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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **BO** - 5770

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Makkat Choshech
Rav Zecharia Tubi shlit"a

The plague of choshech was the second-to-last makkah, immediately preceding makkat bechorot. The pasuk describes, "Moshe stretched forth his hand towards the heavens, and there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period. No man could see his brother nor could anyone rise from his place for a three-day period; but for all of Bnei Yisrael there was light in their dwellings" (Shemot 10:22-23). Rashi explains:

A darkness of blackness during which no man could see his brother lasted for three days. And there were another three days in which there was a doubled darkness, during which no man could rise from his place; one sitting could not stand and one standing could not sit.

Chazal (Shemot Rabbah) comment on the fact that Bnei Yisrael had light while the Egyptians were surrounded by darkness:

It does not say "in the land of Goshen" but rather "in their dwellings." For if a Jew entered any place, light would enter with him and illuminate what was hidden in the barrels and containers and treasuries. Regarding this it is said, "A candle for my journeys are Your words" (Tehillim 119:105).

It is understandable that Bnei Yisrael had light while the rest of Egypt remained in complete darkness. But why did Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu perform this miracle, creating a light so that the Jews could find things in the barrels and containers and treasuries? What is the purpose of such a miracle?

The Maharal explains (Gevurot Hashem ch. 57) that the plagues in Egypt parallel the ten phrases with which the world was created. Each one of the plagues parallels one of the ma'amarot of Creation. The

Egyptians attempted to corrupt existence, diverting it from the purpose for which it was created. Hashem therefore punished them with the ten makkot, matching the ten phrases that created the world. The purpose of the makkot was to reveal true reality, the "ma'amarot of Creation." Thus, each plague was simultaneously a cure for Bnei Yisrael and a plague for the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael, who clung to the true purpose of existence and are drawn after the word of Hashem, merited to reveal a ma'amar of Creation in each makkah. This is the meaning of the lesson of Chazal in Pirkei Avot (5:1):

The world was created with ten ma'amarot. What does this teach us? For could it not have been created with one ma'amar alone? Rather, the reason is to punish the evil-doers, who destroy the world that was created with ten ma'amarot, and to reward the righteous, who maintain the world that was created with ten ma'amarot.

The reward went to Yisrael and the punishment to the Egyptians.

According to this explanation of the Maharal, we can understand the essence of makkat choshech. In the story of Creation, we are told, "Hashem said, 'Let there be light!' And there was light. Hashem saw that the light was good and Hashem separated between the light and the darkness" (Bereishit 1:3-4). Rashi explains (based on Chagigah 12a): Hashem saw that the light was good - here, too, we require the words of aggadah. Hashem saw that the wicked were unworthy of enjoying it, and He separated it [and set it aside] for the righteous in the World to Come.

On the first day of Creation, Hashem created the or ha-ganuz, the hidden light, the higher, spiritual light that reveals the final purpose of the Creation and elevates everything. But Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu set this light aside for the tzadikkim to use in the World to Come, in the world that is complete. Thus, the inner meaning of "Let there be light" is "Let the true purpose of creation be illuminated." Once this light was hidden away, the wicked could corrupt the world and derail it from achieving its purpose.

Since the Egyptians took advantage of the fact that this light was hidden away, ignoring the true purpose for which the world was created, they were punished with makkat choshech - parallel to the ma'amar of "Let there be light." "But for all of Bnei Yisrael there was light in their dwellings" - this is not a reference to regular light, but rather light that reveals that which is hidden in the barrels, containers, and treasuries. This is similar to the or ha-ganuz that the righteous will possess in the World to Come, an internal, spiritual light that illuminates the true purpose of Creation. This is why the midrash makes reference to the pasuk from Tehillim, "A candle for my journeys are your words" - a supernatural light that reveals what is hidden in the most secret of places.

In contrast, the Egyptians remained in complete darkness - for this light caused overwhelming darkness for them. At the moment that the or ha-ganuz was revealed, it became clear that the entire worldview and culture of Egypt was completely false - "No man could rise from his place." This also explains Chazal's teaching that the wicked members of Bnei Yisrael were secretly killed during makkat choshech (as Rashi explains) - for that same spiritual light destroyed those evil people who removed themselves from Klal Yisrael.

May we merit to soon see the light of Mashiach, as the pasuk teaches: "For the darkness shall cover the land and the fog [shall cover] the nations - but on you will shine Hashem and His glory will be revealed upon you" (Yishayah 60:2).

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The Timeless Rav Hirsch
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Parshas Bo

Everything New Under the Moon!
Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt, saying: This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year.

The calendar described in this section, the first mitzvah given to the people about to become a nation, is a study in engineered inefficiency. And so it was meant to be. Efficiency, in the Torah's view, pales in comparison to the value of important instruction. In this case, the inefficiency of the calendar tells us volumes about human free will.

Calendars, we would think, ought to be linked to astronomical events that are known and predictable. We see great advantage in a calendar that would allow all people, in all places, to know in advance when the important events of the year will take place, so that they could plan accordingly, long in advance.

Such a calendar, however, would leave in place an impression that the Torah insists on overturning. Were our holidays linked to fixed astronomical events, we might conclude, as so many others did, that all of us – Man, G-d, and the way we relate to each other – are equally fixed and constrained.

If Rosh Chodesh were determined by the time of the earth receiving the first rays of sunlight reflected by the lunar mirror, we would be worshipping the dutiful periodicity of Nature. The Torah wants us to do nothing of the sort. We are not worshippers of Nature. It is not Nature and its regular ways that we celebrate each month. The waxing and the waning of the moon mean nothing to us, other than to act as symbols of the vicissitudes of life. We are required to pass through times of darkness and obscurity – but they will always be followed by glimpses of illumination. The moon and its phases are no more than a model to us, challenging and prodding us to rejuvenate ourselves periodically, to renew our dedication to Him after a lapse of time in which the relationship may have become dulled.

It is not the astronomical ??? – the first appearance of the new moon – that has us count the days till the ??? – the special days of encounter. Rather, it is the ?????, the newness, that takes place within ourselves that allows us to spend time with G-d on the special days of the year. Because we can change and move towards Him, we experience something powerful when He makes Himself available to us. Without that change, we would just be commemorating the past, but is would not be a ????, a meeting and encounter.

In other words, Rosh Chodesh is not determined so much by the moon as by the way it is noticed and perceived by us. Our calculation of the astronomical event does not fix the day of Rosh Chodesh. In the system that the Torah here describes, human beings must visually note the appearance of the moon. Their testimony has to be accepted by the court, which then formally proclaims the day as Rosh Chodesh. (Interestingly, this is only a requirement when the moon is cited by the witnesses on the day that it is expected to be seen by calculation, but not if the that day has already passed. It is only when the astronomical event coincides with the visual sighting that it is important to downplay the role of “natural” law, and treat it as unworthy of veneration in its own right.) It is Man that declares the New Moon – not the moon itself!

Halacha dictates that the visual sighting predominates over the “actual” occurrence in other ways as well. The court can artificially

tamper with the calendar and delay Rosh Chodesh for human convenience. In this way, they can prevent Yom Kippur from falling on the day before or after Shabbos, which would be a hardship. It is thus the human court that determines when the Heavenly one will meet in judgment of the people! The declaration of the court has finality, even when it is later learned that the testimony of the witnesses was inaccurate, whether by error or intentionally. In all these cases, human need trumps natural “fact.” The occurrences of holidays that count from the beginning of the month depend entirely on human input. They are fixed by us, and recognized by Heaven only after our declaration.

How foolish it is to cheer the establishment of the fixed calendar that we rely upon today as if it were a monumental achievement, an improvement upon the “primitive” method of the past. Our calendar is a sad concession to the realities of galus, of not having a court populated by judges with real semicha. Gone – until the restoration of the old system when the Redemption draws near – is our consciousness of being the ones who control time, rather than time controlling us.

One vestige of the old system remains enshrined in the fixed calendar, to remind us of what the calendar was supposed to be. When the moon was still sighted visually, distant communities often did not receive word of the decision of the High Court until a holy day was upon them. Not knowing when the festival was to begin, they had to observe two days, to remove any doubt. When the court of Hillel II gave us our fixed calendar, they sent a plea to the outlying communities not to abandon the old practice of observing two days, even though they would technically be able to follow the fixed system. The second day of Yom Tov, observed despite our knowledge of the “real” day of Yom Tov, serves as a constant reminder of the older, truer form of living the Jewish calendar. It is only this second day – disparaged by so many as a useless appendage from the past – that keeps alive the authentic character of the first day of Yom Tov!

According to Chazal, the musaf of Rosh Chodesh serves to atone for the unconscious violation of the taharah of the Mikdash and its holy articles. This is no small detail in the complex laws of the beis hamikdash, but a truism about Jewish life in general. Unconscious contamination of the mikdash stems from drifting so distant in the course of time from a focus on holiness and holy ideas, that we lose some of the reverence we ought to have for them. Inevitably, we then mistreat and profane the holy.

Left to our selves, the slow drifting would continue to the point that we would become – like Paroh – so coarse and unresponsive to Divine illumination that our hearts would remain hardened and resistant even in the presence of wondrous signs. It is precisely this drifting away that Rosh Chodesh addresses and cures. Once a month, we remind ourselves to look for the light and warmth of His spirit. In it, we are refreshed and renewed!

Within this monthly renewal is a strong repudiation of the fundamentals of paganism. In that universe, there is no renewal and no change – not in Man, not in the world, not in the ways of the gods. What is, needs to be. Every tomorrow follows inexorably from today. Everything new was already present within the old. There is no creation, no something coming into being out of nothing.

Just as there is no creation in the physical universe in the mind of the pagan, there is none in the moral one. From evil will flow only evil. Everything is fixed, determined. Egypt in particular was mired in this paganism. The perceived fixity of the universe reached into its social structure, producing fixed and immutable ranks and castes.

Precisely into this world view, “in the land of Egypt,” Hashem showed Moshe the sliver of the new moon, and told him that it would serve as a model of a different order, a different view of life itself.

[1] Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Shemos 12:1-2

From: Rabbi Goldwicht [rgoldwicht@yutorah.org]
Sent: Thursday, February 02, 2006 11:45 PM
Subject: Parashat Bo 5766 WEEKLY INSIGHTS BY RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT

Parashat Bo

The first mitzvah we were commanded in Mitzrayim was the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh. But why, to review a famous question, was this mitzvah chosen to be the first of the mitzvot? One answer given is that this mitzvah demonstrates our dominion over time; we determine when Rosh Chodesh is. Power over time creates freedom; a slave's schedule is decided by his master. What demonstrates the transition from slavery to freedom is control over our time.

There is another interesting explanation. When we look at the Torah, the Navi, and Chazal regarding the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh, we discover something very interesting. The Torah, discussing Rosh Chodesh, writes: "Uvroshai chodsheichem takrivu," teaching that the observance of Rosh Chodesh involves only one special sacrifice. Moving on to the Navi, we find that Shaul haMelech made a feast on Rosh Chodesh, significant because on that particular day David did not attend. The mishnah in Rosh HaShanah adds that the witnesses that would arrive to testify about the new moon would gather in a courtyard in Yerushalayim, where they would participate in great feasts. In the words of the Navi regarding the future, however, Rosh Chodesh takes on a different character. Yeshayahu reports that in the future Rosh Chodesh will be like the shalosh regalim, and people will make aliyah laregel: "V'hayah midei chodesh b'chodsho yavo kol basar l'hishtachavot l'fanay."

This being the case, we see that Rosh Chodesh is the holiday of the future. This is because in the future, after the geulah, the illumination of the moon will once again be as great as that of the sun. This is the explanation behind the Jewish custom of looking at one's tzitzit after kiddush levanah, which we will say this coming motza'ei Shabbat; in the future, the light of the moon will be like that of the sun, and tzitzit will be a nighttime chiyuv as well. Looking at the tzitzit is essentially an expression of our longing for the day when the light of the moon will be like that of the sun. This is also the reason why on Rosh Chodesh we do not recite the complete Hallel; the revelation of this day as a yom tov, as a day of aliyah laregel, will only take place after the geulah. Currently, it is deficient, and consequently our recitation of Hallel must be incomplete as well.

What can we do today in order to hasten the arrival of the day when the moon will shine as brightly as the sun? When we analyze the fourth day of Creation in sefer Bereishit, when HaKadosh Baruch Hu created the two great luminaries, we find an interesting midrash. Chazal teach that the moon complained to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, "Two kings cannot share one crown." HaKadosh Baruch Hu responded, "Okay, if you have difficulty sharing with the sun, move over a bit." As soon as the moon moved away from the sun, its light began to diminish more and more, because, as we know, the moon's light is merely a reflection of that of the sun. As long as the moon remained opposite the sun, its light was as bright as the sun's light. As soon as the moon moved away from the sun, it lost its light, because the attachment between the sun and moon was severed.

This idea is found regarding Moshe and Yehoshua as well. Yehoshua's appointment as Moshe's successor was the only event in the Midbar that was not accompanied by machloket. Yehoshua was the obvious choice, a shoo-in for the position, as he was the student of Moshe, receiving all of his master's light. This was true until Moshe's final day on earth, when he turned to Yehoshua and said, "Ask me anything you want; this is your final opportunity." Yehoshua responded, according to the gemara in Zevachim, "Rebbe, I've already learned everything from you." In that moment, Yehoshua's face changed completely. The entire nation wished to kill him, saying,

"Moshe's face is like that of the sun; Yehoshua's face is like that of the moon." Yehoshua's light was essentially a reflection of Moshe's light; the moment he moved away, he began to lose his light, and therefore the nation wished to kill him.

We learn from this that when a person grows with Torah and mussar, having studied the ways of his rabbanim, he should never think he is completely independent and can survive on his own. Obviously, this requires some qualification. On the one hand, every individual is unique and bears his own intrinsic light. At the same time, however, he must remain attached to his rabbanim and recognize that a great part of his own inner light is in actuality a reflection of the hard work invested in him by his rabbanim. Via this recognition, the chain that links the generations to one another is strengthened, hastening the geulah in which the light of the moon will shine as brightly as that of the sun.

This is why the first mitzvah given to us in Mitzrayim is that of kiddush hachodesh. The lesson is that one who does whatever he pleases is not in actuality free; only one who remains connected to his parents, his teachers, and the generations before him, recognizing that they have nurtured him and endowed him with the ability to grow, is truly free.

Shabbat Shalom!

Meir Goldwicht

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MURDER :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Judaism places human life and its preservation at the highest level of spiritual and, social and moral behavior. The commandment "you shall not murder" is the cornerstone of Jewish life. Throughout the ages of Jewish history murder was always considered the most heinous of crimes. Even when killing was necessary and justified, such as in wars of self defense and other extraordinary circumstances, it left a scar on the Jewish psyche.

King David, the greatest and most pious of all of the Judean kings of Israel, was denied the privilege of building the Temple in Jerusalem simply because he had killed people, albeit justifiably and legally. Human blood spilled was not ever going to be the basis for anyone attempting to build the house of God. It is noteworthy that King Solomon, David's son and heir who actually did construct the First Temple, is not recorded in the Bible as ever having fought a war. His government did execute criminals and traitors but Solomon himself was never seen by his generation or later generations as being a killer. There is tradition that Moses himself was punished by God for his justifiable killing of the Egyptian taskmaster. Moses spends almost sixty years in exile from his brethren in Egypt as a penance for this killing. The Torah provides for such exile in a "city of refuge" even for accidental unpremeditated killings that occur.

Suffice it to say that the Torah objects to the taking of human life though it certainly allows it on the basis of saving the Jewish people and other extraordinary circumstances.

During the long exile of Israel, Jewish society generally knew of few if any cases of murder in its midst. Violent personal crime was also almost an unknown here in the land of Israel for almost all of the last century. There were unfortunately political killings, ideologically motivated, such as those of DeHaan, Arlazarov and Rabin, but the general Jewish population felt itself safe from cases of wanton murder of Israelis on Israelis.

Somehow this situation has changed in this opening decade of the twenty-first century. The Israeli underworld has grown more powerful, more violent and wealthier over time. Their internal wars have grown more public and more brutal over time with completely innocent victims being part of the collateral damage of their internal wars.

And the police and the courts seem to be badly overmatched in attempting to deal with the problem. There is also hardly a day that passes when a murder – usually a typically horrendous and shocking one – by Israelis against Israelis is not featured in the media. Children against parents, neighbors against neighbors, spouses against spouses, etc. are all the daily fare of killings. Drunken fights by the Friday night pubsters also lead often to murder.

Children bring knives with them to school and stabbings will inevitably occur and again the authorities seem to be at a loss as how to deal with this ugliness and its effect on our society generally. And there seems to be no section of our very diverse society that is exempted from this problem.

Into this bleak picture there are very few easy or immediate solutions that anyone can propose. Education towards civility, tolerance and non-violent disagreement is probably the only viable long term solution of this problem for our society. Every school in Israel as well as every home and family should stress the imperative that “you shall not murder.” The relative absence of violent personal crime in past Jewish society was based on this type of repetitive education.

It was also based on a much more homogeneous society than is our current Israeli community. The conscious attempt by the early Zionists to create the “new Jew” here produced a much more aggressive personality than the “old Jew” of the Exile. But with this necessary and apparently admirable strengthening of Jewish physical power there also slowly arose a gradual erosion of the prohibition against violence and murder.

Added to this are the difficulties of the absorption of immigrants, many of whom have no Jewish background whatsoever and who come from countries where violence and murder are unfortunately all too common, have also complicated matters. The rabbis of the Talmud warned us that “the day of the ingathering of the exiles will be a most difficult one” and apparently widespread violence and murder is certainly to be reckoned as one of the issues that makes for this difficulty in our society. Our mantra that “you shall not murder” should be constantly drilled into all segments of Jewish society. Eventually it will have a positive effect. Shabat shalom.

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Weekly Parsha :: BO :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The entire story of the Torah regarding the redemption of the Jewish slaves from Egypt descends into a contest of wills. Pharaoh reaches the limit of his patience in this week's parsha. He warns Moshe not to dare come and see him again. He assesses that Moshe's demands are not

serious since he remains inflexible and not open to any compromise regarding them. He also apparently believes that Moshe has run out of plagues to visit on Egypt.

The troubles that Moshe has visited on Egypt have not dented the spirit of Pharaoh. Only when finally his own life is threatened and when all of Egypt is mourning its deaths does Pharaoh waver in his determination to refuse Moshe's requests. And even then he will soon regret his decision to free the Jews from Egyptian slavery. What is the reason for Pharaoh's behavior?

His advisers have long ago declared to him that Egypt is lost if he continues on his present course of recalcitrant behavior. Yet Pharaoh is unwilling to concede to Moshe. Their discussions and differences have now turned personal and no logic can any longer rule the day. His angry outburst to Moshe and his banishing him from his palace marks the breaking point in his behavior.

There will be no reasoning with him from now forward. Only the blows of the deaths of the first born Egyptians will affect him and, as mentioned above, only weakly and temporarily. His stubbornness will eventually lead to great tragedy and loss for his people.

But that is always the way of tyrants. Blinded by one's own ego, uncaring as to the fate of others, deluded by one's own alleged infallibility, stubbornness and illogic rule the day. Pharaoh cannot be wrong. He seems himself as never having been wrong. Lord Acton's famous phrase that “absolute power corrupts absolutely” is always borne out to be accurate.

The struggle for Pharaoh's mind and soul is what the Torah is teaching us here. The kings of Israel always had prophets that pricked the bubble of their ego. Moshe may be banished from the Pharaoh's palace but his message cannot be so contained. Ideas and spirit are the stuff of human existence. Eventually they penetrate the most closed of palaces and societies. That is what Moshe is trying to convey to Pharaoh. The prophet stated that Pharaoh though himself to be a god – the god of the Nile no less.

All dictators think themselves to be gods. Their pictures of themselves are to be regarded as talismans and no criticism of themselves is allowed. Judaism spares no one from criticism, even our greatest leaders. There are no perfect people and there is no human that in any way can be deemed as a god. Moshe's visits and conversations with Pharaoh were meant to have him realize that he is only human and therefore prone to error and mistakes.

Pharaoh is unwilling to hear that message from Moshe and therefore he will be forced to hear it from plagues and death itself. This type of confrontation is a lesson to all of us as to dangers of power and ego. It is the contest between Moshe's humility and Pharaoh's arrogance. And we all know who won out in that contest.

Shabat shalom.

from Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>
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date Thu, Jan 21, 2010 at 3:40 AM
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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Bo

Pharaoh demanded, "Which ones are going?" Moshe said, "With our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters... because it is a festival of Hashem for us." (10:8,9)

Pharaoh demanded that only a designated group of Jews leave Egypt to celebrate and bring offerings to G-d. Moshe Rabbeinu responded that everyone must be permitted to leave. It was a festival to Hashem and, as such, the entire nation was required to attend. A Jewish festival is for all Jews - men and women - when they become of age. This is the simple

explanation. I would like to take an innovative - perhaps bold - approach to Moshe's dialogue with Pharaoh.

Pharaoh told Moshe to take yechidim, individuals, the elite, those who understood the meaning of offering sacrifices in the wilderness to G-d. The hamon am, average Jew, had no reason to go. Moshe replied that, chag Hashem lanu, it is "a festival of Hashem for us," and Hashem wants His entire nation to share in His festival. Judaism is neither only for the elite, nor is it the sole possession of a few select communities. It is for everyone; everywhere.

B'neareinuu u'b'zekeineinu neilach, b'vanein u'bivnoseinu, "with our youngsters and with our elders shall we go; with our sons and with our daughters." Klal Yisrael is comprised of many factions, of individuals of all stripes, personalities and backgrounds. They hail from all parts of the country and all corners of the globe. Some have always been observant, descendants of illustrious lineages, while others have only recently entered the fold of observance. Yes, some are "elders" in Yiddishkeit and others are "youngsters." Some are comfortable in their religious status-quo, while others are struggling to survive spiritually. Some present themselves with no care in the world, while others walk around as if they are carrying all the world's problems on their shoulders. In a large community, the "young" at risk - or "young" at heart - tend to get lost in the shuffle. The "old," with the various issues characterizing their past and future, seem to take a back door to the challenges of the present. Each "son" and "daughter," an individual in his or her own right, is at risk for being swallowed up among the massive numbers, but every one of them is an individual who has his or her own story. Every soul has his or her unique issues, which must be addressed sensitively on a case by case basis. They are all a part of the collective Klal Yisrael and, thus, each is an essential component of every religious experience. They, too, must be permitted to leave Egypt, because, without them, the experience would be incomplete. Moshe told Pharaoh that Klal Yisrael is not comprised only of the "few and the proud." We are all proud to be a part of the glorious Jewish people.

We must remember that some people need more attention. Two stories occurred during a class of a popular rabbi. The topic was unconditional love, caring for someone in a manner that is unwavering and not determined by tangential factors. No motives - no factors - no benefits: simply, love and caring. As the lecturer was speaking, a gentleman to the right of the lecturer muttered, "Absolutely right. The only unconditional love is the love you get from your pet dog." The man repeated himself; this time, his voice was slightly elevated. He continued, louder and more aggressively, "Human love can never be trusted. People will disappoint you, but your dog will always love you, unconditionally. When you come home after a hard day, your dog will greet you at the door, lick you and accept you. Human love is unpredictable, always changing, always has strings attached." It was clear that this man had some serious issues. The next time he began to rave about humans being unreliable and dogs being man's best and most dependable friend, a woman screamed out dismissively, "We did not come here to listen to you talk about your dog. Stop raving like a lunatic, so that we can listen to the rabbi."

The man glared back at her as he hissed, "You are so shallow." It was now up to the rabbi to respond to the scenario. He said, "Listen, this week we are addressing human love. Next time, I will allow for a seminar on canine love." The man surprisingly acquiesced to the rabbi and even said, "Thank you, I understand."

After the class, the rabbi received a note from another one of the lecture's attendees. The note read, "I have been attending your class for upward of two years. During the course of the classes, I have learned many important lessons. Tonight, however, I learned the most important lesson of all: the respect one must show to people, regardless of how strangely they might behave. You have healed me tonight from my greatest failing: my lack of trust in human dignity."

A number of months later, the man who had an obsession for his dog also wrote a thank-you note: "Your validation of me has given me the strength to deal with some of the very difficult challenges that I am confronting. Over the years, people have considered me weird because of the bizarre way in which I react to issues concerning love. That night, something changed. For once someone did not view me as a reject, an odd bird with issues. The fact that you actually allowed me to continue along with my eccentricity opened some significant doors for me. I now believe in new possibilities."

The next anecdote tells a story that many of us in public life have experienced at one time or another. This time it took place at a weekend retreat in the Catskills. As always, it occurred at a public gathering and one stereotypical woman could just not stop complaining. This woman did not like the room, the food, the stereotypical program, the waiters, the air conditioning; the list went on. She was inconsolable - finding fault in everything and everybody. The rabbi made a feeble attempt at speaking to her, but noted that something else was disturbing her. It was not the aesthetics. She needed space to think and reconcile herself with the demons in her mind.

The next morning, the rabbi's lecture focused on people helping people, human beings being imbued with the power to console one another. Hashem transfers some of His power to heal to his "agents" in this world. After the rabbi's short talk, the woman who was obsessed with negativity came over and apologized for her obnoxious behavior. It was the first yearzeit of her son whose bar-mitzvah had taken place on that Shabbos. She had gone away for the weekend to try to get away from the pain that had been gnawing at her. Her emotional distress had catalyzed her intemperate complaining. After hearing the rabbi's lecture, she felt somewhat consoled. She believed that people had the power to comfort one another.

A great gadol once commented, "Just as we find it necessary to fa'renfer - to answer/give meaning to - a shverer Rambam, a difficult decision of the Rambam, we are likewise obliged to understand a shverer Yid. Every Jew has a place of honor in Hashem's scheme of the world. We must similarly find place in our hearts to reach out to all Jews. This is what Moshe intimated to Pharaoh. Everybody must leave because everybody is an integral part of Klal Yisrael.

Moshe stretched forth his hand towards the Heavens, and there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt... no man could see his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place. (10:22,23)

The ninth plague, choshech, darkness, had a devastating effect on the Egyptian people. While one might question why darkness is considered so traumatic, let us attempt to better understand the progression of this plague. During the first three days of darkness, the Egyptians were unable to see one another, but they could move around, albeit slowly and with great caution. The next three days were quite different. The Egyptians could not move around. The darkness was thick, weighing them down. They were frozen in suspended animation. Those who were standing when the darkness struck remained that way, as they were no longer able to sit down. Conversely, those who were sitting when it became "darker" could not arise from their seats. Every empty space in Egypt was filled with thick darkness. While there is no question that this was a horrifying, enervating experience, it still seems far-fetched to suggest that the plague of darkness was more traumatic than the previous eight plagues had been.

Horav Shabsi Yudelewitz, zl, the venerable Maggid of Yerushalayim, answers this question pragmatically with a story. In the "old days," maggidim, scholars, who were powerful speakers, would travel from town to town and earn their livelihood by lecturing to the community about ethics, Torah and yiraas Shomayim, fear of G-d. Some of these maggidim were quite famous, as a result of their ability to captivate their audience with their spellbinding oratory. One such maggid arrived in a

small village, far off the beaten path. Its inhabitants were simple Jews, who had not been accorded a Jewish education. Whatever they knew about their religion was transmitted to them by their parents, who themselves had not been proficient in their knowledge of Torah. It is difficult to be an accomplished, observant Jew if one lacks basic knowledge of Torah and the Codes. Additionally, if one does not know what he is missing, it becomes increasingly difficult to motivate him towards observance. Thus, the maggid had a tall order to inspire the community to achieve a higher level of observance.

Instilling awe of G-d, the fear of retribution, into a person always seems to "inspire" people. That is exactly what the maggid did: He spoke about the contrast between Gan Eden, Paradise, and Gehinom, Purgatory. With vivid portrayal, he was able to illustrate to the people the reward in store for those who adhere to Hashem's Torah and the punishment for those who repudiate Hashem's mitzvos. He was a passionate speaker who imbued his audience with a sense of yearning to live like a Jew is supposed to live.

The audience seemed inspired and moved by his words. Suddenly, one gentleman arose and declared loudly, "Rebbe, I want to go to Gehinom! Yes, that is exactly what I said. In fact, I will repeat it. I want to go to Gehinom!"

The maggid looked at the speaker incredulously. "Why would you want to do that?" the maggid asked.

"Let me explain my predicament," the man began. "If I live the rest of my life as an observant Jew, meticulously observing Hashem's Torah and carrying out His mitzvos, after 120 years, I will be called to my rightful place in Gan Eden to enjoy the tremendous spiritual pleasure in store for those who obey Hashem. One problem which seems to gnaw at me is: with whom will I associate? The rabbis, scholars and righteous individuals are, with all due respect, not my speed. Never in my life did I have any relationship with such pious people. What will we talk about? Now, my friends are the simple Jews who have led lives totally distant from religion. They will all be in Gehinom. Therefore, I want to go to Gehinom, so that I will have someone to talk with. Otherwise, I will be very bored."

"You are utterly mistaken," the maggid countered. Do you think for one minute that in the Olam HaEmes, World of Truth, you will meet up with your friends? No. You are wrong. Gan Eden is a place filled with incredible light. It is a place of overwhelming joy and happiness. The righteous all sit together, sharing in the pleasure derived from the shine of the Shechinah. The tzaddikim have the opportunity to meet once again and renew old acquaintances with the other righteous who lived in their generation.

"This is quite unlike the morbid, dreary scenario in Gehinom. There, darkness reigns. One neither sees another soul, nor hears a sound. He cannot raise his hand or lift his leg. Gehinom is a lonely, dreary place. The individual sits alone amid darkness, surrounded by his sins. There is nothing there - but him."

This is what occurred in Egypt during makkas choshech. The Egyptians were engulfed in thick darkness, but the loneliness made it worse. The Egyptians could not share their feelings of fear, anger, grief and frustration with anyone else. This is why choshech was so devastating. True, the earlier plagues had caused great destruction, almost ruining the entire country, but each Egyptian had not suffered alone. They all suffered collectively. This gave them a measure of comfort. It eased their pain. One can accede to the most ruinous plague as long as he is not alone, as long as he can share his travail with his fellowman. In makkas choshech, "no man could see his brother." This added "feature" rendered the plague unbearable.

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

The following d'var Torah may not necessarily be parsha appropriate, but I just could not pass up the story and its powerful lesson. Many women observe the custom of refraining from certain chores on Rosh

Chodesh. Years ago, washing machines were an appliance that was found in the homes of the most wealthy - certainly not in the impoverished neighborhood of the Old City in Yerushalayim. Usually a laundress was hired. This woman, who was herself from a very poor family, would slave over the washing board, washing each article of clothing individually. It was difficult labor, which often lasted from early in the morning until late at night, but it was her means of earning a livelihood.

One Rosh Chodesh morning, Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was on his way to Shacharis, morning services, when he heard a loud commotion down the block. Curious if he could help someone in need, he asked his daughter-in-law, who lived with him after the passing of his rebbetzin, to inquire as to the nature of the disturbance.

She returned with the following tale of woe. Apparently, one of the women had a routine for her laundress, who would come on schedule once every week. The laundress arrived in the pre-dawn darkness to begin her day's labor, only to discover that her employer had forgotten that it was Rosh Chodesh. Since she was very observant, she refused to permit her to wash the clothes. The custom was not to do laundry on Rosh Chodesh, and she refused to deviate from the custom - regardless of the woman's pleas. The laundress cried that if she did not work, she could not eke out her wretched livelihood, which was especially critical since her husband was incapacitated and could not work. This meant that her children would go hungry. They began to argue gently, until it escalated into a full-scale fight, which woke up the entire neighborhood. When Rav Yosef Chaim heard the story, he immediately asked his daughter-in-law if they had any dirty laundry at home. If so, they would hire the laundress for a few hours, so that the day should not be an entire loss for her. "Quickly, bring the woman to our house for a few hours," Rav Yosef Chaim urged. "To cause such sorrow and pain to a poor Jewish woman is a much greater offense than breaking a religious custom."

The daughter-in-law ran to call the woman to their home before she had a chance to leave the neighborhood. As she was setting up her washboard, there was a knock at the door. It was the woman who had originally hired the laundress. "If the Rav can have his laundry washed on Rosh Chodesh, then so can I!" she declared, and she rehired the woman for the remainder of the day.

The point that I would like to accentuate is that *mentchlichkeit*, human decency, should complement *frumkeit*. Without question, we do not ignore a halachah in order to conform to decency, but when one can balance the other, why should it not? Some of us think that a mitzvah takes precedence over anything another person might be doing. Thus, he can make much noise in his apartment in celebrating a mitzvah - even if it is at the expense of his neighbor's sleep. One feels that his davening will be failing if he does not enunciate the words loudly. The fact that this may infringe upon his neighbor's kavanah, concentration, is unimportant. He is performing a mitzvah. There are those who introduce new mitzvos - such as feeling the urge to "text" during davening or letting their phone ring during davening - despite the fact that it disturbs everybody in shul. After all, he is waiting for an important phone call - which concerns a mitzvah.

Much of this is related to one's self-perception or, rather, his self-absorption. We are often so obsessed with ourselves that we do not notice that anyone else exists. This is especially true in the performance of a mitzvah. My mitzvah takes precedence over everything and everybody. *Mentchlichkeit* is dismissed. Our own self-righteous attitude supersedes all else. I find this especially true when it concerns our children, who are extensions of ourselves. It happens more often than I care to elaborate. A child comes home with a complaint about his rebbe. Heaven forbid that a parent gives the rebbe the benefit of the doubt, or even goes to the trouble of making a phone call to discuss his "tzaddik's" behavior and what might have provoked the rebbe's alleged reaction.

Immediately, the rebbe is deemed, at best, incompetent, and, at worst, a danger to society. The next step is speaking to the principal, who has the good sense to act diplomatically, which means agreeing to "look into the matter," while simultaneously supporting the rebbe.

The parents are not placated. After all, we are dealing with the future gadol ha'dor, leader of the generation. If the rebbe is not removed, it might prove harmful to other students. Mind you, nothing negative has been confirmed concerning the rebbe. Now, the parents feel it incumbent to start a movement against the rebbe. The malignant disease of slander spreads throughout the parent body until the principal is forced to take action. The rest of the story is easy to predict. The rebbe's life is ruined: no job; no future; ultimately, no family, all because of self-righteous parents who were so self-absorbed in their child's education that they did not allow for rationality and *mentchlichkeit* to prevail.

Let me end with a story that demonstrates how a *mentch* should act. Traditions and customs are extremely important to Jewish life. A *minhag Yisrael*, Jewish custom, has the status of *halachah* in some cases. There are two customs regarding walking one's child down to the *chuppah*. The prevailing custom in the *chassidic* world is that both fathers walk the *chossan*, while both mothers walk down the *kallah*. In the Lithuanian *yeshivah* world, both of the parents walk their children down together. A man once came to Horav Yaakov Kamenetsky, *zl*, who, aside from being a *gadol ba'Torah*, was also the embodiment of *mentchlichkeit* and *yashrus*, decency and integrity, with all human beings. The man was marrying off his son, and the issue regarding walking down to the *chuppah* surfaced. What should they do?

"Rebbe," the father began, "this is our only child. We have waited for years for this auspicious moment, but the *kallah's* family is *chassidic* and their custom is to have the *chossan* walk down with both fathers. I would like to know: What is the Rosh *Yeshivah's* *minhag*, custom, regarding his own children? We will abide by the Rosh *Yeshivah's* custom." "My custom," replied Rav Yaakov, "is to do whatever the other side wants." And he did. The Rosh *Yeshivah* had six children. Three, he walked down with his *rebbetzin*, while for the other three, he followed the *minhag* of the other family. He did not get carried away with himself. Neither should we.

And it shall be when your children say to you, "What is this service to you?" (12:26)

In the *Haggadah*, this question is attributed to the wicked son.

Interestingly, of the four sons expounded upon in the *Haggadah*, three of them are in this *parsha*. They are: 1.) The *rasha* (12:26); 2.) the *tam*, simple son, "And it shall be when your son will ask you at some future time, 'What is this?'" (ibid 13:14); 3.) the *she'eino yodea lishol*, one who does not know how to ask; "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, "It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt" (ibid 13:8); The fourth son, the *chacham*, wise son, is cited in *Sefer Devarim* 6:20, "If your child asks you tomorrow, saying, "What are the testimonies and decrees and the ordinances that Hashem, our G-d, commanded you?" There is a glaring distinction between the questions presented by the wise son and his simple "brother" and that of the wicked son. The word "tomorrow" is included in the text of the question of the wise and simple brothers, while such reference to the future is omitted from the wicked son's question.

In his *Shemen HaTov*, Horav Zev Weinberger, *Shlita*, explains that the concept of *machar*, "tomorrow," contrasts the difference in approach to *mitzvos* manifest by the *rasha* and the *chacham* and *tam*. The wise son and, likewise, the simple son have questions which bother them. They have issues concerning the *mitzvos* which they would like to have reconciled. *Sforno* delves into some of the *halachic* issues presented by the *Korban Pesach* which need explaining. These questions, however, do not in any way inhibit their observance. Their performance of the *mitzvos* is not suppressed by the questions. They go forward and act. "Tomorrow," after they have affirmed their commitment to the *mitzvah*,

they will present their questions. The *rasha* is not so "hasty" in his commitment. He acts only when he fully understands the *mitzvah* and everything related to it. He really does not want to observe; he is always seeking some rationale to excuse himself. Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, *zl*, once traveled to a town in which one of his ex-students lived. I say "ex," because he was a bright, young aspiring scholar who could, and should have, achieved greatness. Something went wrong along the way, and he went off the *derech*, left the fold. While the young man had rejected religious observance, he still missed his revered rebbe, and, therefore, asked for an appointment to visit with him. The appointment was granted.

"Rebbe, I have many questions to ask concerning Judaism, the Torah and *halachah*," the young man began. Rav Chaim interjected, "I am prepared to spend all day and all night in discussion with you, responding to your questions. There is, however, one condition - answer one question for me: Tell me the truth concerning these 'questions' that you have: Did they trouble you before you desecrated *Shabbos* or afterwards?"

"To tell the truth, it was after I became a *mechallel Shabbos*, desecrated *Shabbos*, that these questions began to disturb me," the young man replied.

"If that is the case," countered Rav Chaim, "these are not questions. They are answers to justify your rejection of *Yiddishkeit*. You are seeking to validate your apostasy. I want no part of that."

Rav Weinberger notes another discrepancy between the wicked son and his two brothers. Concerning the wicked son, the text of his question is written in the plural, whereas, regarding the *chacham* and the *tam*, the question is presented in the singular. He suggests that this alludes to the pernicious character of the *ben rasha*, wicked son. He is not satisfied merely to reject the religion of his parents by himself. He attempts to sway others and pull them into his maelstrom of iniquity. I think the reason is simple: the wicked are insecure. They know that they are wrong. They know that they cannot support this approach. Thus, they must pursue others. Falsehood cannot stand alone. Truth needs no support.

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**Parshas Bo: Pharoahic or Phyrriic Victory
By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

In this week's *parsha*, Moshe warns the Egyptian nation about the last and most devastating of the ten plagues - Death of the First Born. Therefore, he tells the Egyptian ruler, "Thus says Hashem, 'At about midnight I will go about Egypt and strike the first born'" (Exodus 11:4) The vague expression "about midnight" is noted by Rashi who quotes the *Talmud* in *Tractate Berachos*. In actuality, it was the plague occurred exactly at midnight (Exodus 12:29).

Why then, would Hashem Whose all encompassing magnifying eye can discern milliseconds as if they were eternities, need to identify the time of striking with the vague reference "about midnight." Why didn't Moshe warn the Egyptians that at the exact strike of midnight Hashem would smite the firstborn?

Surely the indefinite timing was not done to catch the Egyptians off guard. Hashem could have told them the exact second and they would have been helpless and defenseless in an attempt to stop Him!

The Talmud explains that Moshe was reluctant to say that Hashem would strike at midnight. He suspected that the Egyptians with their fallible timepieces would miscalculate the hour of attack. Then they would then point their fingers and scoff, saying that the attack was off by several moments and question the accuracy of both Moshe's prediction and Hashem's ability to execute precisely as predicted. Therefore, Moshe gave the fuzzy reference "about midnight" even though the actual attack occurred precisely at that hour.

When I learned the Rashi and later the Talmudic source that he based his explanation on, I stood in wonder.

On the night of one of the most calamitous events in Egyptian History, how can we fathom a skeptical reaction based on the mere miscalculation of at most a few seconds. Which Egyptian would actually care enough to even discern if there were a discrepancy of a few seconds. More so, after losing thousands of firstborn children, which Egyptian would have the audacity to mock Moshe by saying that the attack was mistimed?

Clearly, definitive judgment was an eternal hallmark of G-d's Divine judgments. There cannot be even an iota of room for question. But how would the Egyptians even think to find skepticism in an ever so powerful and disastrous calamity that clearly is stamped with the Seal of the Divine?

An old story I heard, at least in one variation begins with a foolish smuggler who was caught with thousands of dollars worth of contraband merchandise being accosted by his vicious captor. The accused man refuses to divulge any information about the source of the bounty so the officer decides to play hardball with him.

He forces the poor man to stand behind a solid white line and threatens him with physical violence dare he crosses the boundary. "If I catch you stepping over that line," he shouts, "I'll break every bone in your body!" The frightened fool is stuck behind the line while the sadistic official demolishes every bit of the booty. He rips the cloth, smashes the pots and pans, and shatters the glass items.

Suddenly the pathetic victim begins laughing. He slaps his sides in astonishing indifference to the havoc and destruction being wreaked upon his smuggled wares.

Finally, the officer stops smashing the merchandise and screams at the hysterical fellow.

"Hey you! What do you think is so funny?"

The poor punch line has the feeble victim mocking the officer. "Ha Ha!" he shouts. "While you weren't looking, I stepped over the line three times!"

There is a pathetic nature often associated with defeat. The loser tries to find solace in the phyrnic, meaningless victories of tiny nothings. The world may be collapsing around him yet he will grasp the tiniest solace in his brilliant accomplishment by finding a meaningless point of an imagined breach in an all-encompassing armor.

The people of Mitzrayim (Egypt) were reeling from the greatest tragedy in history, yet they would search to find a discrepancy of a few seconds to justify their desperate attempt at defiance.

How often do we revel in our phyrnic victories when they are nothing more than Pharaohic victories?

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Bo

The First Mitzvah Teaches Us A Lesson Regarding All Mitzvos

The first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a national entity is found in this week's parsha. (The mitzvos that are mentioned earlier in Bereshes, such as Pru U'Rvu [having children] and Milah [circumcision] are mentioned before there was actually a nation of Israel.) This first mitzvah is establishing the months of the year based on the determination of the Beis Din [Jewish Court] [Shmos 12:11].

Witnesses are to come before the court and testify that they saw the new moon. On the basis of such corroborated testimony, the court will proclaim a new month which in turn determines the dates of the Jewish holidays. In fact, the very first Rashi in Chumash mentions this idea that the Torah should properly have begun with chapter 12 of Shmos, because that is where we find the first mitzvah to the Jewish people. In several places, including the Book of Mishlei, the Vilna Gaon writes that the introductory pasuk [verse] of a sefer encompasses in microcosm the entire contents of that sefer. If we take this maxim one step further, we might say that given the fact that (according to Rashi) the Torah should have begun with the pasuk "This month is for you the start of all months" the pasuk is in fact telling us that there is something fundamental about this pasuk and this mitzvah which serves as a common denominator for the entire set of 613 mitzvos! What is that common denominator?

There is nothing more predictable in this world than the astronomical calculations of the cycles of the sun and the moon. We know that sunrise will be exactly the same time it was today on this date 5 years from now and 10 years from now and 100 years from now. Likewise we know that a Jewish month is comprised of 29 days, 12 hours, and 793 parts of an hour (chalakim). Therefore, what is the point of having witnesses coming to testify that they saw a new moon? Why is this a Biblical mitzvah? It is science! It is clockwork! What does this have to do with religion?

Clearly, the purpose (tachlis) of this mitzvah is not for its informative value. Rather, its purpose is to do it for the sake of doing it. This means that we should not perform mitzvos for utilitarian purposes. We are not "accomplishing" anything in terms of concrete physical accomplishments of a utilitarian value. The major reason of doing any mitzvah is because first and foremost this is the Will of the Creator. The mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon, as is the case with all mitzvahs, is primarily done because G-d told us to do it. By doing it, we are obeying the Almighty and subjugating our minds and our bodies to His Will. As the first mitzvah in the Torah, this mitzvah is instructive regarding all mitzvos. We should not assume that there is necessarily a "practical application" to what we are doing other than to train us to fulfill the Will of the Creator.

The Redemption Comes When Things Seem Bleakest

This week's parsha contains a "famous pasuk": "They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt for they could not delay nor had they made provisions for themselves." [Shmos 12:39]. I refer to this pasuk as a "famous pasuk" because aside from the fact that we read it in the Torah on Parshas Bo every year, we say it every year at the Pesach Seder, as one of the most essential parts of the Hagaddah. This is the proof text cited by Rabban Gamliel's teaching "Whoever has not said these 3 things has not fulfilled his obligation" of eating Matzah on Seder night.

If we think about it, this seems like a rather minor side point to the whole story of the Exodus. The fact that they were driven out quickly and had no time to bake bread that night would hardly seem to rate as a crucial factor in the miraculous deliverance! And yet because of this seemingly insignificant event we eat Matzo. We eat Maror because we suffered a bitter slavery for 210 years. This fact easily qualifies for a significant ritual symbol of the holiday of Passover. Eating the Korban Pessach each year symbolizes our bravery in slaughtering the G-d of the

Egyptians and eating it in our homes on the night of the Exodus in accordance with G-d's mitzvah. This too is a significant occurrence. But where is the fundamental significance in the fact that we did not have time to bake bread when we were chased out of Egypt? Furthermore, we might ask, why did not they have a little foresight? We spend weeks preparing for Pessach. They didn't have any cleaning to worry about. Moshe told them ahead of time they were leaving Egypt the next day. They should have packed up and prepared provisions. Why were they so rushed at the last minute that they did not have time to let their dough rise? What is the meaning of this? The answer is the following: The Jews expected to leave Egypt right after the plague of blood. They were packed, they had their provisions, and they were ready to go. The plague of blood came and went and there was no movement. Nothing happened. Again with the frogs, there was a "false alarm" that they were about to leave. However the status quo persisted after frogs and after each of the first nine plagues. By the time of the Plague of the First Born, people already did not believe that the end was imminent. They took a "I've been there, done that" attitude and were not going to get caught yet again making provisions and having to unpack and unwrap the meals that they had prepared for the road. They did not pack. They did not prepare. They did not bake. They did not believe. They were so depressed and so helpless as a result of the rollercoaster of emotions they had been through during the previous 9 plagues that they did not expect to leave when they did. The lesson of the Exodus is that the salvation of G-d can come in the blink of an eye. It could be that yesterday the odds against it happening appeared astronomical, but today it might yet happen. This is the way redemption works. The Exodus is the paradigm for all future redemptions. It is always darkest before the dawn. Geulah [redemption] comes Precisely at the point of hopelessness.

This is why it is most significant for all generations to celebrate the Exodus by eating matzah. Which matzah? The matzah that symbolized the fact that they gave up hope of ever leaving to the extent that no one prepared an iota of food ahead of time. When we look at the situation in Eretz Yisrael today, we get depressed. Everyone asks - what is going to be? The lesson of the Exodus and the lesson of all Jewish redemption is that G-d's salvation can come in the blink of an eye. If we merit it, things can turn around in the time it takes to snap one's fingers! Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

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"When all is said and done"

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The Midrash Tanchuma on our parashah opens with a description of the plague of Darkness. The midrash asks: From where did this darkness come? [Commentaries explain that this darkness was not merely the absence of light; rather, the Torah teaches that it was a tangible darkness that weighed down the Egyptians.] One answer offered by the midrash is that it was darkness from gehinnom, about

which we read (Iyov 10:22), "The land whose darkness is like pitch-blackness, a shadow of death and without order, whose very light is like pitch blackness."

The midrash continues: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: There are three sources from which we learn that a person must review his Torah learning shortly before he passes away. In Mishlei (22:21), we read, "To teach you the veracity of true words so that you may answer words of truth to those who send word to you." [Commentaries explain that one will be called upon to speak "words of truth," i.e., Torah, "to those who send word to you," i.e., to G-d, who sent the person here; therefore, one must prepare by reviewing his learning.] Likewise, we read in Kohelet (12:13), "At the end of the matter, when all has been heard: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is man's whole duty."

[Commentaries explain: "At the end of the matter," i.e., life, "all that a person has learned will be heard"; therefore, one must prepare.] Finally, we learn this from the verse cited above, "A shadow of death and without order"—when a person approaches the shadow of death, he should give order to that which he learned.

The midrash concludes its exposition of the verse from Iyov: Woe to a house whose windows open onto darkness, as it is written, "Whose very light is like pitch blackness." Commentaries explain: A house should be filled with light, i.e., Torah. Woe to a person who opens the windows of his house to allow in the darkness of gehinnom instead.

"Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels." (11:2)

The Gemara (Berachot 9a) notes that Hashem said, "Please speak . . ." The Gemara explains that Moshe was to say to Bnei Yisrael, "Please request gifts from the Egyptians."

Why was it important that Bnei Yisrael ask for gifts? And, why did Hashem only request that they ask for gifts, rather than commanding them to ask. R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains: After hundreds of years in the Egyptian exile, Bnei Yisrael were lowly and down-trodden. The nature of a person in such a situation is not to dream of "big things"; he will be more than satisfied if he can gain his freedom. However, in order to prepare Bnei Yisrael for the glorious spiritual future that lay ahead of them, Hashem "needed" them to think big. As a first step, He wanted Bnei Yisrael to want wealth.

The Gemara explains that the reason Hashem wanted Moshe to request Bnei Yisrael to ask for gifts was so that Avraham Avinu would not say, "You kept the part of Your promise which said, 'They will enslave them and they will oppress them,' but not the part that said, 'And after that they will leave there with great wealth.'" R' Kook explains: The "great wealth" to which Hashem referred in His promise to Avraham was the Torah and Eretz Yisrael. However, given the lowly state of Bnei Yisrael, Avraham might have complained that they were not capable of aspiring to spiritual goals or nationhood. Indeed, the Gemara records that Bnei Yisrael told Moshe, "We will be happy just to be released from our imprisonment."

Of course, telling Bnei Yisrael to seek wealth can backfire, since they might think that having material wealth is an end in itself. Thus Hashem requested, but did not command, that they seek wealth, so that no one would mistake it for a mitzvah. (Ein Ayah)

We are taught that "ma'aseh Avot siman la'banim" / the events in the lives of the Patriarchs foreshadow what will befall their descendants. For example, the gifts that Bnei Yisrael received from the Egyptians were foreshadowed by the gifts that Avraham Avinu received from Pharaoh (Bereishit 12:16). Indeed, this may have been Avraham's intention when he said to Sarah (12:14), "Please say that you are my sister, so that things will be good for me for your sake . . ." Avraham may have wanted Sarah to be taken to Pharaoh so that Avraham would

receive gifts, thus foreshadowing the receipt of gifts by his children from the Egyptians.

Nevertheless, one must ask: How could Avraham benefit from Sarah's being in such a difficult situation? R' Yitzchak Dadon shlita (Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) explains: Avraham knew that Sarah would be taken to Pharaoh in any event, and he was concerned that this would cause him to hate the Egyptians. Avraham, the pillar of chessed, had worked his entire life on loving every human being; how could he allow himself to hate an entire nation? Thus, if he could arrange things so that the Egyptians would do something good for him, his middah / trait of hakarat ha'tov / recognition of the good that was done for him would prevent him from hating the Egyptians. Similarly, Avraham wanted his descendants to receive gifts from the Egyptians so that they (Bnei Yisrael) would not hate the nation that had first hosted, and only later enslaved, them. (Haggadah Shel Pesach: Dodi Tzach V'adom)

"I shall go through Egypt on this night, and I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from man to beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment -- I am Hashem." (12:12)

In the Pesach Haggadah, this pasuk is interpreted as follows: "I shall go through Egypt on this night"--I [Hashem], and not a malach / angel.

"I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt"--I, and not a saraf (another type of angel).

"Against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment"--I, and not a messenger.

"I am Hashem"--I am He, and no other. [Until here from the Haggadah.]

R' Aharon Teomim z"l Hy"d (rabbi and darshan in Prague, Worms and Krakow; martyred in 1690) explains: Our Sages teach that once Hashem permits a plague to begin, the Angel of Death does not distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. Thus, Hashem Himself had to carry out the Plague of the Firstborn to ensure that no firstborn of Bnei Yisrael would be killed. Nevertheless, one might have thought that Hashem's power of discernment was only needed in those cases where Egyptians and Bnei Yisrael were in the same house. The general plague, however, could have been carried out by the Angel of Death. Therefore, the pasuk tells us, "I shall go through Egypt on this night"--I, and not a malach. Even though an angel could have performed part of the mission, Hashem chose to do it Himself.

"I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt"--I, and not a saraf. This refers to striking those Egyptian firstborn who took refuge in a Jewish home. These firstborn had to be stricken by Hashem Himself, for the reason explained above.

"Against all the gods of Egypt I shall mete out punishment"--I, and not a messenger. The Egyptians' idols could have been destroyed by an angel, as there was no issue of discerning between the innocent and guilty. Nevertheless, Hashem chose to do it Himself.

Finally, lest one think that angels did assist, and the verse merely reflects the halachic principle of, "A person's agent is like himself," therefore the pasuk concludes: "I am Hashem"--I am He, and no other. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Bigdei Aharon)

"When your children say to you, 'What is this service to you?'" (12:26) In the Pesach Haggadah, this question is attributed to the rasha / wicked son. R' Shmuel Zvi Danziger z"l (the Alexanderer Rebbe; died 1923) explains the rasha's question as follows: Even you do not understand the deep meaning behind these rituals that you perform; therefore, they will not help you merit the redemption. Why then do you bother? The rasha does not understand that G-d guides those who truly seek Him to deeper and deeper understandings of the Torah and mitzvot.

As for the rasha, had he been in Egypt, he would not have sought-out G-d and would not have merited this Divine assistance. Therefore, he

would not have been redeemed. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tiferet Shmuel)

R' Shmuel Meltzen z"l (Slutsk, Poland; 19th century; author of Even Shleimah) writes that the degree to which a person merits Divine assistance in attaining spiritual goals depends on the degree to which he strengthens himself in the following areas: Love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, attaching himself to Hashem, bitachon / trust in Hashem, and the trait of simchah / joy. Of these, the most important is bitachon, R' Meltzen writes. (Ha'emunah V'ha'hashgachah p.2b)

Shabbat: A Remembrance of the Exodus

R' Yechezkel Landau z"l (the Noda B'Yehuda; 18th century) poses the following question: Why is a man permitted to recite kiddush for his wife? A man who recited Ma'ariv has already said "Vayeichulu" and the blessing "Mekadaish ha'Shabbat"; thus, he has certainly fulfilled his Torah obligation to recite kiddush. All that remains is a Rabbinic obligation to recite kiddush over a cup of wine. His wife, on the other hand, has most likely not recited Ma'ariv since (married) women generally do not recite that prayer; thus, her obligation to recite (or hear) kiddush is on the level of a Torah obligation! As a general rule, a person whose obligation is of a relatively lesser Rabbinic nature cannot exempt a person whose obligation is of a higher Torah nature. [Thus, for example, a child cannot recite Birkat Hamazon on behalf of an adult.] Why then can the husband recite kiddush for his wife? (Dagul M'revavah ch.271)

R' Akiva Eiger z"l answers that this is simply an example of the rule that one who is theoretically obligated to perform a mitzvah can exempt another person even if the former is not obligated at the moment. (Sh.U't. R' Akiva Eiger No. 7)

Some answer that there is no set text for the Torah obligation of kiddush. Thus, when the husband comes home from shul and his wife says "Shabbat Shalom" (or any similar greeting), she fulfills her Torah obligation to sanctify the Shabbat verbally, i.e., to recite kiddush. Now, both the husband and the wife have "only" a Rabbinic obligation to recite kiddush over a cup of wine. Since their obligations are equal, the husband may exempt the wife through his recitation.

In contrast, R' Yosef Babad z"l (Poland; died 1875) answers that even the husband has not fulfilled his kiddush obligation through praying because an essential aspect of kiddush is missing from the Ma'ariv shemoneh esrei. Specifically, one is obligated to recall Yetziat Mitzrayim / the Exodus in kiddush. Thus, the husband's and wife's obligations are equal, i.e., they are both on a Torah level, and the husband may recite kiddush for his wife. (Minchat Chinuch, mitzvah 31)

Why is recalling Yetziat Mitzrayim a part of kiddush? One answer is that the miracles associated with the Exodus (the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Yam Suf) attest to the fact that G-d is the Creator just as Shabbat does, because it is intuitively obvious that no one but the Creator of the universe could have wreaked havoc with the laws of nature the way that G-d did in Egypt. Knowing this actually strengthens our belief in Creation, and thus makes Shabbat more meaningful, because our ancestors saw the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Yam Suf, whereas no one saw Creation. (Zemiroth Shirin Ve'rachshin p.137, citing Rambam z"l)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at Torah.org start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page.

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subject [Rav Kook List] Bo: Training for Greatness

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Bo: Training for Greatness

Before the Jewish people left Egypt, God had a request:

"Please speak to the people, and let each man request from his friend gold and silver articles. Let every woman make the same request of her friends." [Ex. 11:2]

The language in the verse is surprisingly gentle. God usually commands the Israelites. Why the solicitous request, "Please speak"?

The Sages noted the unusual wording. According to Rabbi Yanai, God was asking the Jewish people for a favor: Please request gold and silver from your Egyptian neighbors, so that Abraham will not be able to claim that I failed to keep My promise to him that his children will leave Egypt with great wealth [Berachot 9a-9b].

If God wanted the Israelites to leave Egypt with riches, surely He could have arranged it without any effort on their part. Why did God want them to borrow from the Egyptians in order to fulfill His promise to Abraham?

Presumably, requesting handouts from their Egyptians neighbors was embarrassing and demeaning. Why put the Jewish people through this ordeal?

Bontsha the Silent

I.L. Peretz tells the story of Bontsha the Silent, a simple Jew who accepted all of life's humiliations - and he suffered far more than his fair share - with quiet resignation. His life and death went unnoticed in this world. But in Paradise, the arrival of Bontsha the Silent was a major event. Trumpets blew, important angels rushed to greet him, and he was crowned with a golden crown.

Bontsha reacted to all this commotion exactly as he would in this world: with silence. His silence was due to his great trepidation; he was certain that a terrible mistake had been made. However, when Bontsha's trial began, and the defending angel related the long tale of misfortune and mistreatment that had been Bontsha's daily lot, he slowly began to take heart. It is me they are taking about!

"Despite everything," the defending angel concluded, "Bontsha never complained. He never protested, not against his fellow man, and not against God." The prosecuting angel conceded that just as Bontsha had always been silent, so too he would be silent. Then the heavenly Judge turned to Bontsha, and informed him, "Your reward is not just one little portion of Paradise, but everything! Whatever you want!"

All turned to Bontsha, eager to hear what great reward he would request. Bontsha meekly responded, "What I would like, Your Honor, is to be served every morning a warm roll with fresh butter."

There was shocked silence in the court. The angels bent their heads in shame, and the prosecutor laughed a bitter laugh.

Emancipation of the Spirit

Slavery is not just a legal status; it is also a state of mind. It is not enough to emancipate the slaves. They must be trained for independence, for courage and greatness. A lifetime of oppression can create a poverty of spirit, where the greatest good imaginable is a warm roll with fresh butter. The Torah relates that the enslaved Israelites were incapable of accepting Moses' message of hope due to "smallness of spirit" [Ex. 6:9]. Even in the desert, the former slaves would remember Egypt nostalgically, fondly recalling 'sitting by the pot of meat' as they ate fish, onions, and melons [Ex. 16:3; Num. 11:5].

Asking the Hebrew slaves to borrow gold and silver from their neighbors was an educational exercise. God wanted to raise their ambitions above fish and onions. Of course, gold is not the true goal.

Therefore the Israelites only entreated, not commanded. Only regarding spiritual goals and mitzvot does God command us.

It was not easy for the Hebrew slaves to borrow from their former masters. The Midrash tells us they would have happily foregone the Egyptian gold and leave Egypt right away. But they would require courage and greatness of spirit for the difficult journey ahead.

Maimonides wrote in the Guide for the Perplexed that the forty years of hardship in the wilderness instilled in the former slaves those traits of independence and courage that a free nation must have.

God desires humility - but the true humility of Abraham and Moses, great men willing to argue against Him - not the passive meekness of a Bontsha.

[adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 44]

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Weekly Halachah - Parshat Bo 5750

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Cleaning Garments on Shabbos

Laundering garments is prohibited on Shabbos for it is a toladah of one of the thirty-nine Shabbos Labors, Melaben, Bleaching. While laundering usually entails the use of water and/or cleaning agents, removing dirt from a garment even without them may also fall under the halachic prohibition of Laundering. It is this type of Laundering which is the subject of our discussion.

Removing dust or dirt particles from a garment

There is a dispute among the Rishonim whether or not removing dust or other dirt particles from a garment is considered Laundering. Some hold that removing any speck of dirt from a garment, even if it is not absorbed into the fabric of the garment but is merely lying on its surface [like a feather or a loose thread], is Biblically forbidden since the garment is being transformed from "dirty" to "clean."¹ A second opinion maintains that removing any dirt, whether it is absorbed into the fabric [like dust] or not, is totally permitted, since a dusty garment is not considered dirty and removing the dust is not considered Laundering.² A third, middle-of-the road view, holds that only dust which is trapped between the fibers of the fabric may not be removed, while dirt which lies on the surface, may.³

The basic halachah follows the middle-of-the-road opinion,⁴ forbidding one to remove dirt that has been absorbed into the fabric⁵ while allowing one to remove a feather or a loose thread that has landed on the garment⁶ [using one's hands or a soft, dry cloth; a brush may not be used⁷]. Accordingly, one should be careful not to let his clothing fall on the ground and get dusty so that he does not come to desecrate the Shabbos.⁸ If, however, one's clothes should get dirty from dust, there is a mitigating factor which may permit removing dust from a garment:

Removing dust from a garment is only considered Laundering if the person wearing the garment⁹ is particular not to wear clothes in such a condition. In other words, if the garment is so dirty that its owner would not wear it,¹⁰ then cleaning it is considered Laundering. If the garment is not significantly dirty, i.e., its owner would not refuse to wear it,¹¹ it may be cleaned so long as the following two conditions are met:

* No brush is used.

* The garment it is not shaken or scrubbed vigorously; it may be gently shaken or lightly dusted only.¹²

Question: Can anything be done to a dusty garment [that is significantly dirty] whose owner has no other suitable clothing and is embarrassed to be seen publicly in such a dirty garment?

Discussion: The poskim permit one to ask a non-Jew to remove the dust.¹³ While generally one may not ask a non-Jew to do anything that a Jew is not permitted to do on Shabbos, in this case he may, since as stated above, there are opinions that maintain that it is even permitted for a Jew to remove dust from a garment on Shabbos. [It is questionable, however, whether one may instruct the non-Jew to use a brush.¹⁴]

* If a non-Jew is not available and the owner is embarrassed to be seen in public wearing a dusty garment, some poskim permit a Jew to clean the garment, provided that it is cleaned in an unusual manner, e.g., with one's elbow.¹⁵

Removing a stain from a garment

Halachically speaking, there are two types of stains: 1) a wet stain which is absorbed into the fabric of the garment, e.g., a ketchup stain, and 2) a stain which is made when a piece of dirt or food falls on a garment and hardens there. There are different rules for each of these stains.

A wet stain which is absorbed into the garment:

It is strictly prohibited to remove on Shabbos a stain which is absorbed into the fabric and can be removed only with water or a cleaning agent. This is the classic Biblical prohibition of Laundering. Even if the stain is so insignificant that the owner will not be deterred from wearing the garment because of it, it is still strictly forbidden to remove it with water or any other cleaning agent.

If no water or cleaning agent is used, then it is permitted to remove the stain if it is insignificant and would not deter the owner from wearing the stained garment. If the stain is significant, however, it is prohibited to remove it if the stain will be removed completely, i.e., it will leave no mark whatsoever on the garment. If, however, the stain is only partially removed – some mark will remain – one is permitted to remove it. Two conditions apply:

* No brush may be used.

* The stain may not be scrubbed away; it may only be gently wiped off with a dry cloth or removed by hand, with a knife, etc.¹⁶

Dirt which adheres to the garment's surface

A stain which results from dirt or food that has attached itself to a garment can also be removed if it will be only partially removed or when it is "insignificant," as explained earlier.¹⁷ It can be removed either by scratching it off or by rubbing the reverse side of the material until the dirt is dislodged.

There is, however, one notable difference between this type of stain and the wet stain which became absorbed into the fabric of a garment. The removal of a dry stain is subject to the laws of Grinding, a forbidden Shabbos Labor. If the dirt or food has dried or hardened, then scratching or peeling it off will cause it to crumble, which is a Rabbinical violation of the prohibition against Grinding. Therefore:

* If the garment was stained by mud and the mud has dried, it may not be rubbed off – even if the stain is insignificant or will leave a mark – because of the prohibition against Grinding.¹⁸

* If the garment was stained by unprocessed food which grows from the ground, e.g., fruits and vegetables, it may not be removed because of the prohibition against Grinding. But a stain from food which has already been ground, like baby cereal, may be removed because Grinding does not apply to previously ground food.¹⁹

* Beans or potatoes from cholent are not subject to the prohibition against Grinding, since they are cooked so thoroughly that they are

considered "previously ground", and the prohibition of Grinding does not apply to them.²⁰

* Even when the prohibition of Grinding applies, it is permitted – when necessary – to ask a non-Jew to remove this type of stain on Shabbos.²¹

1 Sefer ha-Zichronos, quoted by Magen Avraham 302:4. 2 Tosafos, Shabbos 147a and many other Rishonim. 3 Rashi, Shabbos 147a, as explained by Rama and Beirur ha-Gra 302:1, and other Rishonim. 4 Rama, Shulchan Aruch Harav and Aruch ha-Shulchan strongly recommend that one be stringent and follow this view [but do not absolutely require it]. Chayei Adam and Mishnah Berurah, however, are of the opinion that the basic halachah is in accordance with this view and one may not be lenient. 5 In theory, there may be some dust which lies completely on the surface of the garment and is not absorbed into the fabric. In practice, however, this is almost impossible to determine. 6 A minority view rules like the first opinion that even feathers and threads are prohibited: Magen Avraham, quoted by Chayei Adam 22:9 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 80:39; Ben Ish Chai, quoted by Kaf ha-Chayim 302:11. See also Aruch ha-Shulchan 302:9, who rules according to this view in the unlikely event of a person who is reluctant to wear a garment because of the feathers, etc. 7 Beirur Halachah 302:1. 8 Mishnah Berurah 302:6. 9 It remains questionable whether or not another person [who is bothered by the dirt] can clean the garment if the wearer himself is not particular; Beirur Halachah 302:1 (s.v. v'hu). See Shulchan Shelomo 302:2-2. 10 This is determined by assessing the individual wearer's willingness to wear a dusty garment on weekdays, even if he would not wear it on Shabbos, Yom Tov or other special occasions; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 15, note 89 and Tikunim u'Miluim). 11 While this is sometimes difficult to determine, there are two general guidelines to follow: 1) One would normally be reluctant to wear dark (black or dark blue) clothes which are dusty, but not brightly colored clothing; 2) One would normally be particular not to wear new, or freshly laundered clothes which are dirty, but would be less particular if the clothing were obviously worn or faded. 12 Mishnah Berurah 302:36 and Beirur Halachah 302:1 (s.v. yeish) and 7 (s.v. d'havi). 13 Mishnah Berurah 302:6. 14 Since this may be prohibited according to all views. If the non-Jew uses the brush on his own, to make his job easier, he need not be stopped. 15 Misgeres ha-Shulchan on Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 80:80, quoted by Minchas Shabbos 80:143. See Beirur Halachah 302:1 (s.v. lachush), who seems to rely on this only when the garment is clearly not new or newly pressed. See also She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 80:36, who disagrees with this leniency. 16 Entire section based on the view of the Mishnah Berurah 302:11 and 36, and Beirur Halachah (s.v. d'havi). This is also the view of Da'as Torah 302:7. There are, however, poskim who are more lenient and allow a stain to be removed even when it will be completely removed, as long as it is not scrubbed vigorously; see Aruch ha-Shulchan 302:9; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 116:3. 17 See previous note that other poskim are more lenient and permit removing stains as long as they are not scrubbed vigorously. 18 O.C. 302:7. 19 See Rama 321:12. 20 See Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 6:9 and 15:28. 21 Mishnah Berurah 302:36 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 44.