no longer the ones abused.

We see this in many other instances as well. Smokers who are finally able to quit for good often become crusaders and feel compelled to lecture others to quit smoking; overweight individuals who manage to lose weight are suddenly weight loss experts and have no problem sharing their opinions about how much you should weigh; religious leaders struggling with their own demons become virulent anti-smut and lascivious behavior crusaders, yet nobody is surprised when scandals about them emerge. These "crusades" are merely a coping mechanism for their unresolved issues.

This is exactly what Hashem is telling Bnei Yisroel. He is saying, you have been slaves now in Egypt for close to two hundred years. You need to emotionally deal with the fact that you are now truly free and no longer slaves. One of the ways to emotionally get past one's own slavery would be to have and hold on to slaves of your own. But this is why you must observe the mitzvah of freeing slaves. The ability to no longer need slaves of your own is the ultimate proof that you have internalized your freedom and are in a healthy emotional place. At that point, you will be truly free.

It's All About Me

These are the heads of their fathers' houses; The sons of Reuven the firstborn of Yisroel; Hanoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuven [...] (6:14).

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the Torah suddenly finds it necessary to record the genealogy of Yaakov's family right in the middle of the story of the Exodus. Rashi goes on to explain that the Torah wanted to record the yichus (lineage) of Moshe and Aharon; and once it mentioned Moshe and Aharon, it begins from the firstborn of the family – Reuven. This is unusual for a few reasons. Generally, when the Torah records the lineage of an individual, the Torah begins with the individual and works its way backwards (e.g. Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen). So why did the Torah begin with Yaakov? Moreover, why does the Torah mention the families of Reuven and Shimon at all?

Sometimes during the speeches at a simcha, the attendees are subjected to a detailed recollection and description of all the prominent antecedents in the family. While it is true that a family's yichus does add, at least somewhat, to that individual and family's prominence – as the possuk says, "the glory of children are their fathers" (Mishlei 17:6) – most people tend to forget the beginning of that very same possuk: "the crown of grandfathers are their grandchildren."

In other words, the crowning achievement of one's family isn't in the past, it's in the future. We have to develop ourselves into people who our forbearers would be proud of and become their crowning achievement. This means that all they did in their lives, their sacrifices, their own accomplishments, etc. are for naught if we fail to fulfill our own mission in life. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah – Toldos) says that the only reason Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace was because he would have a grandson named Yaakov. In essence, we can and must justify the lives of our ancestors.

This is an awesome responsibility to fulfill. While all of us are descended from a glorious past – that of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – our personal obligation is to fulfill their mission. If we, God forbid, fail to live up to that responsibility then all is for naught. As great as our forefathers (and all our forbearers throughout history) were, they need us in order for the world to come to its final culmination and fulfill the destiny of why all of us were created.

That is what the Torah is telling us here. Moshe was supposed to lead Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt and into Eretz Yisroel to the final purpose of why the world was created. Therefore, this is the story of Yaakov's family. That is why the lineage begins with him. Continuing with his first born Reuven and then Shimon, great as they were, they didn't succeed in fulfilling the family's mission. But Levi, through Moshe and

Aharon, justified the entire family and their purpose in fulfilling Avraham's vision of bringing Hashem down to this world, and on to the final redemption.

<https://oukosher.org/blog/consumer-kosher/aged-cheese-list/>

Refua Sheleima שלום יהודה הלוי בן חננה חזקה
לע"ג

יוחנן בן יקוטיאל יודא ע"ה
שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) ליב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל

Parasha Va'era: Making Sense Of The Plagues: The Education Of Pharaoh **By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom**

INCONSISTENCIES WITHIN THE PLAGUES

Then YHVH said to Mosheh, “Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. Say to him, ‘YHVH, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, “Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.” But until now you have not listened.’ Thus says YHVH, “By this you shall know that I am YHVH.” See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. (Sh'mot [Exodus] 7:14-17)

In this account of the warning of the first plague (blood), there are several details which show up again in some – but not all – of the other plagues:

Mosheh warns Pharaoh about the upcoming plague – but not every time (only before the plagues of frogs, wild beasts, pestilence, hail, locusts and the first-born).

Some of these warnings take place in the early morning by the banks of the Nile (wild beasts and hail) while others take place in Pharaoh’s palace.

A theological message (e.g. “By this you shall know that I am YHVH”) is appended to the warning – whereas other warnings are bereft of such a message.

Mosheh’s staff is used in some of the plagues – but not all (it is only used in the plagues of blood, frogs, lice, hail and locusts).

Our first simple and straightforward question is: Is there any rhyme or reason to the plagues and their attendant warnings which would explain these apparent inconsistencies?

II. “I WILL HARDEN PHARAOH’S HEART”

The second question begins in the text, challenges our basic theological and philosophical assumptions – and is answered right back in the text. This question has troubled religious thinkers throughout the ages:

And YHVH said to Mosheh, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.” (Sh'mot 4:21 – see also 7:3)

Not only does God promise that He will make Pharaoh stubborn – the Torah also recounts this divine intervention several times throughout the “plague-driven negotiations” (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27)

Why did God harden Pharaoh’s heart?

There are two parts to this question:

How could Pharaoh be held responsible for his wickedness if God was “pulling the strings”?

If God made Pharaoh stubborn until something changed which would allow B’nei Yisra’el to go free – what “changed” after the smiting of the first-born that allowed our freedom – which couldn’t happen before?

Rambam (MT Hilkhot Teshuva, Chapter 6) addresses this question, as do R. Sa’adia, Albo, Ramban, Ibn Ezra and many other Rishonim. Their answers vary, including the response that the punishment for Pharaoh’s harsh enslavement of the B’nei Yisra’el was to “close off the doors of repentance” by hardening his heart.

III. THE S’FORNO’S APPROACH

Rabbenu Ovadiah S’forno suggests an independent and original approach:

And I will harden his heart: Since he will be unable to tolerate the plagues, he would certainly emancipate the people – not because he accepts the sovereignty of God and to do His will – therefore He hardened his heart to be able to withstand the plagues and not to free them. (Commentary to Shemot 4:21 – see also his commentary to 7:3).

In other words, God wanted Pharaoh to let B'nei Yisra'el go – but only for the right reason. To let them go as a political move or as a visceral reaction to the onslaught of plagues was not sufficient. Pharaoh had to learn a lesson of sorts which would affect his overall attitude towards God and the B'nei Yisra'el before the process could be completed and the B'nei Yisra'el could be allowed to leave. In order to “keep Pharaoh in the game” until he could learn this lesson, God had to strengthen his will (=heart) to withstand the plagues.

Although S'forno doesn't point this out explicitly, the implication of this is that something took place in Pharaoh's consciousness – even if only for a fleeting moment – in reaction to the plague of the first-born which signified the proper attitude and the desired change. The text indeed bears this out.

In response to those plagues which caused Pharaoh to temporarily “give in” (although he always changed his mind once the plague had passed), the text tells us that the king allowed us to Go, sacrifice to your God (8:24). Pharaoh's responses in the other cases, although varying in scope (sacrifice in the land, only the men could go etc.), remained constant in style: It is your God whom you seek to worship – not mine!

In response to the final plague (12:32), Pharaoh added two key words: uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti (And bring a blessing on me too!). The Rishonim generally understand these words to mean that Pharaoh was asking the B'nei Yisra'el to either pray or to present an offering on his behalf (when they reach their worship site in the desert).

In other words, the understanding that Pharaoh achieved via the final plague was that this God – YHVH – who the B'nei Yisra'el worship, was a God Whose blessing even the Pharaoh needed. He also recognized one other facet – this Supreme Ruler had a special relationship with the B'nei Yisra'el, such that their intercession on his behalf would be more effective than his own prayer.

As I explained in last week's shiur, this turnabout was necessary not only for Pharaoh's spiritual welfare and theological enlightenment – but, most significantly, for the benefit of B'nei Yisra'el. For these people, steeped in Egyptian culture and self-subjugated to Egyptian icons, to have their own king make this sort of declaration and express this awareness would do more to bring the B'nei Yisra'el back into their own proper place in their relationship with God (and awareness of their own greatness) than any miracle.

IV. THE PROCESS OF AN ATTITUDE-SHIFT

I would like to propose that the process which culminated in Pharaoh's cry of uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti can be discerned in the structure of the plagues and of Mosheh's warnings in advance of them. For purposes of this shiur, we will focus on the first nine – and then view the tenth (the first-born) independently.

First – the facts as they are presented in the text:

#1: Dam (blood)
Warning: YES
Where: NILE
When: MORNING
Message: YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH
Vehicle: STAFF

#2: Tz'farde'a' (frogs)
Warning: YES
Where: PALACE
When: ???
Message: (none)
Vehicle: STAFF

#3: Kinim (lice)

Warning: NO
Where: n/a
When: n/a
Message: n/a
Vehicle: STAFF

#4: 'Arov (wild beasts)
Warning: YES
Where: NILE
When: MORNING
Message: YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH IN THE MIDST OF THE LAND
Vehicle: (none)

#5: Dever(pestilence)
Warning: YES
Where: PALACE
When: ???
Message: (none)
Vehicle: (none)

#6: Sh'kin (boils)
Warning: NO
Where: n/a
When: n/a
Message: n/a
Vehicle: (none)

#7: Barad (hail)
Warning: YES
Where: NILE
When: MORNING
Message: YOU WILL KNOW THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN ALL THE LAND
Vehicle: MOSHEH'S HANDS/STAFF

#8: Arbeh (locusts)
Warning: YES
Where: PALACE
When: ???
Message: (none)
Vehicle: MOSHEH'S HANDS/STAFF

#9: Hoshek (darkness)
Warning: NO
Where: n/a
When: n/a
Message: n/a
Vehicle: MOSHEH'S HANDS

Note the following:

Wherever Mosheh encounters Pharaoh at the river in the morning, there is also a theological message attached to the warning. This is followed by a plague with a prefatory warning given inside the palace – without a theological message – which is followed by a plague given with no warning. If we can decipher this structure, we will only need to explain the role of the staff and Mosheh's hands to complete the picture. [emphasis added]

V. A FOUR-STEP EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

As we all know, attitudes which are dramatically shifted in one shot are often just as easily shifted back. In order to

permanently and effectively educate someone, we need to use slow and even steps, giving the student time to digest, reflect and integrate the new information in such a way that a new attitude may be adopted.

God (through Mosheh) had to lead Pharaoh from I don't know YHVH (Sh'mot 5:2) to uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti (12:32). In order to clarify the steps needed for this process, we'll use an analogy from our own world of Torah education.

If a teacher would like to encourage a potential student – who is not even aware of Talmud Torah as an academic discipline at all – to take a year off to go study in Yeshivah in Israel, there are several shifts which the teacher must effect in the student:

Make the student aware of Torah as an academic discipline;
Demonstrate the special qualities of Talmud Torah;
Demonstrate the superiority of Talmud Torah over all other disciplines;
Demonstrate the special and unique relationship which this future student has with Talmud Torah.

In much the same way, Pharaoh had to:

Be made aware of YHVH's existence;
Be shown the uniqueness of YHVH;
Be shown the ultimate superiority of YHVH;
Admit to the special relationship that the B'nei Yisra'el – and he – have with YHVH.

If we look through the three theological messages (in context) given in the warnings (before plagues #1, 4 and 7), we can note that this progression covers the first three steps:

(1): "YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH" (God's existence) (4): "YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH IN THE MIDST OF THE LAND" (The uniqueness of God's powers) (7): "YOU WILL KNOW THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN ALL THE LAND" (The superiority of God)

The progression of Pharaoh's education is capped with his request following the plague of the first-born: uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti – indicating that a recognition of the special relationship which he has with God (he is dependent on God's blessing) and which the B'nei Yisra'el have with God (he is dependent on their intercession on his behalf).

VI. EACH STEP: THREE "SIGNS"

Earlier in the narrative, we are introduced to the notion that three demonstrations of a truth will suffice to persuade the targeted audience. When Mosheh asks God for a sign through which he can prove the veracity of his divine agency (4:1), God gives him three signs (staff, scale-disease, blood; these signs are themselves a mystery which we hope to unravel in a future shiur). As God Himself says, the goal of these signs is:

"This," said YHVH, "is so that they may believe that YHVH, the God of their fathers -the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak and the God of Ya'akov -has appeared to you." (4:5)

Note that this "message" and goal of the three signs is given subsequent to the first sign – as if to say: Mosheh, the purpose of this entire series which has just begun is to establish your credentials as My messenger.

In the same way, each step in Pharaoh's education took three signs/plagues to be accomplished, allowing him to move on to the next step. This explains the following pattern: [emphasis added]

The first plague in each set (blood, wild beasts and hail) follows a pattern: Early morning warning at the river, theological message – and then the plague.

Why was the warning at the river in the morning? Ibn Ezra and Rashbam point out that the river was a spot where the king would take walks – and where the people would be present, watching him as he sojourned. I would like to suggest that since the Nile was considered a divinity in Egypt, the Pharaoh was likely involved in some form of worship at the banks of the river early in the morning. Mosheh's confrontation of Pharaoh in the middle of a worship service, in front of his priests and the people, became a public statement and challenge to the entire Egyptian culture and belief system.

This warning was the preface to all three plagues in the set – including a public declaration and the theological lesson of these three plagues.

The second one in each set (frogs, pestilence and locusts) also has a consistent pattern: Warning in the palace with no theological message – and then the plague.

In these cases, Mosheh challenges and warns Pharaoh in his palace – there is no need for either public declaration or a theological message, as these have already been given at the beginning of the set. The warning, however, was still given to show Pharaoh that the upcoming plague was part of that same system.

The final one in each set (lice, boils and darkness) also has a pattern: No warning at all – just a plague. At this point, the message and warning are moot – Pharaoh needs to internalize the lesson of the series.

This entire structure and explanation is buttressed by R. Yehudah's acrostic of the plagues – D'Tza"kh 'Ada"sh B'acha"v:

VII. R. YEHUDAH'S *SIMANIM*

In the Sifri (Devarim #301) we first encounter R. Yehudah's famous acrostic for the ten plagues: D'Tza"kh 'Ada"sh B'acha"v (which stands for *Dam* – *Tz'farde'a* – *Kinim*, *Arov* – *Dever* – *Sh'khin*, *Barad* – *Arbeh* – *Hoshekh* – *makkat B'khorot*) – which is incorporated into the Haggadah shel Pessach.

There are many explanations of the meaning behind this acrostic (the simplest is that it is a mnemonic device) – but it may hold the key to understanding the structure of the plagues and the educational process driving them.

Leaving the final plague aside for a moment, let's reexamine our list, keeping R. Yehudah's acrostic in mind. Following his set-up, there are three sets of plagues. Each set carries an increasingly radical and impactful message to Pharaoh – until he is ready to be affected by the plague of the first-born and to declare uVeirakhtem Gam-Oti. [emphasis added]

Before examining the consistent pattern within the sets, let's see if we can discover the lesson of each set. We will also be able to explain the role of the staff in the plagues.

SET #1: THE EXISTENCE OF YHVH

When first approached by Mosheh, appearing in the Name of YHVH, Pharaoh's response was: "I do not know YHVH" (5:2). The first goal, therefore, was to "introduce" Pharaoh to God.

We see this in the theological message attached to the first plague – That you will know that I am YHVH. At this point, Mosheh was to make Pharaoh aware of the God of the Hebrews – if you will, as an "equally valid" God to the rest of the Egyptian pantheon. This is accomplished through blood, frogs and lice. Note that all three of them involved using the staff as the direct catalyst for starting the plague (Blood: "he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river"; Frogs: "So Aharon stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt"; Lice: "Aharon stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth") – just like the Egyptian wizards would do their magic. Note that through these three plagues the Egyptian magicians stayed in the plague-competition, finally bowing out during the third one.

In other words, this first set of plagues was designed to introduce God into the Egyptian power picture: YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM YHVH.

SET #2: THE SPECIAL POWERS OF YHVH

Now that Pharaoh realizes that YHVH exists and that He has powers (at this point) akin to those of the Egyptian gods (and even surpassing them, as his wizards had already bowed out of the competition), the time had come to impress upon Pharaoh God's unique power. Unlike the gods of the Egyptians, who are distant but need a human intermediary (wizard) to trigger the plague with a vehicle (staff) – God is ...in the midst of the land. This is demonstrated by plagues which, unlike the first three, do not come out of the ground (river, earth), but from the environment. In addition, Mosheh no longer uses the staff – the message here is that God Himself is present and it isn't Mosheh's staff that triggers the plague as much as Mosheh's command/request.

Through the second set, including wild beasts, pestilence and boils, Pharaoh is finally taught that: I AM YHVH IN THE MIDST OF THE LAND. As before, the first plague is preceded by a public warning with this message, the second is preceded by a private warning and the third has no warning attached.

SET #3: THE SUPERIORITY OF YHVH

Pharaoh is ready to embrace the superiority of God over all members of the Egyptian pantheon. Significantly, God tells Mosheh to lift his hands heavenward to trigger all three of these plagues (hail – 9:22; locusts – 10:12; darkness – 10:21); however, in the case of the first two, Mosheh lifts his hands and holds the staff up – whereas in the third, he only lifts his hands to the heavens.

The staff, which did not play a role in the second set, serves a different function from the first set. In the first set the staff was the catalyst of the plague, mimicking the Egyptian wizards. In the third set, Mosheh lifted the staff as an extension of his hands, showing everyone that the same God Who brought the first three plagues was also behind these. The staff is not a catalyst, it is a sign. This explains why Mosheh did not use the staff for the third plague in this set – darkness. Once he lifted his arms, absolute darkness fell and no one (of the Egyptians) would see either his hand or the staff!

Through these final plagues, Pharaoh has been taught the penultimate lesson: THERE IS NONE LIKE ME IN ALL THE LAND.

Pharaoh was now prepared for the ultimate lesson, brought through the plague of the first-born – but that will have to wait for another shiur.

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Parshat Vaera: Rise of a Leader

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PARASHAT VA-ERA (not):

Last week's shiur was about the Egyptian attitude toward Bnei Yisrael and how Bnei Yisrael's lack of strong leadership contributes to their weakness and the ability of Paro to enslave and murder them. We did not develop the second major theme in Parashat Shemot: the appearance of Moshe Rabbeinu. We will begin with that theme this week (we will not actually make it into Parashat Va-Era).

MOSHE'S BIRTH AND SALVATION:

The way the Torah tells of Moshe's birth and his adventures in the Nile (at the age of three months) brings to mind some events we looked at a long time ago:

SHEMOT 2:3 --

The woman [i.e., Moshe's mother] conceived and bore a son. She saw ["va-teireh"] that he was good ["ki tov"], and hid him for three months. She then could no longer hide him. She took a box ["teiva"] of reeds, smeared it with sealing and tar, put the boy into it, and put it among the reeds at the edge of the river.

These two pesukim (verses) contain two kernels which hint to themes which will occupy the rest of the sefer (book). By using particular words or phrases, the Torah often hints to connections between events. Here, the parallels jump right out at us:

PARALLEL #1:

Va-TEIREH oto KI TOV hu: "She SAW that he WAS GOOD"
Va-YAR Elokim KI TOV: "Hashem SAW that it WAS GOOD"

The Torah uses the same phrase: ". . . saw . . . was good" with regard to both Hashem's appraisal of Creation, way back in Parashat Bereishit, and here as well, with regard to Moshe's mother's appraisal of her newborn son.

PARALLEL #2:

The second parallel is a word, not a phrase: the word "teiva," "box" or "ark," appears both here with regard to Moshe, and, much earlier, with regard to No'ah ("No'ah's Ark").

The first parallel stands on its own: the language of the two phrases is sufficiently similar that it seems the Torah means for us to make these connections (Hazal, in fact, do connect these pesukim). But the second parallel ("teiva") needs more justification -- how do we know that the Torah truly means to connect the story of Moshe with the story of No'ah just because of this one word? One way to be more certain that a pattern is truly meaningful is to check how rare the word is. "Teiva" turns out to be pretty rare: the word appears in only two places in all of Tanakh (the Bible) -- here, referring to Moshe's little ark, and in Parashat No'ah, referring to the Ark built by No'ah for himself, his family, and a zoo's worth of animals.

Now that we have noted these linguistic parallels, we need to make sense of them: what are the thematic connections between Moshe's birth and Creation, and between Moshe's ark and Noah's? In order to understand these connections, we need to first look at these phrases in context:

- 1) "Va-yar Elokim ki tov": Creation
- 2) The teiva of No'ah: salvation from destruction.

CREATION:

What is the parallel between "Va-yar Elokim ki tov" and "Va-teireh oto ki tov hu"? Both are stories of creation: the story of

Creation itself clearly deals with "creation"; the story of the birth of Moshe heralds creation in a more subtle way:

- 1) The birth of the nation Yisrael. Moshe is to lead his enslaved brothers out of Egypt, to the revelation at Har Sinai, and through the desert toward their future homeland. In the process, they become a nation, developing a national consciousness and identity.
- 2) The rebirth of the world: the revelation of the Torah at Har Sinai so transforms the people who witness it and the world at large that it can be understood as a spiritual recreation of the world. From this point, monotheism begins its public career, as the Jewish people spread the belief in One God all over the world. In a sense, the world is created physically during the first seven days, but spiritually and morally, it is first truly "created" with the revelation of the Torah, Hashem's instructions for how He wants to be served.

SALVATION:

How does the salvation of No'ah thematically in a "teiva" parallel the salvation of Moshe in a "teiva"? Both stories share:

- 1) An environment of mass destruction (in the case of No'ah, the whole world is doomed; in the case of Moshe, all Israelite baby boys are doomed).
- 2) The mass destruction is accomplished by water (the flooding of the whole world in the time of No'ah, the drowning the babies in the Nile in the time of Moshe). (Note also that the ultimate come-uppance of the Egyptians is also through flood, as the waters of the Red Sea "un-part" and swamp the Egyptian pursuers.)
- 3) An individual who is deserving is saved from the watery destruction (the Torah tells us that No'ah is an "ish tzaddik," and that Moshe "was good").
- 4) The deserving individual is saved in a "teiva."

Why does the Torah draw this parallel? What is the Torah trying to communicate?

In our discussions of Parashat Bereshit and Parashat No'ah, we noted that at first, Hashem seems to want to establish a close relationship with all of humanity. When He creates the first human(s), He makes clear that the purpose of humanity is to achieve the status of a "tzelem Elokim" -- an image of Hashem. Humanity is supposed to attempt to emulate Hashem's (a) creativity, (b) control of the universe, and (c) morality, by being (a) creative (procreating), (b) asserting control over the world, and (c) behaving morally. But before long, humanity fails this mission, and "the earth was full of evil/violence" (Bereshit 6:11 and 6:13). Humanity may have achieved creativity and control, but morally, it has failed. Hashem decides that creating humanity was a mistake -- "I regret that I made them" (Bereshit 6:7) -- and that the "experiment" is over. Humanity must be destroyed.

But Hashem saves No'ah because he is an "ish tzaddik." This act signals Hashem's new strategy: before, the plan had been to relate closely to all of humanity. Now, Hashem will choose either individuals or a group from among humanity to carry out His mission. The selected people will be held to the high standards of morality necessary for maintaining a relationship with Hashem, and may also have the job of educating the rest of the world about morality.

The selection of No'ah to survive while the rest of humanity dies exemplifies this new strategy. Shortly after humanity is re-established after the Flood -- and begins once again to flout Hashem's wishes by building the Tower of Bavel -- Hashem acts on His new strategy and chooses an individual to found the group with which He plans to establish a close relationship. This is, of course, Avraham, who is chosen to found a special nation. In the salvation of No'ah -- a righteous individual -- is "hidden" the kernel of Hashem's plan to select a nation to call His own.

If so, then the Torah evokes the No'ah theme now, as Moshe is saved from death, in order to hint that with the salvation of Moshe, Hashem's plan of choosing that special nation is about to unfold. The saving of Moshe 1) from mass destruction 2) through drowning 3) which takes place through a "teiva," 4) because "he was good" (= "No'ah ish tzaddik"), flashes us back to Parashat No'ah and hints that the process of selecting the people to form a relationship with Hashem is about to bear fruit.

A ROUGH BEGINNING:

We now watch as Moshe grows up and takes tentative steps toward his fellow Israelites. The Torah tells us three stories about Moshe prior to Hashem's revelation to him at the (non)-burning bush; we will deal with them separately:

- 1) Moshe kills an Egyptian who is beating/trying to kill a Jew.
- 2) Moshe tries to intercede in an altercation between two Jews, but when one reveals that he knows Moshe has killed an Egyptian, Moshe fears for his life and runs away.
- 3) Moshe defends the daughters of Yitro from the shepherds, and waters their sheep.

DEFENDING A FELLOW JEW:

The Torah tells us that Moshe grows up and then "went out to his brothers and saw their burdens" (2:11). This itself is somewhat surprising: Moshe identifies with Bnei Yisrael, his "brothers" ["ehav"] despite having grown up in an Egyptian household -- in fact, the household of Pharaoh. Somehow, he has maintained his identity as a Jew; he sees the lowly, enslaved Jews as his brothers despite having grown up an aristocrat in a society which looks down on the Jews as lower-class citizens, or at least slaves (and perhaps even lower-order creatures, as discussed last week). Even these slaves are his "brothers."

he gets into trouble the very next day when the most obvious witness --

The way Moshe deals with the brutal Egyptian demonstrates his powerful sense of justice. The Torah tells us that before killing the Egyptian, Moshe "looked this way and that way," but wherever he looked, "he saw that there was no one" to witness what he was about to do. Of course, there is someone right in front of him -- the very Jew whom he is saving -- but since Moshe thinks of this Jew as part of his team, "there was no one" there -- no one to be concerned about. But Moshe is wrong, and he realizes this with surprise the next day when implicitly threatened with exposure by a Jew. It seems that the very Jew he was trying to save (who else could have told the tale?) could not keep the secret, and Moshe's brave act exposes him to danger.

One lesson Moshe is taught is that a leader cannot necessarily count on others to be his or her co-conspirators. In the future, as Bnei Yisrael's leader, Moshe will face this gap again and again. As close as any leader might come to the people he leads, there will always remain a gap between the leader and the led. The leader can never depend on the led to cover for him or look out for his interests; he can never assume (without checking) that he and the led share interests. Sefer BeMidbar (Numbers) will provide us with many instances where the Jews turn on Moshe as a group, blaming him for dragging them out of wonderful Egypt into the wasteland of the desert. While Moshe is willing to tolerate this sort of relationship for a long time, he eventually becomes frustrated (in Parashat Be-ha'alotekha) and attempts to resign his post.

BREAKING UP THE FIGHT:

Now we move to the second story of Moshe's early days: the two fighting Jews. Moshe quickly identifies the one at fault and tries to put a stop to the violence: "Why do you hit your fellow?" But bringing peace turns out to be much more complicated than just taking the moral high ground. Hazal tell us that offering tokhaha (reproof) is so difficult that no one has the sensitivity to carry it off anymore. Tokhaha is a form of teaching and should also manifest concern for the spiritual welfare of the sinner (as well registering a personal protest against the commission of sin). But it can also -- and usually does -- make for an adversarial relationship between reprobate and reproved. Few people like to be told they are doing something wrong, especially in front of other people and when emotions are high -- like during a fistfight. Facing a situation like the one Moshe faces, it is not simple to decide what to do. Moshe actually does very little -- all he does is ask "Why do you hit your fellow?", but the response is furious, sarcastic, and above all, contains a threat to Moshe.

Looking back now on these two stories, it looks like there might be more than just one reason why Moshe runs to Midyan. The Torah tells us that he runs away to avoid being prosecuted (read "executed") for killing the Egyptian. But on a more subtle level, he has shown concern for his people -- twice -- and twice he has been rejected. First he saves the life of the Jew being beaten by the Egyptian, but instead of keeping Moshe's act a secret, the Jew tells his family and friends, and the secret gets out. Moshe risks his life to save this man, but the man turns around and endangers Moshe's life. Then Moshe tries to defuse conflict between two Jews, who not only reject him, but also threaten him. How eager would YOU be to maintain a relationship with this group of people?

PARO'S MOTIVATION:

Meanwhile, Paro wants to kill Moshe. The simple reading is that he wants to execute him for killing the Egyptian who was beating the Jew. But since Moshe is Paro's adopted grandson, isn't there some sort of royal immunity?

Grandson or not, Moshe is a Jew to Paro, and the most dangerous thing in his mind is a Jew who shows signs of leadership and resistance (see last week's shiur). Paro allows his daughter to save the Jewish baby she finds in the Nile since he assumes that the child, raised as an Egyptian, will never become a threat. But now he sees Moshe as a potential troublemaker, perhaps even the first spark of Jewish resistance. Moshe's defense of his stricken brother, if not firmly punished by Paro, might send the message to Moshe or to others that there is hope for resistance.

MOSHE AND YA'AKOV:

The Torah next reports Moshe's flight from Egypt and his arrival at Midyan. I don't want to spend too much time here, but it's worth noting an interesting pattern:

YA'AKOV	MOSHE

Runs away from home	Runs away from home
Reason: to avoid death	Reason: to avoid death
Encounters a well	Encounters a well
Woman shepherd (Rahel)	Women shepherds
Gives sheep water	Gives sheep water
Moves in with family	Moves in with family
Marries shepherdess daughter	Marries shepherdess daughter
Tends sheep for father-in-law	Tends sheep for father-in-law
Has children there	Has children there

Besides noting this parallelism and offering it for you to "unpack," one other important point is also worth mentioning: this story again shows how Moshe Rabbeinu's sense of justice and fairness impels him to take action to right wrongs. He cannot stand by while evil goes on before him. Even though his interference has already landed him in trouble with Paro, he has not concluded that the smart thing to do is to ignore injustice. He stands up for the daughters of Yitro and prevents the other shepherds from taking advantage of them.

HASHEM APPEARS:

We now move on to Moshe Rabbeinu's first meeting with Hashem -- the burning bush. Hashem hears the cries of anguish of Bnei Yisrael, the Torah says; Hashem "remembers" His covenant with the Avot (forefathers), the promise to make their descendants into a great nation and to give them the Land of Cana'an. After giving us this peek into Hashem's thought process, as it were, the story continues with the flaming bush which attracts Moshe's attention.

SHEMOT 3:1-4 --

Moshe was tending the sheep of Yitro, his father-in-law, priest of Midyan. He led the sheep toward the desert and came to the mountain of Hashem at Horev. An angel of Hashem APPEARED ["VA-YERA"] to him in a flaming fire from a bush. He SAW ["VA-YAR"] that the bush was flaming with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Moshe said, "Let me go over and SEE ["ER-EH"] this fantastic SIGHT ["MAREH"] -- why doesn't the bush burn up?" Hashem SAW [VA-YAR] that he had turned to LOOK ["LI-R'OT"]. Hashem called to him from the bush: "Moshe! Moshe!" He said, "Here I am."

Within just 3 pesukim, six different variants of the root "ra-ah" -- "to see" -- appear. The irony of this root's presence here becomes clear as we read on:

SHEMOT 3:5-6 --

He [Hashem] said, "Do not come closer; take your shoes off of your feet, for the ground you stand on is holy ground." He said, "I am the God of your fathers, God of Avraham, God of Yitzhak, and God of Ya'akov." Moshe **HID HIS FACE,**

because he was afraid of LOOKING at Hashem.

After all this emphasis on "seeing," and with Moshe so eager to "see" this great "sight" which has "appeared" to him, with Hashem "seeing" that Moshe has come to "see" what it is, when he actually finds out what it is, he doesn't want to "see" it at all! He hides his face, afraid to look at Hashem. This scene foreshadows and encapsulates the entire conversation which ensues between Hashem and Moshe: Hashem announces in dramatic, formal fashion that He has heard the cries of His people (this is the first time Hashem refers to Bnei Yisrael as "Ami," "My nation"), that He remembers the covenant with the Avot, and has now "descended" to pass judgment on the foe. He will redeem the people with mighty miracles, "signs" and "wonders," and the people will then serve Him on Har Sinai. They will move from there to inherit the land promised to them. But Moshe continues to "hide his face" from Hashem, expressing self-doubt and fear and refusing to accept Hashem's mission to lead the people.

In light of Moshe's future interactions with Hashem, it is curious that Moshe is now afraid to "look" at Hashem. Much later, we find Moshe actively seeking opportunities for greater levels of revelation:

SHEMOT 33:18 --

He [Moshe] said [to Hashem], "SHOW ME Your glory!"

By the time the event in the above pasuk occurs, Moshe has accepted the Torah from Hashem, discovered that the people have built an idol in his absence, and returned to the mountain for the second Tablets and to seek forgiveness for the people. Seeing that Hashem is in a favorable mood, so to speak, Moshe gains forgiveness for the people and then requests: "Show me Your glory!" Not only is Moshe not afraid to "see" Hashem's glory, he is so bold as to *request* this experience. Clearly, Moshe's relationship with Hashem develops over time. Earlier on, he is overcome by awe, "afraid to look at Hashem." But by the time he has served as the intermediary for the revelation of the Torah at Har Sinai, he is eager for an experience of greater divine revelation. He asks for the highest level possible. Hashem tells Moshe that he cannot truly see Him without dying in the process; He then shows Moshe His "back." We will look much more closely at this experience when we get there (Parashat Ki Tisa), but for now it is important to realize that Moshe undergoes a process of transformation and growth in his relationship with Hashem.

"REMOVE YOUR SHOES":

Hashem speaks to Moshe from the bush, calling his name. Moshe responds, but he does not yet know Who is speaking to him. Only when Hashem explicitly reveals His identity does Moshe cover his face in fear of looking at Him. Hashem commands Moshe to remove his shoes before he comes any closer: the ground before him is holy.

Where else are people told to remove their shoes because they are standing on holy ground?

Just after Yehoshua brings Bnei Yisrael over the Jordan River into Cana'an, a warrior appears to him (Joshua 5). When Yehoshua asks him whether he is friend or foe, the warrior tells Yehoshua that he is actually the angel-general of Hashem's army, sent to guide Bnei Yisrael in their conquest of the Land of Cana'an. He tells Yehoshua to take off his shoes, that the ground he stands on is holy.

Moshe stands in our parasha on Har Horev (Har Sinai); Yehoshua stands somewhere outside of Yeriho (Jericho). What is so special about Har Horev and "some place near Yeriho," that Hashem commands Moshe and Yehoshua to remove their shoes?

At least in the case of Har Sinai, the answer seems obvious: this ground is holy because Hashem will deliver the Torah to Bnei Yisrael on this spot. But that only begs the next question: why indeed does Hashem choose Har Sinai in particular to deliver the Torah?

Perhaps these places -- Har Sinai and "somewhere near Yeriho" -- are holy because of *what* Hashem tells the prophet there, not because of any inherent quality of the places themselves. There is nothing really special about Har Sinai itself: it is a desert mountain, and not a particularly imposing one (as Hazal point out), located three days' journey from Egypt and eleven days' journey from Cana'an. It is distinguished not at all; it lies, so to speak, exactly in the middle of nowhere. The same is true of the place where Hashem's warrior-general-angel appears to Yehoshua: outside of Yeriho, somewhere near the border of the Land of Cana'an but not in a city or some other significant location.

Both of these revelations of Hashem have special characteristics, which may explain why the ground is made holy by the revelation. In both stories, Hashem entrusts the prophet with his life's mission:

- 1) Moshe's mission is to bring the Jews out of Egypt and mediate the revelation of the Torah to them at Har Sinai. His task will not extend to bringing the Bnei Yisrael into Cana'an.
- 2) Yehoshua's mission will be to bring Bnei Yisrael into Cana'an and lead the conquest of the Land. This mission is symbolized by the appearance of Hashem's chief warrior-angel.

The reason these places are considered holy is because special divine revelations take place there: two leaders of unparalleled significance in the history of Kelal Yisrael receive their missions in these revelations. The special message sanctifies the ground on which the revelation takes place.

This is also what sanctifies Har Sinai as far as the revelation of the Torah is concerned. Har Sinai is chosen because it is the quintessential "nowhere" (an idea echoed in Hazal). It is chosen because its holiness is due exclusively to the revelation which will take place there. What makes it so holy is that it is where Bnei Yisrael receive their mission -- the Torah -- just as Moshe receives his mission there and Yehoshua receives his mission outside Yeriho. It is also no accident that at the time of the revelation, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to stay away from Har Sinai because it is too holy to tread upon. Hashem warns Moshe repeatedly that anyone who steps on the mountain will die. Once again, the reason the ground is sanctified is because the revelation by Hashem of a mission of national significance is what sanctifies a place.

This would also explain why these places of revelation are holy only *during* the actual revelation itself, not afterward. Hashem explicitly tells Moshe that once Ma'amad Har Sinai (the revelation of the Torah) is completed, the people may ascend the mountain; only during the revelation are they prohibited to ascend. This confirms that these places are not inherently holy, and are sanctified only while the special divine presence is there. Similarly, we never hear of a place near Yeriho which has any special permanent significance; there is no warning in Tanakh about not walking there. The place of Yehoshua's revelation was holy only during the giving-over of his mission.

A SUDDEN DEATH THREAT:

As we know, Moshe finally packs up his family and heads from Yitro's home in Midyan back to Egypt. Somewhere on the road, a bizarre incident occurs: an angel of Hashem appears and tries to kill a member of Moshe's family:

SHEMOT 4:24-26 --

It happened, on the way, at a rest stop, that Hashem met him and wanted to kill him. Tzippora took a knife, cut off the foreskin of her son, threw it at his feet, and said, "You are a 'hatan-damim' to me." He turned away from her, and then she said, "A 'hatan-damim' for the circumcised."

Who does Hashem want to kill? Grammatically, it is ambiguous, and may refer to either Moshe or his son. Why does Hashem want to kill anyone? Why does circumcising Eliezer (Moshe and Tzippora's son) ward off Hashem's anger? And what does this story have to do with anything?

In order to understand what is going on here, we have to move back a few pesukim:

SHEMOT 4:21-23 --

Hashem said to Moshe, "As you go to return to Egypt, see that you perform before Paro all of the wonders which I have placed in your hand; I will harden his heart, and he will not send out the nation. You shall say to Paro, 'So says Hashem: 'My FIRST-BORN SON is Israel. I have said to you, 'Send forth MY SON, so he may serve Me,' but you have refused to send him. I will [therefore] kill your FIRSTBORN SON!'''

Hashem's firstborn is Bnei Yisrael; Moshe is to threaten Paro that if Paro does not release Hashem's firstborn, Hashem will kill Paro's firstborn. Right after this, Hashem tries to kill *Moshe's* firstborn! But why? To answer, we must follow through on the reference to the plague of the firstborn which will strike Egypt after all the other plagues. Looking ahead to then, Hashem has decided to carry out the threat He makes here -- He decides to kill the firstborn of Egypt because Egypt refuses to release His firstborn. At that time, Moshe is commanded by Hashem to tell Bnei Yisrael that if they want their own firstborn sons not to be struck down by the plague, they must paint blood on their doorposts to identify their houses as

Jewish houses. This blood is to come from the Korban Pesah, the sacrifice that Bnei Yisrael are commanded to offer on the afternoon before they are to be redeemed from Egypt.

The same thing happens here! Just after Hashem threatens to kill the firstborn of Egypt, Hashem's angel comes and tries to kill Moshe's firstborn. Tzippora suddenly realizes that she and Moshe have done nothing to show that this child is a Jewish child. Just as the houses must be marked (with blood) to show that they are Jewish houses, this child must be marked (with blood) to show that he is a Jewish child.

Perhaps the reason why blood is necessary in both cases -- in this case, the blood of the child, and later on, the blood of the sacrifice -- is as a form of self-sacrifice. The Ramban says that one reason we offer sacrifices is because we are offering something we own to be sacrificed in place of ourselves. We are, on a certain level, offering ourselves. The same theme may be present in circumcision: shedding a few drops of blood symbolizes our total devotion to Hashem, to the degree that we are willing to be "moser nefesh" (sacrifice our lives) for His sake. In order to deserve to be saved from the destroying angel, Moshe's son, in this story, and the Jewish firstborn sons, later on, must bear a sign of their complete dedication to Hashem.

Perhaps one other level of meaning here is that in order to be saved, we must do something to "deserve" it. One reason why the Jews may be commanded to bring the Pesah sacrifice is so that Hashem can give them "credit" for their obedience. The first-born sons, who at this time serve as "kohanim," priests, are key players in the bringing of the sacrifice. Their participation in this mitzvah, and the painting of the symbol of this good deed -- the blood of the sacrifice -- on the doorposts of their houses, merits them salvation. The same is true for Moshe's son: in order to escape the fate with which Hashem has just threatened Egypt, the family must perform a mitzvah with this son. The opportunity most readily available is an act which was commanded to Avraham long ago: circumcision. Tzippora thinks quickly and saves her son by performing this mitzvah.

This structure -- that the plagues of Egypt often have a precursor in earlier events -- is a theme we will explore more fully next week.

Shabbat Shalom

PARSHAT VA'ERA -- "ANI HASHEM"

Should Bnei Yisrael's redemption from slavery be unconditional?

According to God's original promise to Avraham Avinu at Brit Bein ha'Btarim (Breishit 15:13-15), it certainly seems that way.

Furthermore, the opening lines of Parshat Va'era also leave us with this impression that the forthcoming redemption will be unconditional – after all, could God have any higher expectations from a nation that had endured so many years of oppression?

In the following shiur, we re-examine those psukim (i.e. Shmot 6:2-9) – to show how and why Israel's redemption from Egypt emerges as a more 'reciprocal' process.

INTRODUCTION

In our study last week of the 'burning bush' narrative, we explained how Moshe Rabeinu received a 'double mission' - as God instructed him to both:

* **INFORM** Bnei Yisrael that God has come to fulfill His promise to the Avot to take them to Eretz Canaan.

AND

* **ORDER** Pharaoh to allow Bnei Yisrael to journey a three day distance into the desert - to worship their God.

At first glance, Moshe's mission to Pharaoh appears to be much more difficult than his mission to Bnei Yisrael. After all, Moshe must **convince** the Egyptian ruler to do something against his will; while Bnei Yisrael need only to be **told** 'good tidings'.

However, as the story continues, we will see how Moshe's 'mission' to Bnei Yisrael becomes no less difficult, and how that mission emerges as a primary theme of Sefer Shmot!

To explain how and why, we must first consider the setting as Parshat Va'era begins.

GETTING BETTER, OR GETTING WORSE

Recall from Parshat Shmot, how Bnei Yisrael immediately believed Moshe's tidings of their forthcoming redemption:

"...and the people believed that God had come to redeem His people..." (see 4:29-31).

However, this initial enthusiasm quickly turned bitter after Pharaoh doubled their workload (in reaction to Moshe's opening request /see 5:18-21). Understandably, the people accuse Moshe - their new leader - for aggravating their condition; whereupon Moshe turns to God in prayer, asking:

"Why have you made things worse for this people, why have you sent me! From the time I have gone to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, their situation has only gotten worse, and You have not saved Your nation!" (5:22).

It is precisely at this point when Parshat Va'era opens, i.e. as Moshe awaits God's answer concerning what to tell the people. As the people raise a rather 'legitimate' complaint, Moshe needs to know how to respond.

Note how God's response to this complaint is found in the opening eight psukim of Parshat Va'era (i.e. 6:2-9) - and how it divides into two sections:

- 1) What God tells Moshe (see 6:2-5), and hence:
- 2) What Moshe must tell Bnei Yisrael (see 6:6-8).

In our shiur, we will focus on God's answer to Bnei Yisrael (i.e. 6:6-8), while our additional shiur on Parshat Va'era (to follow) will discuss how and why God first mentions "brit Avot" in his preliminary remarks to Moshe in 6:2-5.]

ANI HASHEM

Review the opening line of God's response to Moshe (see 6:2), as it appears to contain a rather superfluous statement: "And Elokim spoke to Moshe, and told him: **ANI HASHEM**".

Even though Moshe Rabeinu already knows who God is (see Shmot 3:6-7 & 3:13-15), nonetheless, God finds it necessary to preface his response with this statement of "Ani Hashem".

Similarly, the message that God instructs Moshe to convey to Bnei Yisrael begins (and ends!) with this same statement of 'ANI HASHEM' (see 6:6-8). To clarify this, note our emphasis of this point as we quote these psukim:

"Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael:

ANI HASHEM,

and I will take them out from their suffering in Egypt...
 and I will save them from their enslavement,
 and I shall redeem them with an outstretched arm....
 and I shall take them for Me as My Nation
 and I will be their God... then they shall know that:

ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM

who has taken them out of Egypt.
 And I will take them to the Land...
 and I will give it to them as an inheritance...

ANI HASHEM."

(see 6:6-8, read carefully!)

Clearly, God wants Bnei Yisrael to hear this 'message' of "Ani Hashem". But how does this 'statement' answer the people's complaint? Would the repetition of this phrase, together with yet another promise of redemption lighten their workload?

[Recall, Bnei Yisrael never asked for redemption, they simply desired less work! (see 2:23)]

As we see in the next pasuk, this message did not convince them, and precisely for this reason - that it did not alleviate their heavy workload:

"And Moshe spoke these words to Bnei Yisrael, **but they did not listen** to Moshe, due to their crushed spirit and **their hard labor**". (see 6:9).

So what was the purpose of God's message of "Ani Hashem", if it didn't work?

A STATEMENT, or A COMMAND?

To answer this question, we contend that the phrase 'ANI HASHEM' (in the context of these psukim) should not be understood as simply a '**statement**' – promising imminent redemption, but rather as a '**command to accept Hashem**' – i.e. demanding improved behavior – **to enable redemption!**

Even though this interpretation may not appear to be the simple meaning of this phrase, a careful reading of this entire section in Sefer Shmot, with a little help from Sefer Yechezkel, will help us prove this conclusion.

To do so, let's take a careful look at Bnei Yisrael's **response** (in 6:9) to God's message (in 6:6-8):

"And Moshe relayed this [message] to Bnei Yisrael...

- **ve'lō SHAM'U** el Moshe mi'kotzer ruach u'm'avoda kasha-
 But they did not LISTEN to Moshe, due to their crushed
 spirits and hard work. (see 6:9).

In our quotation of this pasuk, we have translated the phrase of "ve'lō shamu" as they did not 'listen'. However, as we shall now explain, this translation is problematic.

'TO BELIEVE' OR 'TO OBEY'?

To interpret the phrase "ve'lō SHAM'U", let's consider the possible meanings of the verb "lishmoa", which can imply to either hear; comprehend; listen, or obey – and contemplate how it would relate to the context of these psukim:

* They did not **HEAR** what Moshe said.

That can't be its meaning in this pasuk, as they obviously

heard what Moshe said. [If not, he could have simply raised his voice, and repeated it again.]

* They did not **COMPREHEND** what he said.

This would also seem unlikely, for nothing in Moshe's statement seems particularly complex or intellectually demanding.

* They did not **PAY ATTENTION** to what Moshe told them.

Based on its context, this seems to be the simplest understanding; the problem only being that this is not what the word "sham'u" usually implies.

* They did not **BELIEVE** (or accept) what Moshe told them.

Even though this is the popular interpretation (of this pasuk), this translation is problematic as well, for the Torah should have used the phrase "ve-lo he'eminu", as this is the word Chumash usually employs to describe belief – just as it did to describe Bnei Yisrael's original belief in God's first promise of redemption - see 4:30-31.

* They did not **OBEY** what Moshe told them.

Although this is the most common translation of 've-lo sham'u' elsewhere in Chumash [see for example Devarim 28:15 & Vayikra 26:14], such a translation in our context seems entirely untenable, as Moshe's remarks contained no commandment or imperative for the people to obey!

Or did they?

Based on the above analysis, the best translation for "ve-lo sham'u" would be - that the people did not 'obey' - but if so, it would require that we identify some sort of commandment in God's statement to the people, as recorded in 6:6-8.

To explain how and why the statement of ANI HASHEM could be understood as a commandment – that must be obeyed; we must study a parallel source that describes these same events, as recorded in the book of Yechezkel.

A PROOF FROM YECHEZKEL

[Before continuing, it is recommended that you first read Yechezkel 20:1-12 and carefully compare it to Shmot 6:2-13; noting the obvious textual parallels, e.g. 20:5-6 w/ 3:6-8.]

Yechezkel chapter 20 opens in the seventh year [i.e. seven years after the Exile of King Yehoyachin and the aristocracy from Jerusalem], as the elders of Yehuda (the leaders of the Exile in Bavel) visit Yechezkel to inquire in regard to their predicament.

[Based on chapter 28 in Yirmiyahu, we can assume that rumors of Bavel's imminent fall are spreading (as Egypt will come to their rescue/ see also Yirmiyahu 37:1-10), kindling [false] hope among the people that God may soon redeem the Exile and return them to Jerusalem.]

In response to their inquiry, God tells Yechezkel that the people need to hear rebuke (rather than 'good tidings' /see 2:4).

In that rebuke, God instructs Yechezkel to remind the people that they are not worthy of redemption, just as their forefathers in Egypt did not deserve redemption! [See 20:5-10.]

As you review these psukim, note how Yechezkel describes the set of events that took place just prior to the Exodus, and their obvious parallels to the opening psukim of Parshat Va'era:

"And you shall say to them... on the day that I chose Israel ... [va-ivada lahem] - when I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt... and I stretched out My Hand to them saying ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM".

[Compare with Shmot 6:3 & 6:6]

"... on that same day ["nasa'ti et yadi"] I lifted out My Hand to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey" (Yechezkel 20:5-6),

[Compare with Shmot 6:8 and 3:7-8].

Note especially the repetition of the phrase of ANI HASHEM as well as "ve-lo avu liSHMO'ah".

TAKING 'EGYPT' OUT OF THE JEWS

However, the most important piece of information in these psukim, that (for some reason) were left out of Sefer Shmot, is the COMMANDMENT that God had given Bnei Yisrael at that time:

"And I said to them [at the time of Yetziat Mitzrayim]: -

"Each man must rid himself of his detestable ways and not DEFILE himself with the fetishes of Egypt - [for] ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM" (see 20:7).

"But they REBELLED against Me - 've-lo avu liSHMOA eilai' - and they did not want to listen to Me (i.e. obey) - for no one rid himself from his detestable ways, nor did anyone give up the fetishes of Egypt, and I resolved to pour out My anger upon them..." (see 20:8).

It becomes quite clear from Yechezkel, that when God told Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael ANI HASHEM (as recorded in Parshat Va'era), this included an implicit COMMAND as well - to rid themselves from Egyptian culture- a command which Bnei Yisrael DID NOT OBEY.

Much to our amazement, Sefer Yechezkel states explicitly that which Sefer Shmot only alludes to. God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent prior to the Exodus, to cleanse themselves from the "tum'a" of their Egyptian culture - in preparation for their redemption. Unfortunately, at that time Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY ['ve-lo avu liSHMOA' / see 20:8] and thus deserved to be destroyed in the land of Egypt.

Nevertheless, as Yechezkel explains in the next pasuk, the redemption process did continue, but it was only for the 'sake of God's Name' (see Yechezkel 20:9-10).

[These psukim in Yechezkel support the popular Zohar that explains how Bnei Yisrael in Egypt had reached the 49th level of 'tum'a' before the redemption began. See Further Iyun section for additional sources that are based on (or quote) these psukim in Yechezkel.]

Thus, these psukim in Yechezkel can help us understand the deeper meaning of the phrase 'Ani Hashem' in Parshat Va'era. God's instruction to Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael – 'Ani Hashem' - implies not only that they must accept God, but they must also reject any other gods (and/or culture). Basically, God is telling His nation that He will indeed redeem them from Egypt, as they request; but this redemption demands that they become a 'committed partner' in this relationship.

If this understanding is correct, then Bnei Yisrael's response of "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" could definitely be understood that 'they did not OBEY' – for they rebelled against God (as Yechezkel explained) continuing their evil ways by clinging to their Egyptian culture!

A LOGICAL 'KAL VA-CHOMER'

Additional support for this interpretation [that they did not 'obey'] can be inferred from the next three psukim that follow in Parshat Va'era:

"Then God told Moshe, go speak to Pharaoh... that he should SEND Bnei Yisrael from his land. [Clearly, a command!]

Then, Moshe retorted [employing a 'kal va-chomer'], saying:

"hein Bnei Yisrael LO SHAM'U eilai – [If even B.Y. did not 'listen' to me] – ve-eich YISHMA'ENI Pharaoh - why should Pharaoh 'obey' me?" (see 6:10-12).

As you review this pasuk in Hebrew, note how the Torah uses the word 'sham'u' on each side of the 'kal va-chomer'.

In the context of Pharaoh's refusal to comply with God's command - 'sham'u' definitely means to OBEY - for Moshe commands Pharaoh to grant Bnei Yisrael permission to leave Egypt (to worship their God). Therefore, for this 'kal va-chomer' to make sense, the verb 'sham'u' in both halves of the pasuk must carry the same meaning. Thus, if 'sham'u' in the second half of the pasuk means 'obey', then 'sham'u' in first half of the pasuk - in reference to Bnei Yisrael - must also mean to OBEY.

In other words, the 'kal va-chomer' implies: "Why should Pharaoh OBEY me, if Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY me!"

Once again, we find proof that the phrase 've-lo sham'u' in 6:9 should be understood as: Bnei Yisrael did not **obey**.

TO KNOW or TO INTERNALIZE

Based to this conclusion, "ANI HASHEM" must now be understood as a **command**; and not as a **statement** (as we originally assumed). In this context, "Ani Hashem" encompasses much more than pure intellectual knowledge, rather it constitutes a precept that must be **INTERNALIZED** – and hence requires the rejection of any other god.

As Parshat Va'eyra begins, Moshe Rabeinu has been charged with the responsibility to become an 'educator', and not simply the bearer of good tidings. In this capacity, he must help prepare Bnei Yisrael for their redemption – by changing their ignoble culture – leading them in the path of God. It will also remain as his primary job for the next forty years!

THE FIRST TWO 'DIBROT'

This interpretation can help us appreciate the deeper meaning of the first two of the Ten Commandments that Bnei Yisrael receive when they arrive at Har Sinai. The first commandment: "ANOCHI HASHEM ELOKECHA asher HOTZEITICHA me-eretz Mitzrayim..." (see 20:2-3, compare w/6:6!) is simply a more emphatic form of "Ani Hashem"; and the next commandment: "lo yihiyeh lachem elohim acherim al panai..." - not to follow any other gods – reiterates this warning that accepting God requires the rejection of decadent cultures.

This may also explain why some commentators consider Anochi and Lo Yihiyeh as one commandment, for the first statement automatically implies the second (like two sides of the same coin!).

Even though Bnei Yisrael did not internalize this 'commandment' of ANI HASHEM before they left Egypt (as 6:9 implies), as God had hoped; their redemption process would not be complete until they do – as will unfold in the events that follow in the rest of Chumash.

A DIFFICULT MISSION

From this perspective, Moshe's mission to Bnei Yisrael becomes more difficult than his mission to Pharaoh. His assignment involves not only informing the people, but also EDUCATING them - to prepare them for their redemption. Just as Pharaoh must be convinced to recognize God, Bnei Yisrael must be convinced that they must become worthy for their redemption by God.

This interpretation can also explain the interesting wording of God's response to Moshe's objection in 6:11-12:

"Then God spoke to Moshe & Aharon, and **COMMANDED** them [va-yetzavem] **TO** Bnei Yisrael **AND** **TO** Pharaoh the king of Egypt to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt" (6:13).

God once again gives Moshe a double mission - to command Pharaoh to allow them to leave, **AND** to command Bnei Yisrael to 'become worthy' of that redemption.

[See Ramban's interpretation of this pasuk!]

SOME HELP FROM SEFER VAYIKRA

So what were Bnei Yisrael doing in Egypt that was so terrible? Considering that these events took place before the Torah was given, what did they need to do 'teshuva' from?

A possible answer can be found in Parshat Acharei Mot, where we find once again an interesting textual and thematic parallel to Yechezkel chapter 20 and Shmot chapter 6.

In Vayikra chapter 18 (which just so happens to be the Torah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon, and not by chance), God bids Bnei Yisrael not to follow the corrupt lifestyle of the Egyptians. Note once again the repetition in these psukim of the phrase 'ANI HASHEM':

"And God spoke to Moshe: speak to Bnei Yisrael and **TELL** them ANI HASHEM!"

Do not act as the Egyptians do... and do not follow their customs. Follow My laws instead... for ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM.

Keep My laws, for by them man lives... ANI HASHEM" (see Vayikra 18:1-5).

This short introduction is followed by a long list of forbidden marital relationships [better known as the 'arayot'], which had apparently become common in the Egyptian and Canaanite cultures (see 18:24-25!). Thus, God's call for 'teshuva' may have included a demand that Bnei Yisrael's refrain of their decadent Egyptian lifestyle, and accept instead whatever mitzvot God may command.

A THEME IN SEFER SHMOT

This interpretation not only helps us understand the phrase "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" in 6:9, it also explains a whole series of events that take place up until Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai.

Recall that God had originally planned (at the 'sneh') for Bnei Yisrael to travel a three-day journey directly to Har Sinai immediately after the Exodus (see 3:12-18). Instead, they arrive at Har Sinai only some six weeks later. Why?

Based on the excerpt quoted from Sefer Yechezkel, the answer is quite simple. As the prophet explained, God saved Bnei Yisrael for the 'sake of His Name' - even though they were undeserving at that time (see 20:8-9). Hence, the redemption process could not continue, i.e. Bnei Yisrael cannot travel on to Har Sinai, until something is done to improve their spiritual readiness.

Therefore, even before Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, they must offer a special Korban [Pesach] to affirm their faithfulness. [See our TSC shiur on Parshat Bo.] Then, after their first 'three-day journey' into the desert, they must pass the test at 'Mara' (see 15:22-26), where they are given one more chance to accept what they had earlier rejected in Parshat Va'era. Note what God commands Bnei Yisrael at MARA:

"And He said - IM SHAMO'A TISHMA - If you OBEY the voice of the Lord your God, do what is upright and listen to His commandments, then the afflictions that I brought upon Egypt [which you deserved as well!] I will not bring upon you, for ANI HASHEM, your Healer" (16:26).

[This topic will be discussed in greater detail in our shiur on Parshat Beshalach.]

Finally, immediately upon their arrival at Har Sinai, God again demands as a PRE-REQUISITE for receiving the Torah a similar 'pledge of allegiance':

"And now, IM SHAMO'A TISHME'U BE-KOLI - if you agree to obey My instruction and keep My covenant..." (see 19:3-6).

Of course, this time Bnei Yisrael agree to follow God and 'listen' [obey] to whatever He may command them (see 19:7-8).

Finally, as we explained above, this explains why the very first DIBUR of the Ten Commandments is "ANOCHI [=ANI] HASHEM ELOKECHA who took you out of Egypt - LO YIHIYEH... Do not have any other gods INSTEAD of Me" (see 20:2).

As we saw in Sefer Yechezkel, these two statements - ANI HASHEM and LO YIHIYEH - act as 'two sides of the same coin' - for the statement of ANI HASHEM automatically implies that you shall have no other gods.

ELIYAHU AT LEIL HA-SEDER

In closing, the conclusions of this week's shiur can also help us appreciate our custom to 'invite' Eliyahu ha-navi to our 'seder table'. On Pesach night, as we commemorate the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim, we conclude the SEDER with our hope for the final redemption. However, before we begin Hallel & Nirtza, we first invite Eliyahu. Most likely, this custom is based on the final pasuk of Mal'achi, which promises:

"Behold I am sending you Eliyahu the prophet, BEFORE the great and awesome day of the Lord, and he will return the hearts of sons to their fathers, and the hearts of fathers to their sons, lest I come and smite and land instead."

In the final redemption, just as in the first redemption, our obligation to perform 'teshuva' is as important an ingredient as God's readiness to redeem us. After all, what purpose would there be in our redemption if we were not ready to fulfill our covenantal obligations?

In order for redemption to succeed, a constant recognition of ANI HASHEM must become not only a 'frame of mind', but even more so, it must become a 'way of life'.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. Review Shmot 2:23-25. Note how Bnei Yisrael cry to Hashem for salvation. In your opinion, does this indicate that they did teshuva, or was this simply a cry for help.

See Ibn Ezra (2:23 / aroch), Ramban (2:25), and Seforo (2:23-24) on these psukim, noting how they all relate to this question, and how they all relate to the psukim in Yechezkel 20:1-9 as well!

2. See Seforo's introduction to Sefer Shmot (in some Chumashim it is found in the first volume of Sefer Breishit, where Seforo provides and intro to all five books of Chumash).

Note how his commentary on what transpires in Sefer Shmot is based on what is described in Yechezkel chapter 20!

Note also how he relates to this information in Sefer Yechezkel in his commentary on almost every pasuk in Shmot chapter one, as well as his commentary on 2:23-24.

3. See Amos 5:18! There he claims that it would be better for Bnei Yisrael not to desire a YOM HASHEM. Based on the context of that pasuk (considering the people's behavior during the time period of Uziyahu) and the conclusions of this week's shiur, explain Amos' warning in that pasuk

See also Yirmiyahu 29:10-14, and relate it to the above shiur!

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

The Forty-nine 'sha'arei tum'a'

The concept that Bnei Yisrael plummeted to the forty-ninth 'gate of impurity' appears in the Zohar Chadash, vol. 1, Parshat Yitro 52a. The Zohar there writes that while Hashem had promised Avraham Avinu only that He will redeem his offspring from bondage, He in fact did much more: He took them from the forty-nine 'gates of impurity' and raised them to the forty-nine 'gates of wisdom'. This, explains the Zohar, is why Hashem constantly reminds Bnei Yisrael, "I am Hashem your God who took you from Egypt", to emphasize that He did more than fulfill His promise to Avraham Avinu.

The Zohar adds that the forty-nine days we count between Pesach and Shavuot commemorate this elevation from the forty-nine 'gates of impurity'. This concept is developed later by the Ramchal, in Choker U-mekubal, 18.

"Ve-lo Sham'u El Moshe" (6:9)

Our explanation, that this pasuk refers to Bnei Yisrael's unwillingness to give up their idolatrous practices, appears explicitly in several Midrashim. The Mechilta, Parshat Bo - Mesechta De-pischa 5 and Shemot Rabba 6:5 explain that Bnei Yisrael could not extricate themselves from idolatry, and the Midrashim make reference to Yechezkel 20 as evidence. Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel also explains this pasuk as suggesting Bnei Yisrael's refusal to abandon idolatry, though he adds as well the element of 'kepidut rucha', anger and frustration. Perhaps this means that the intensified labor that resulted from Moshe's initial meeting with Pharaoh contributed in no small measure to the people's refusal to heed his call for teshuva.

It is worth noting that we find two different approaches in the Midrashim as to why Bnei Yisrael resorted to avoda zara: either for theological reasons, or due to circumstances they deemed out of their control. The Torah Shleima quotes a "Midrash Aggada" that Bnei Yisrael lacked faith and claimed that Hashem did not

have the ability to save them. They thus resorted to avoda zara, on ideological grounds. The Midrash Hagadol, by contrast, records the following response of Bnei Yisrael to Moshe's call for their return to monotheism: "Where do you find a slave who acquires for himself two masters? We are slaves to Pharaoh; how can we violate his decrees - we are afraid!" Their subjugation to Pharaoh precluded the possibility of their service to Hashem.

The Netziv, in his comments to Shmot 13:9, finds what he considers a clearer source in Chumash for Bnei Yisrael's involvement in avoda zara. The pasuk there instructs them with regard to the mitzva of tefillin and concludes, "for with a mighty hand Hashem took you out from Egypt". The Netziv explains this clause as a response to the anticipated question as to why Hashem must issue so many commandments to ensure Bnei Yisrael's trust and belief in Him. He answers by reminding the people that they agreed to leave Egypt only after witnessing Hashem's mighty hand. Although they happily welcomed Moshe's initial announcement of their freedom (4:31), they rejected his second proclamation because, as we noted in the shiur, it required them to accept Hashem as their God. Only after witnessing the miracles in Egypt did they agree to forsake idolatry and accept Hashem.

VE-LO SHAM'U EL MOSHE

By and large, the "mefarshim al derech ha-pshat" interpret "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" differently. We list here the three general directions taken by the mefarshim:

BELIEVE

They did not believe: We dismissed this approach in the shiur, but several prominent mefarshim adopt - either explicitly or implicitly - this interpretation. The Rashbam contrasts the nation's response here with their reaction to Moshe's initial announcement, as recorded in Parshat Shmot - 4:31. Although then, they believed Moshe ("Va-ya'amen ha-am"), having seen their hopes crushed by the decree of more intensive labor they no longer believed. In quoting this pasuk in Parshat Shmot, the Rashbam may have implicitly addressed the possible objection to this approach, as we asked in the shiur: why did the Torah not say, "Ve-lo he'eminu"? The answer may be that in that very pasuk the Torah writes, "va-yishme'u ki pakad Hashem et Benei Yisrael..." There, 'va-yishme'u' seems to parallel 'va-ya'amen', to mean 'they believed'. Other mefarshim who claim that Bnei Yisrael did not believe Moshe include the Ralbag and Seforo.

PAY ATTENTION

Another group of mefarshim explain 've-lo sham'u' to mean a rough equivalent of, 'they did not pay attention'. For one of several reasons, Bnei Yisrael did not or could not pay attention to Moshe as he spoke to them - either because of the pressure of their workload, their emotional distress, or because Pharaoh had already ordered them to disregard the 'words of falsehood' spoken by Moshe and Aharon (5:9).

This approach is taken (though in slightly different forms) by the Ramban, Chizkuni, Abarbanel, Netziv and Meshech Chochma in their commentaries on this pasuk. One interesting variation of this approach appears in the work of Rav Hirsch. He explains, along the same general lines as our analysis in the shiur, that in Moshe's speech he does more than inform the people of redemption; he charges them with a mission, the destiny and purpose of Am Yisrael. Due to the pressures of their work, however, Bnei Yisrael had no patience for such lofty ideas and concepts. All they could concentrate on was the immediate tasks at hand; they therefore could not pay any attention to Moshe's description of their spiritual mission as a free nation.

CONSOLATION

The final approach is that of Rashi: "They did not accept consolation." Unlike our explanation in the shiur, Rashi apparently understood Moshe's address as simply an attempt at consoling the people whose lives had become even more unbearable as a result of Pharaoh's new decree. Rashi expresses this interpretation of the pasuk in other writings, as well. In Sefer Hapardes (compiled by Rashi's students) and in Siddur Rashi (414), this pasuk is cited as proof that those who

seek to offer consolation should do so 'me'at me'at', by expressing modest hopes for better things to come. In Rashi's words, one who does not do so: "is like one who says to a beggar, 'Tomorrow you will be a king' - he does not believe him." Here, too, Bnei Yisrael suffered from physical torment, and Moshe consoles them with promises of a glorious life as God's nation in the land of Canaan. This offered them little consolation; they wished only for a respite from their current hardship.

The Malbim (on our pasuk) explains along these lines, as well, that Moshe here was to console Bnei Yisrael, but did not succeed.

TESHUVAH IN EGYPT

In sharp contrast to the line taken in the shiur, Ibn Ezra in his *peirush Ha-aroach*(2:23) says that the words "Va-yeanchu Bnei Yisrael min ha-avoda va-yiz'aku" implies that they did do teshuva and thus were worthy of being redeemed from Egypt.

'Ani Hashem'

The centrality of this phrase within this opening unit of *Parshat Va'era* is demonstrated by Nechama Leibowitz (*Studies, Parshat Va'era* 1). She shows that within this segment, which consists of Hashem's speech to Moshe (6:2-8), 'Ani Hashem' appears at either end (6:2&8) as well as in the middle (6:6). Clearly, the notion of 'Ani Hashem' comprises the most important message Moshe is to convey to Bnei Yisrael at this point.

In the shiur we suggest that 'Ani Hashem' involved an educational message, that Bnei Yisrael must rid themselves of Egyptian culture and prepare themselves spiritually for redemption. This approach appears in the works of two twentieth-century writers, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (*Oznyim La-Torah*) and Rav Yoel Leib Herzog (*Imrei Yoel*). They both claim that 'Ani Hashem' was meant as an admonishment that Bnei Yisrael relinquish their attachment to idolatry. Rav Sorotzkin adds that Bnei Yisrael could not accept the fact that the same God who brought about this bitter exile would also come to their assistance and redeem them. They fell under the influence of pagan ideology and so believed in the existence of different gods with different powers. Moshe was thus to teach them the message of 'Ani Hashem', that there is only one God who governs every force in the universe. Indeed, the same God who subjected them to hardship will lead them to a life of freedom.

This interpretation of 'Ani Hashem' may shed light on the passage in the *Zohar* mentioned earlier. The *Zohar* asks, why does Hashem so often remind Bnei Yisrael that "Ani Hashem Elokeichem asher hotzeiti etchem me-eretz Mitzrayim" (or similar)? After all, by taking them out of Egypt, Hashem simply fulfilled the promise He had made to Avraham; why does this act merit such emphasis? The *Zohar* answers that these proclamations stress the fact that Hashem went beyond His promise to Avraham. He had promised Avraham only to redeem his offspring from bondage, not to raise them from the quagmire of the forty-nine 'gates of impurity'. Why must Hashem emphasize this point? Is He trying to 'brag'?

In light of our discussion, the answer becomes clear. Hashem constantly reminds Bnei Yisrael of the commandment He issued to them when they were in Egypt, 'Ani Hashem' - the commandment that they failed to heed. It is as though He reminds them, "You did not internalize this message in Egypt, so I must reiterate it to you again and again!"

We list here three alternative explanations that appear in the *Midrashim* and *mefarshim* as to the meaning of 'Ani Hashem' in this context:

The *Midrash Hagadol* and *Mechilta De-Rashbi* understand 'Ani Hashem' as a disclaimer of sorts. Hashem here declares that although He knows the future, and thus foresees Bnei Yisrael's future abandonment of Hashem, He will nevertheless redeem them.

Several *mefarshim* interpret the phrase as a source of encouragement for Bnei Yisrael, underscoring Hashem's unlimited power that enables Him to redeem them. This approach appears in various forms in the commentaries of Rashi, *Seforno* and *Abarbanel*. The *Ibn Ezra* posits a slight variation of

this approach, that 'Ani Hashem' emphasizes the nature of the Almighty's promise; as He is God, Bnei Yisrael may confidently trust that He will fulfill His guarantee of redemption.

The *Malbim* explains that Hashem here informs Bnei Yisrael that He will redeem them with the divine attribute of 'Shem Havaya', entirely outside the bounds of the natural order. Amos Chacham, in *Da'at Mikra*, takes a similar approach, as does Rav Chayim Yaakov Goldvicht (*Asufat Ma'archot - Haggada Shel Pesach*, p.113).

"Va-yetzavem El Bnei Yisrael..." (6:13)

The glaring problem in this pasuk, as noted by many commentators, is the absence of any content to this 'command' Hashem issued to Moshe and Aharon. We claim that this refers to the spiritual preparation of Bnei Yisrael for redemption. This appears explicitly in two *Midrashim* - the *Mechilta* cited earlier, and the *Midrash Lekach Tov* on our pasuk. This may be the deeper meaning of two other *Midrashim* as well. One *Midrash* brought down in the *Sefer Ha-mivchar* (as quoted in the *Torah Shleima* on our pasuk) says that Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael to prepare wood for the construction of the *Mishkan*. This may symbolize Bnei Yisrael's preparation for *hashra'at ha-Shechina* - Hashem's residence within the nation. Secondly, the *Yerushalmi* in *Masechet Rosh Hashana* 3:5, based on the pasuk in *Yirmiyahu* 34:13, explains this command as referring to the obligation to free one's slaves. (Apparently, as Rav Menachem Kasher notes in *Torah Shleima* – *mili'um* to *Parshat Va'era*, 3, there were noblemen among Bnei Yisrael who, not only were excused from slave labor, they themselves owned servants.) As the *Torah* explicitly writes in *Vayikra* 25:42, the laws concerning the freeing of slaves relate to the notion that Bnei Yisrael are ultimately subservient to Hashem alone. Before realizing their freedom from bondage, Bnei Yisrael must internalize this critical lesson, that they are freed from slavery in order to become the servants of Hashem.

Three other general approaches to this pasuk appear in the *mefarshim*:

The *Sifrei* in *Parshat Beha'alotcha* (91), quoted by *Rashi* here, understands the command to Moshe and Aharon as urging them to exercise patience when dealing with Bnei Yisrael and speak respectfully when they address Pharaoh. Though *Rashi* views this explanation as *drash*, as the pasuk makes no mention of patience and respect, this approach does accommodate the context of this pasuk. Moshe had just expressed his frustration over Bnei Yisrael's refusal to listen and the likely prospect of a similar reaction on Pharaoh's part. Hashem thus urges him and Aharon to retain their composure despite the intransigence of both the people and Pharaoh. This explanation appears in the *Zohar Ha-chadash* (2:26) as well as in the *Rambam's Mishne Torah* (*Hilchot Sanhedrin* 25:2), and in a slightly different form in the *Pesikta De-rav Kahana* (14). In a similar vein, the *Ibn Ezra* quotes a Karaite exegete, *Yeshua*, who explains this pasuk as a charge to Moshe and Aharon not to become angry as a result of their growing frustration. Whereas in his *peirush ha-katzar* the *Ibn Ezra* mentions this possibility without any further comment, in his *peirush ha-aroach* he writes that 'there is no need' for this interpretation. (This approach brings to mind an interesting comment by the *Ralbag* on the immediately preceding pasuk. He claims that the 'kotzer ruach' which led Bnei Yisrael not to listen to Moshe refers to Moshe's - rather than Bnei Yisrael's - frustration. His growing impatience led him to speak irritably, and his words thus met upon deaf ears. If so, it would then stand to reason that Hashem must urge Moshe to exercise more patience.)

The *Akeidat Yitzchak* interprets 'va-yetzavem' here as referring to the conferral of a given status, rather than the issuance of a command. Citing examples from *Tehillim* 33:9 and *Melachim I* 17:4, the *Akeidat Yitzchak* explains that Hashem granted Moshe and Aharon prominence and respect among both Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh's court, such that their words would be heard. Other *mefarshim* adopting this approach include the *Abarbanel* (as his first suggestion), the *Or Hachayim* (though he adds as well the third approach that we will soon see) and the

Tzror Hamor.

Several mefarshim see this pasuk's mention of Aharon as the key to its meaning. Moshe had just expressed his discouragement, compounded by his poor verbal skills (see 6:12), and so Hashem calls upon Aharon and commands both brothers to return to Bnei Yisrael and to speak to Pharaoh. This was Hashem's answer to Moshe's complaint - that he take Aharon with him and address the nation (for a second time) and then the king. The Ibn Ezra (peirush ha-aroch), Chizkuni, Rabenu Yosef Bechor Shor and Abarbanel (as his second approach) explain along these lines. The Jerusalem Publication Society Bible also seemed to have this approach in mind when it translated this pasuk.

Inviting Eliyah Hanavi to the Seder

We suggest in the shiur that Eliyahu's 'participation' in our seder reminds us that before the final redemption we must perform teshuva, and for this reason Eliyahu will come before the unfolding of the redemption. Just as Hashem called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent before leaving Egypt, so must we correct our ways in anticipation of the final redemption.

The Rema - Orach Chayim 480 - mentions the custom of opening the door at the seder and cites the explanation of the Mahari Brona that this demonstrates our belief in Pesach night as a 'leil shimurim' - a night of watching, when Hashem grants us special protection. The Maharal, in his Haggada "Divrei Negidim" rejects this explanation and claims that we open the door to publicize our belief in the coming of Eliyahu Hanavi prior to the final redemption. (See also Aruch Hashulchan.) He does not, however, relate this to the concept of teshuva, as we suggest in the shiur.

Though our explanation does not appear explicitly in earlier sources, it may relate to the approach taken by the Netziv to explain the fifth cup poured at the seder. As we know, the four cups drunk at the seder correspond to the four expressions describing Yetzi'at Mitzrayim in the beginning of Parshat Vaeyra ('ve-hotzeiti', 've-hitzalti', 've-ga'alti', 've-lakachti'). The Netziv, in his "Ha-amek Davar" commentary to 6:7, suggests that the fifth cup - which we pour but do not drink - commemorates the promise, "and you shall know that I am Hashem your God who takes you out from Egypt". According to the Netziv, this promise speaks of a level of comprehension unattainable by the masses; it refers to the unique knowledge and insight acquired by the nation's spiritual elite. Therefore, given the exclusive nature of this 'knowledge', we do not drink this fifth cup.

In contemporary times, Rabbi Eliezer Ginsburg, in his "Shirat Yehuda" commentary on the Haggada, associates the Netziv's explanation with the common reference to this fifth cup as 'kos shel Eliyahu' (see, for example, Mishna Berura 480:10). Eliyahu will come before the final redemption to teach, guide and inspire, such that we may all attain this lofty level of "you shall know that I am Hashem your God", and we thus appropriately name this fifth cup after Eliyahu Hanavi. This closely relates to our suggestion, that the inclusion of Eliyahu at the seder reminds us of the spiritual growth required before the final redemption.