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THE PRACTICAL TORAH

BY RABBI MICHAEL TAUBES

Parshas Shemos: SUSPECTING THE INNOCENT

No definitive Halacha LeMa'aseh conclusions should be applied to practical situations based on any of these Shiurim.

When Moshe Rabbeinu is told by Hashem at the burning bush that he should go and inform Bnai Yisrael that Hashem has spoken to him and will soon redeem them from slavery, he reacts by stating that the people will not believe that he's telling the truth (Shemos 4:1) Hashem immediately responds by giving Moshe two signs that he may show the people to prove the veracity of his claim; as part of the second sign, Moshe's hand becomes afflicted with Tzora'as (Ibid. v. 6). The Gemara in Shabbos (97a) understands that this affliction was not merely a random sign for Moshe to use, because, as Rav Achai Gaon explains in the She'iltos (She'ilta 40), Hashem could have selected any number of other signs. Rather, he chose a sign which contained a lesson, indeed a punishment, for Moshe himself because he had suspected Bnai Yisrael of not believing him. The Gemara thus derives from this story that one who is Chosheid B'Keshairim, that is, he unjustly suspects innocent people, is punished with a physical affliction as Moshe was.

The Mishnah in Yoma (18b) states that as part of the preparation for the Avodah in the Beis HaMikdash on Yom Kippur, the elders among the Kohanim would have the Kohein Gadol swear that he would not alter the service in any way; following this, both the Kohein Gadol and the elders would cry. The Gemara (Ibid. 19b) explains that he would cry because they even suspected him of being a Tzeduki (coming from that group of people who do not believe in the validity of the Torah SheB'al Peh or the authority of the Rabbanan), and they would cry because if they were indeed being suspicious of an innocent man, they would be deserving of the above cited punishment which is visited upon one who is Chosheid B'Keshairim. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 4:4) lists Choseid B'Keshairim as one of the Aveiros which prevents a person from being able to fully do Teshuvah, explaining that people do not even realize that it is an Aveirah to consider a good person to be a sinner; people will therefore rarely even attempt to do Teshuvah for this Aveirah. It is clear from the above that it is prohibited to suspect an innocent person of being a sinner.

Does this prohibition apply to one's attitude towards all people, or is it possible that sometimes one may indeed be suspicious of someone else? The Rambam, in discussing the case of the Kohein Gadol (Hilchos Avodas Yom HaKippurim 1:7), implies that it is prohibited to suspect anyone whose actions and motivations are not known, because perhaps he has nothing wrong in mind. In his Peirush on the above Mishnah in Yoma (1:5), the Rambam likewise writes that it is forbidden to suspect someone whose actions are unclear and might be bad; the Tosafos Yom Tov (Ibid.

s.v. V'Hen) on that Mishnah accepts this as well. This position appears to work out very nicely with that of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (1:6) which states "V'Havi Dan Et Kol Ha'Adam L'Kof Zechut," teaching that one should judge all people favorably, a trait which the Rambam (Hilchos Deios 5:7) says must be possessed by a Talmid Chochom. Rashi there (Ibid. s.v. V'Havi) asserts that unless one knows otherwise for sure, one should assume that other people's actions are all good, and, citing a Gemara in Shabbos (127b), writes that one who does this will himself be judged favorably by Hashem.

The Beraisa in Masseches Kallah Rabbasi (Perek 9), however, states that one should always consider another person to be like a thief (at least potentially), which, of course, implies the exact opposite. The Gemara there (Ibid.) immediately questions this statement based on another Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (2:4) which teaches that one should not judge someone else [negatively, as the Bartenura (Ibid. s.v. V'Al Tadin) points out there] until one has been in that situation, implying, again, that one should not suspect another person without knowing all the facts. The Gemara (Ibid.) responds that in Pirkei Avos, the Mishnah (Ibid.) is talking about a person whom one knows - he should not be judged unfavorably unless all the facts are clear. In Masseches Kallah Rabbasi, however, the Beraisa (Ibid.) is referring to a person whom one does not know - he may justifiably be suspected of being wicked.

Rabbeinu Yonah, explaining the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos about judging others favorably (1:6), writes that one should judge the average person favorably whether one knows him or not, adding in his Sha'arei Teshuvah (Sha'ar 3 Ot 218) that this is required by the Torah, but someone who is known to be a wicked person should always be viewed in a negative or suspicious light. The Klei Yakar, commenting on the Posuk in the Torah (Vayikra 19:15) quoted by the Gemara in Shevuos (30a) as the source for the idea of judging people favorably, notes as well (s.v. B'Tzedek) that a wicked person should not be judged favorably because the assumption is that he has remained wicked; one is not considered a Chosheid B'Keshairim for suspecting such a person because this person is not considered to be among the Keshairim. The Bartenura on that Mishnah (Ibid. s.v. V'Havi) also writes that physical punishment is inflicted only upon a Chosheid B'Keshairim, but one who is Chosheid a Rasha has done nothing wrong. We see from here that this prohibition to be suspicious of other people is not necessarily all-encompassing; there are possible exceptions.

Because of this prohibition, though, it is also necessary for one to avoid doing things that make other people suspicious of him. Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChassid notes in his Sefer Chassidim (Siman 44) that one who causes suspicions to be raised about himself is responsible for the reactions of the people who see him, and hence, their punishment, when applicable. There may, however, be a distinction between an individual and a large group of people because one won't usually suspect an entire group of being sinners. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (43b) indeed says that the prohibition of being Chosheid does not apply regarding a group; we thus need not worry that someone will be Chosheid an entire group. The Ramo (Yoreh Deah Siman 141 Sif 4) rules accordingly, and an activity forbidden to an individual because it may raise suspicions about him may therefore be permissible for a group.

This last ruling is debated by the Poskim, but the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim Siman 244 Sif Katan 8) concurs, explaining that a non-Jew may thus do certain work for a community on Shabbos which he wouldn't be able to do for an individual because there will be no suspicion of an entire community. He therefore rules that strictly speaking, although it has been forbidden for other

reasons, a non-Jew may, under certain circumstances, work on building a Shul on Shabbos because nobody will think that the community sinned by hiring him. The Chasam Sofer (Sheilos V'Teshuvos Chasam Sofer Chelek Orach Chaim Siman 60) suggests that this is true only for something like a Shul where the community participates in it together, but if many people happen to be doing the same thing, each on his own behalf, then a problem is created because they are then like individuals who must avoid suspicious activities, even though there are many of them. The Pardes Yosef on the Posuk in this Parsha (Shemos Ibd. Pasuk 2) quotes that perhaps this is why Moshe was punished despite being suspicious of a group; he was really being suspicious of each of Bnai Yisrael as individuals.

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: December 26, 2002 To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shmos "RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shmos

Now The Matter Is Known

Following the incident when Moshe smote the Egyptian who was hitting a Jewish slave, Moshe tried to break up a fight between two Jews. The combatants taunted Moshe, "Are you going to kill us like you killed the Egyptian?" The pasuk [verse] then says, "And Moshe feared and he said, behold the matter is known" [Shmos 2:14]. According to the simple reading of the pasuk, the matter that was known was Moshe's act of killing the Egyptian. The Medrash, however, sees this in a different light. Moshe had been wondering why the people of Israel were enslaved more than any other nation. What was their sin that caused all this suffering? At this juncture, after having heard the comment of the two Jews who were fighting, Moshe's reaction was "now I understand it!" Once he heard those words of accusation, he had discovered the reason for their fate: they had amongst them people who gossip, who speak Lashon HaRah. If so, how will they ever be worthy of redemption?

The Chofetz Chaim elaborates on this Medrash, in his Sefer Shmiras HaLashon. In Egypt, the Jewish people were pagan worshippers, just like the rest of society (halalu ovdei Avodah Zarah, v'halalu ovdei Avodah Zarah). They committed others sins in Egypt, as well. Eventually they sunk to the 49th out of 50 levels of impurity on the spiritual scale. One does not need a magnifying glass or a flashlight to discover their iniquities while in Egypt. And yet, Moshe Rabbeinu had been stumped. He could not understand what sin they were committing that was so wrong that it caused them to suffer so, until he finally came to the conclusion that it must be the fact that they spoke Lashon Harah. The Chofetz Chaim explains that we learn from this Medrash that a person or a people can have a whole bundle of sins on their shoulders but the catalyst that brings punishment to the fore is the sin of gossiping.

The Chofetz Chaim quotes a Zohar that explains that a person who speaks Lashon Harah sets in motion a force in Heaven that instigates against the perpetrators. Such is the power of Lashon Harah. When all other sins lie dormant, as it were, in Heaven, Lashon Harah "says" to G-d "You can't let them get away with this sin".

The logic behind this phenomenon is that gossip "forces G-d's Hand," so to speak. Normally, G-d has the option of either ignoring our faults or noticing them. However, when a person speaks Lashon Harah, he is, in effect, saying, "Look at the bad part of that person." The measure for measure aspect of Divine Justice, perforce, must then look at his actions in a negative light, as well. G-d will respond in kind. "If you focus on the negative, I will focus on the negative as well."

The Chofetz Chaim concludes that a person who continuously speaks Lashon Harah and arouses this instigation ('kitrug') in Heaven is responsible for bringing great misfortune upon himself. "Who knows how many people lost their wealth and how many people have died or been killed as a result of this type of chain-reaction."

This is very frightening. When a person speaks Lashon Harah he must take into account that he is not only hurting himself and not only hurting the person about whom he is speaking, but he can arouse Heavenly instigation against the entire community. Unfortunately, there is no community today in America that is not distressed, shocked, and shaken to the core by tragedies that are becoming all too common. People are beside themselves. What does it mean? What is it all about? Why did it happen?

We do not have prophets among us to give us clear-cut guidance. But the Chofetz Chaim clearly states that it is the sin of tale bearing and gossip that arouses instigation in Heaven against us for our sins.

The irony is that it should not have to be like that. I am not a historian. I cannot quote numbers of how many people were learning in Yeshivos in Europe a hundred years ago. Nor do I know the numbers that were in the great Academies in Sura and Pumbedita or other Jewish communities in Talmudic times. But I venture to say, if we look at the number -- bli ayin hara -- of Jews that are sitting learning Torah today, all over the world -- our generation would fare very well, in historical terms. If you walk into the large Beis Medrash of the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem, you can literally not be able to find a place to stand! In the Yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey, there are people sitting and learning in every nook and cranny. In our own city, one is very hard pressed to find an empty seat in the Beis Medrash in Ner Yisrael. It is like this all over the world. Mexico City has twelve different Kollelim. People are learning at unprecedented levels, not only in Yeshivas, but also in synagogues and in Batei Medrash all over the country.

So what is going on? What about the 'power of Torah'? Why isn't it protecting us? Why do we encounter so much suffering? The answer is because the power of Lashon Harah can undermine the power of Torah! If the same mouth that one uses to speak words of Torah and to utter words of prayer is used to speak Lashon Harah, the mouth becomes defiled. The words of Torah and prayer that come out of the mouth are contaminated. The power of Torah and prayer become diluted.

At the beginning of the second section of Shmiras HaLashon, the Chofetz Chaim quotes a pasuk from Proverbs: "A person can become rich and he has nothing (left)" [Mishlei 13:7]. The Chofetz Chaim interprets this to mean that a person can be in business, making big sales. He can be raking in the money, so to speak, making deposit after deposit in the bank. But when it comes time to make an accounting and his expenses and his debits are taken into account, the bottom line may be that he has nothing left. "Yes I had a great year, but all the profits were wiped out."

The book of Mishlei consists entirely of parables. The Chofetz Chaim applies that pasuk to spiritual matters. A person can engage in performing mitzvos and good deeds his entire life. He can spend his days and night sitting and learning. But that same person might possess an evil tendency to speak bad about people. When such a person arrives in Heaven, he will see that he has nothing in his account! "What happened? I sat and learned my entire life. I finished Shas 4 times! I was honest. I gave charity. Where are my good deeds?" The Chofetz Chaim explained that Lashon Harah can do that.

This is why we beseech every day in our prayers, "G-d, save my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking calumny." It is only after requesting help regarding Lashon Harah that we request

"Open my heart to your Torah." If a person will not guard his mouth, his Torah will not count! It is as simple as that. I just would like to conclude with the following modern parable. This is a true story.

A few years ago, shortly after the Frand family entered the 'computer age,' my daughter was writing a term paper on Edgar Allan Poe. She was working on this term paper for six or eight weeks. It was her first major project using our word processor. One night, she was putting the finishing touches on the report. The report was due the next day. All of a sudden she rushed up from downstairs and with a petrified expression on her face said, "It's gone! It's gone!" I asked, "What is gone?" She answered, "The report is gone! It is due tomorrow. It is eleven p.m. and it is gone!" I said, "It can't be." We went downstairs and stood in front of the screen. She pushed this button. She pushed that button. The report did not appear. It was gone.

The panic and terror were unforgettable. The disappointment -- eight weeks of work just disappeared! The screen was blank! Thank G-d, I had a friend who helped set up the computer. It was after eleven o'clock, but this was an emergency so I called him. I said, "You'll please excuse me, but my daughter is in a panic." He told her how to get out of Windows and into DOS. He told her what to do, step by step. The whole family was standing there in front of the screen. Finally, the report was recovered. After 120, we will go to the Heavenly Court. It will be time to make our final accounting. We will say to G-d, "Okay bring up the record. Bring up all the years that I spent learning. Bring up all the time that I spent learning Torah and performing mitzvos. Bring it up, G-d. Let's see it on the screen."

The person who would always gossip will give out a shriek. He will yell, "IT'S GONE! IT'S NOT THERE! WHAT HAPPENED TO IT?" Multiply my daughter's reaction by the biggest multiple that exists. "The whole life, the whole Torah, all our prayers, all our good deeds -- they are gone!" And no one will be able to bring them back for us.

"There are those who become rich, but have nothing left." We are rich. We are accomplishing in learning. Look at the crowds in classes and study groups all over America. We are learning. But let us not lose it. All we must do is learn to close our mouths. This is the intent of the statement of the Vilna Gaon: The main way to merit the World To Come is through guarding the mouth. This is more important than all of the Torah and other accomplishments. The mouth is Holy of Holies.

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From: office@etzion.org.il December 26, 2002 o: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il  
Subject: SICHOT63 -13: Parashat Shemot Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Student Summaries Of Sichot Delivered By The Roshei Yeshiva Parashat Shemot SICHOT OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A  
"For I Have Drawn Him From the Water"  
Summarized by Danny Orenbuch Translated by Kaeren Fish

A person's name is generally meant to tell us something about the essence of his character. Moshe is bequeathed his name by Pharaoh's daughter because, in her words, "from the water I have drawn him (meshitihu)."

The Maharal offers an intriguing explanation. From an external point of view, material things seem substantial and stable, while spiritual matters seem ephemeral and "up in the air." In truth, though, the situation is exactly the reverse: spiritual matters are really fixed and unchanging, while physical, material things - despite their external appearance of permanence - transform themselves and change.

Water, by nature, represents something physical, material, unstable. It comes and goes and moves from place to place. The drawing out of Moshe from the water therefore represents the severance from the material, moving towards the spiritual. Even when Moshe is involved with material things, he is not influenced by them. Hence his ability to enter a state of prophecy at any time, as opposed to all other prophets. As the Rambam teaches (Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah 7:6):

"None of the prophets was able to prophesy at any time that he wished, but this was not the case concerning Moshe Rabbeinu. Any time that he wished - the holy spirit visited him ... therefore he could prophesy at any time, as it is written: 'Stand and I shall announce that which G-d will command you'... And we learn that all the (other) prophets, when the spirit of prophecy left them, would return to their tents and continue with their physical lives, like the rest of the nation..."

This was also the source of Moshe's unique ability to determine Halakha according to his prophecy, as opposed to the other prophets who were subject to the death penalty if they dared to innovate Halakha according to their prophecies, for "it is not in heaven."

Moshe's name, therefore, hints at his special quality: he is a person who was drawn out of the material world and given over entirely to the spiritual world. As we are taught (Shemot 4:20), "And he set them to ride upon the donkey (chamor - from the same root as 'chomer,' meaning 'material') - in other words, Moshe "rides" upon the material; he is elevated above it and guides it.

In addition to Moshe Rabbeinu, two other individuals also merit to overcome the material. One is Avraham Avinu, who "saddled" and conquered his material emotions (the Torah teaches that he "saddled his chamor (donkey)" - see explanation above) when he set off to sacrifice his son. The other is the Mashiach who, we are told, will be "a poor man riding on a chamor." Therefore, Rashi (4:20), quoting the midrash, identifies Moshe's chamor with Avraham's and the Mashiach's. The midrash adds that this unique chamor was created on the sixth day of creation, during twilight.

The midrash does not mean that this chamor lived thousands of years, but rather that in these three figures spirituality conquers materialism - they "ride the chamor." As opposed to other revolutionaries like Marx, who based his theory on pure materialism, these figures are responsible for revolutions of pure spirit. (It is intriguing that the downfall of Communism was also based on materialistic concerns: people were dissatisfied more with their standard of living than by the lack of spirituality.) Conquest of the material world is a supernatural act; therefore, the midrash describes the chamor as being created during twilight, when all the miraculous phenomena were created.

In our lives, too, the spirit must rule over and shape the physical, just as water is given shape and confined by its container. We must, as individuals and as a nation, "draw ourselves out of the water" and "ride the chamor."

(Originally delivered at Seuda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Shemot 5753 [1992].)

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From: Kol Torah Publications [koltorah@koltorah.org] Sent: December 22, 2002 To: KT Subject: Kol Torah Parshat Vayechi KOL TORAH A Student Publication of the Isaac and Mara Benmergui Torah Academy of Bergen County Parshat Vayechi 16 Tevet 5763

This week's issue of Kol Torah has been sponsored by Dr. Bloch and Dr. Gertler.

REVEALING FLAWS OF A POTENTIAL MARRIAGE PARTNER BY RABBI HOWARD JACHTER

What would you do if a friend is considering marriage and you know that the potential spouse had a serious flaw? Are you permitted to reveal the flaw to your friend? In this issue, we will explore when Halacha permits and even obligates someone to reveal a significant flaw and when one must remain silent.

Flaws that Someone should Reveal about Himself The Torah prohibition of Onaa (Lo Tonu Ish Et Achiv, Vayikra 25:14) forbids us to misrepresent the merchandise that we sell (see Bava Metzia 59-60). Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Even Haezer 4:73:2) writes that most certainly this prohibition applies to when presenting himself/herself to a potential marriage partner. He even suggests that misrepresenting oneself to a potential mate is even more serious of a sin than misrepresenting merchandise. Thus, Rav Moshe in this responsum writes that if one is suffering from Marfan's syndrome, he must reveal this flaw. Elsewhere Rav Moshe writes (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 4:118) that a girl must reveal that she is not a Bitula. Interestingly, Rav Moshe advises that she should not reveal this on a first date. Rather, when things begin to look "serious" then she should reveal her past and explain that she has done complete Teshuva.

Indeed, the Sefer Chassidim (507) writes that one should not conceal flaws from a potential marriage partner. The Sefer Chassidim explains that it is preferable for the couple to separate than live a miserable life together. However, one need not reveal every minor flaw. It seems that one must reveal only a flaw that is highly likely to cause the marriage to be an unhappy one. In fact, Rav Hershel Schachter told me that if someone sells an automobile, he need not enumerate every minor flaw, unless it is a highly significant one. Indeed, the Gemara (Yevamot 45a) seems to indicate that one need not reveal that his father is not Jewish. See, however, Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (Nishmat Avraham 3:251) who rules that one must reveal if one's father is not Jewish. The Steipler Rav (commentary to Yevamot 45a), though, appears to disagree. One must consult a Rav regarding this profoundly delicate and sensitive question regarding which issues one must reveal. Similarly, if one's mother had remarried without the benefit of a Get from her first husband and an eminent Posek ruled that he or she is not a Mamzer/Mamzeret because the mother's first marriage was a conducted in a non-Orthodox manner, then he/she must ask a Posek whether this information must be revealed.

Revealing the Flaws of Others – Background Information The question becomes even more sensitive regarding the issue of revealing another person's flaw to the potential marriage partner. First, we must outline the parameters of the prohibition to speak Lashon Hara. The Rambam, in the seventh chapter of Hilchot Deot, outlines the three basic prohibitions regarding evil speech. The first prohibition is called Rechilut, telling stories about another even if they are true and even if the content is not negative. The second and even more severe transgression is the prohibition of Lashon Hara, speaking evil about another even if the content of the speech is true. The third and most severe sin is Motzi Shem Ra, speaking evil about another when the content is not true. The Rambam emphasizes the severity of the Aveira of Lashon Hara. He writes, "it is a severe sin and it causes the destruction of many Jewish souls." He cites Chazal who say that one that speaks Lashon Hara is the equivalent of one who rejects the existence or omniscience of Hashem. Moreover, the Rambam quotes Chazal who regard Lashon Hara to be equal in severity to the sins of murder, promiscuity, and idolatry combined.

The following Talmudic passages emphasize the severity of the transgression of Lashon Hara. The Gemara (Yoma 4b) states that if someone tells you something, you are forbidden to repeat that information until given express permission to do so. The Gemara cites the Pasuk (Vayikra 1:1) that states "and Hashem called to Moshe from the Ohel Moed to say [to the children of Israel]" as a source for this rule. We see that Hashem authorized Moshe to repeat what He told him. If Hashem had not given this authorization, Moshe would have been forbidden to tell Am Yisrael what Hashem told him. Moreover, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 31a) teaches that a judge may not reveal how he voted in a Bait Din split decision. A Dayan who informs a litigant how he voted in his case violates the prohibition of Rechilut. The Gemara also teaches that there is no statute of limitations associated with the Rechilut prohibition. A student was once banished from the Bait Midrash for revealing a secret that was twenty-two old.

Exceptions to the Rule Despite the severity of the transgression of Lashon Hara, there are times when one is permitted or even obligated to reveal someone's flaws. The Rambam (Hilchot Rotzeiach 1:14) writes "Whoever can save another individual and fails to do so violates the Torah prohibition of Lo Taamod Al Dam Reiacha, do not stand idly by while your brother's blood is being shed. Therefore, if one sees someone drowning in water or robbers are setting to attack him and he can save him, or he hears people planning to harm him and set a trap, and he fails to inform and warn him, he violates the Torah prohibition of Lo Taamod Al Dam Reiacha."

The Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 426:1) codifies this passage as normative Halacha. Accordingly, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yecheve Daat 4:60) concludes that the prohibition of Lashon Hara applies only when one maliciously seeks to harm another. However, if his intent is for a constructive purpose or to prevent damage, the prohibition of Lashon Hara does not apply. Instead, the obligation to save another takes effect. Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, popularly referred to as the Netziv (Haemek Davar Vayikra 19:16), explains that it is for this reason Hashem juxtaposed the prohibitions of Rechilut and Lo Taamod Al Dam Reiacha. The Torah thereby indicates that even though there is a prohibition to gossip, nevertheless, there is a prohibition to remain silent if he knows that someone is in trouble and can be saved by the information he will divulge. The Six Requirements of the Chafetz Chaim In accordance with these passages in the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, the Chafetz Chaim (Hilchot Rechilut 9) rules that one must reveal a serious flaw to the person the flawed individual is considering for marriage. However, he writes that one must pass a six-pronged test to determine if such revelation is permitted. First, he must be absolutely certain that the information is true. Second, the flaw must be of very great significance. Third, his intentions in revealing the information must be entirely noble and not vengeful in any way. Fourth, there must be a reasonable chance of that the information will effect the person receiving the news. If it is most likely that the person will ignore the news then one may not reveal the information. Fifth, one may not exaggerate the information. Sixth, there must not be an alternative way of achieving the desired goal without revealing the sensitive information. Three Responsa – Rav Breisch, Rav Waldenberg, and Rav Ovadia Yosef Three rulings from three major twentieth century authorities will help illustrate what types of information must be divulged to the relevant party. A doctor posed the following difficult question to Rav Yaakov Breisch (Teshuvot Chelkat Yaakov 3:136) a few decades ago. A twenty-year-old man, who suffered from cancer and was expected to live no more than a year or two, became engaged to a young woman. The doctor asked whether Halacha permitted or required him to inform the Kalla of her Chatan's illness. Rav Breisch ruled that the doctor was obligated to inform the Kalla of her Chatan's illness.

A doctor asked Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 16:4) about a female patient who had no natural reproductive organs and was engaged to a young man. Rav Waldenberg ruled that the doctor must reveal the information to the Chatan. Rav Waldenberg ruled that the same applies if the man's reproductive organs were seriously impaired. He explains that even though all doctors take the Hippocratic oath not to reveal confidential patient information, a religious doctor never intended this oath to apply when it conflicts with Torah Law. Interestingly, Rav Waldenberg advises that the doctor should first inform the woman that the Torah obligates her to reveal her flaw to her potential mate. Only if she fails to inform the Chatan should the doctor divulge the sensitive information to the Chatan. In this manner, the woman is potentially spared the humiliation of having the doctor reveal this highly sensitive information about her. A Rav who is skilled in this area can advise similar strategies to help cushion the blow in such circumstances. Rav Ovadia Yosef (ad. loc.) was asked whether a doctor may reveal to the government department of motor vehicles that his patient who is applying for a driver's license is afflicted with epilepsy. Rav Ovadia rules that the doctor is obligated to tell this information in order to preserve life and property.

Each of these cases involved very serious flaws that had to be revealed. However, everyone has flaws and one cannot simply decide to reveal any flaw to someone who is dating the person seriously. Moreover, many cases are "borderline cases" and are difficult to decide such if a woman behaved poorly during Get proceedings with her first husband or if he withheld a Get from his first wife for some time. One must present these very delicate cases to a competent and experienced Rav for adjudication. A mistake in either direction can potentially have devastating consequences.

Conclusion Both Rav Yosef and Rav Waldenberg cite the Pitchei Teshuva to Orach Chaim 156 who decries the fact that people often fail to say Lashon Hara when they should. Indeed, people often speak Lashon Hara when they should not and do not speak Lashon Hara when they should. Indeed, Rav Nachman of Bratzlav's celebrated aphorism that the entire world is a very narrow bridge, certainly applies in these situations. It is both a terrible sin to speak Lashon Hara when it is wrong to do so and it is a terrible sin to not speak Lashon Hara when one must do so. A competent

Rav who has significant experience in dealing with these issues must be consulted regarding these most sensitive and crucial questions.

Halacha of the Week - Rav Eliezer Waldenburg (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 12:21) writes that one should recite the Bracha on lightning if he has seen the sky lit by lightning even if he has not seen the lightning bolt. I have heard that other Poskim disagree and rule that one should utter the Bracha only if one sees the actual lightning bolt. One should ask his Rav which opinion to follow.

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From: Ohr Somayach [[ohr@ohr.edu](mailto:ohr@ohr.edu)] Sent: December 23, 2002 To: [weekly@ohr.edu](mailto:weekly@ohr.edu) Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Shmot \* TORAH WEEKLY \* from Ohr Somayach | [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu) Highlights of the weekly Torah portion Parshat Shmot Sponsored by the Kof-K Kosher Supervision [www.kof-k.org](http://www.kof-k.org) | [info@kof-k.org](mailto:info@kof-k.org)

Birth of a Nation "...and there he became a nation..." (Devarim 26:5) I have a friend who became religious in New York City. He had been attending a synagogue on a fairly regular basis. One day he was leaving the shul after the morning service. He was returning the paper yarmulke to its place at the shul's entrance when he decided he wanted to "wear" his new-found religiosity more openly.

Leaving the shul, he turned, not toward his apartment, but in the other direction. Within a few minutes, he found himself at the door of a Jewish bookstore. At the end of the counter there was a carousel that carried the entire gamut of Orthodox Jewish headgear. Approaching the carousel, he began to turn it slowly.

He was amazed at the range of choices. There were white kipot and green kipot, black kipot, knitted kipot, leather kipot, velvet kipot, cloth kipot and kipot that looked like they had come off the head of an Afghan sheep herd. "Which one am I going to chose?" he thought to himself.

Little did he realize he was about to enter a political minefield. Without thinking too much about it, he picked a large black velvet kipah and plonked it on the top of his head. Making his way to the cashier, he paid for his new yarmulke, and walked outside, and stopped in his tracks. Everything had changed.

He had changed. The world had changed.

He thought to himself, "I have become an ambassador. I have become an ambassador for the Jewish People. Everything I do now will be judged through the lens of my Jewishness.

If I push in line, people won't say 'Who's this guy pushing in line?' They'll say 'Who's this Jew pushing in line?' And if I give up my seat to an old lady on the subway (If old ladies do still venture onto the subway) I will have sanctified the Name of Heaven."

Little do we realize that the good name of the Jewish People, and along with them the G-d of the Jewish People, rests on a small piece of cloth perched precariously on our heads.

This week's Torah portion marks the beginning of the birth of a nation. "...and there he became a nation..."

The Haggada of Passover quotes this verse and explains that the Jewish People were "outstanding" there in Egypt. They didn't change their manner of dress, their names or their language. They were a very visible and very distinct minority.

As we were born, so we continue.

Every interaction a "uniformed" Jew has with the world-at-large has the potential to sanctify the Name of Heaven. And it can be done in the smallest of ways. I've seen this same friend go up to garbage collectors (even if he doesn't live in the area) and say "Thank you!"

The other day he was in an art shop. He was looking for a very, very, fine paintbrush. He found four no. 0000s. To save himself another trip to the art store, he took all of them. In line to pay, he noticed the cashier (a young

lady with spiked hair the color of a depressed Barbie(c) doll) looking at him with an expression of mild distaste. Handing the brushes to her, he remarked, "I took the last of these brushes. You may want to reorder them so you'll have them in stock when the next person comes along."

The assistant looked up at him for a second, and smiled.

We are all ambassadors in the birth of our nation.

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From: National Council of Young Israel [[YI\\_Torah@lb.bcentral.com](mailto:YI_Torah@lb.bcentral.com)] December 23, 2002 Subject: Parshat Shmot Parshat Shmot 23 Tevet 5763 December 28, 2002 Guest Rabbi: RABBI DR. YITZCHOK M. GOODMAN Young Israel of Far Rockaway, NY

(2 Essays from my forthcoming volume on Shmot)

The Exile in Egypt: Rav Aharon Levine is among the many writers who theorized about the ultimate goal of our exile in Egypt. A common idea in many seforim is that we would learn about the abominations we must avoid as G-d's chosen people. However, Rav Levine finds a different ethical message. After out prolonged period of suffering and persecution, we would learn human decency for all G-d's creatures, doing to others what we have longed for our ourselves, for, as he explains, one who has never hungered cannot understand fully a cry for bread. The Haftarah for this Sidra begins (Yeshayahu, 27:6) as follows: "In years" (understood) to come, "Jacob will strike roots, Israel will sprout and flower." The opening verb, however, rings of the first verb in our Chumash: "... the children of Israel who are coming to Egypt" — a strange verb usage itself). Rav Levine's ingenious and interpretive idea is: the arrival of the Israelites to Egypt - had a Divine purpose — that Jacob should strike deep roots for Israel to flower beautifully as a moral nation.

Rav Aharon Levine

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The following alternative interpretation of the question might be called a 20th Century response:

Many volumes state that the Egyptian exile-and-redemption is a model and precursor of the final redemption in the end of times. That is why only these two (past and future) events are referred to by the special term "Geulah" G-d wished at this early stage in Jewish history to show us a model to carry us through a long and bitter exile of centuries with hope and faith. Our exile in Egypt would demonstrate that no matter how seemingly impossible our situation, G-d is the master and ultimate power. Every step of the way He controlled — exile, persecution, gradual steps leading to redemption, and the final exodus. So, too, will the final ultimate one proceed.

Just as before that exodus, we gained favor in the eyes of Egyptians who gave us silver and gold vessels to make up for the years of slavery, the modern day "Egyptians" (world powers who had persecuted us for centuries) tried to make up for their cruelty, and for looking the other way as six million Jews were slaughtered, by voting in the United Nations for a Jewish State, to soothe their consciences.

But just as the Egyptians had a change of heart and pursued us to the Sea of Reeds with intentions of annihilation (as spelled out in the great Shirah sung by our people), the world has also had a change of heart, and Israel finds itself pictured in the international press, and by so many political spokesmen, as the mighty Goliath persecuting the poor Davids. Just as the Egyptian confrontation ended with Israel triumphant, declaring: "G-d shall rule for ever and ever," the day will soon come that this will be repeated in our times, and G-d and His people will have the ultimate victory.

Rabbi Meir Dovid Kahane

Problems of Galut Life — Ancient and Modern: (Shemot 1:7) And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased greatly, and multiplied, and waxed very mightily — and the land was full of them.

The combination-phrase of "fruitful and multiply" is so common that it is found (in various grammatical forms) no less than nine times in Chumash Berashit alone. The fact that in this verse it is broken apart by an inserted verb ("increased greatly," based on a root which means insect) demands attention. Among commentators who discuss this fact was R' Azaryah Figo in his masterpiece "Binah L'itim". He feels that this is meant to show that this increase was not for the fulfillment of the Mitzvah, but represents the

carnal pursuit of animal lust, hence the root "insect". (This point is already noted and emphasized by the Sforno.) So too the phrase immediately afterward ("waxed very mightily") deals with financial success, and the doubling of "very" indicates that they became very substantial people. This leads to the final phrase already analyzed by our Chazal, that they began to spread about the country (the suburbs), visiting the theatres and other such pursuits, all of which help explain the jealousy of the local Egyptian community, leading to servitude.

In the up-to-now very rare volume "Givat Shaul" by Rav Shaul HaLevi Mortira, the head of the Sephardic Jewish community of Amsterdam in the 17th century (Gevuos Shaul - reprinted in 1991, Brooklyn, NY), the author goes through great lengths in castigating Jewish communities in Golus for their excessive indulgence in luxuries, large homes, and expensive clothing, all of which directly create jealousy and hatred and are a major cause of our history of exile from land to land. Had we not behaved thus in Egypt, our servitude there would have been light and bearable, since our major purpose in Egypt was to observe the abominable life and moral decadence of this "advanced" civilization before we received the Torah, so as to learn how not to behave. The severe extent of our suffering was caused by our new Golus life-style. [His essay picturing life in Amsterdam in his days is so relevant to our time, and so powerful, that it truly deserves a complete translation / for modern Jews to reflect upon.] He notes that after the start of some tax-type servitude, verse 12 records: "And as they afflicted them, so they multiplied and so they spread" - what does this verse tell us? Instead of learning from the error of their luxurious life-style and seeking to remove the cause of the jealousy, they continued their ways and "spread out"- looking for other neighborhoods and suburbs that might treat them better. Thus indeed [conclusion of that verse] the Egyptians became disgusted with the Jewish people. The next verse indicates an increase in their servitude to "back-breaking" labor.

He concludes his essay with a sad lament that this is an old Jewish problem, which cannot be solved by individuals but must gain the attention and united action of the entire Jewish community, but he knows alas that this is "very difficult". [to this very day!] Rav Shaul HaLevi Mortira

NCYI's Weekly Divrei Torah Bulletin is sponsored by the Henry, Bertha and Edward Rothman Foundation - Rochester, New York; Cleveland, Ohio; Circleville, Ohio

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From: RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG [tsc@bezeqint.net] December 26, 2002 Subject: [Par-reg]Parshat Shmot

In honor of the 35th wedding anniversary of Sara and Menachem Epstein by their children and grandchildren.

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [http://www.tanach.org] In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag PARSHAT SHMOT Let My People Go

Was Moshe Rabeinu's plea of 'Let My People Go' just a HOAX? As preposterous as this might sound, Rashbam claims that this is the only way to explain the story in Sefer Shmot! In this week's shiur, we uncover the basis for this daring interpretation by Rashbam, while arriving ourselves at a very different conclusion.

**INTRODUCTION** From youth, we are so familiar with the story of the Exodus that we rarely pay attention to the Torah's detail of that story. However, when one undertakes a careful reading of the first fourteen chapters of Sefer Shmot (as Rashbam does), the story that unfolds is quite different from what is commonly assumed. In the first section of our shiur, we will review the story of the Exodus in the Bible to prove Rashbam's basic assertion - that Moshe never, not even once, asks Pharaoh to grant Bnei Yisrael freedom from slavery, or to emigrate to the land of Israel. Instead, each time when Moshe goes to Pharaoh and demands Let My People Go, he only requests permission for Bnei Yisrael to take a three-day journey to worship their G-d in the desert. To our surprise, Moshe never tells Pharaoh the 'whole truth' - that he in fact intends to lead Bnei Yisrael out of slavery to the Promised Land. In the second section of the shiur, we will show how this analysis serves as the foundation for Rashbam's conclusion that this 'master plan' is merely a 'hoax'. In the third section, we will question this conclusion, and offer a different approach (based on a little 'political realism') that will help us better appreciate G-d's 'master plan' for Yetziat Mitzrayim, and its theological significance.

PART ONE

**FREEDOM OF RELIGION or FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY** It is quite understandable why the saying 'Let My People Go' is commonly understood as a plea for freedom from slavery. After all, this was Moshe's recurring plea to Pharaoh just about every time they met. Furthermore, the holiday of Passover, when we commemorate the events of the Exodus, is commonly associated with freedom from slavery ['zman cheruteinu']. Therefore, it only makes sense that people would understand Moshe's demand that Pharaoh 'let his people go' as a request for freedom. However, when we undertake a careful analysis of the story of the Exodus in the Bible, it becomes quite clear that Moshe is making a totally different request, relating more to 'freedom of religion' than freedom from slavery.

The proof of this point is rather tedious but very straightforward. All that we need to do is to follow the plot that unfolds in Sefer Shmot, tracing each time that Moshe Rabeinu goes to Pharaoh to make demands on behalf of Bnei Yisrael. To be thorough, we begin our analysis by first examining G-d's original instruction to Moshe concerning his mission to Pharaoh, as explained to Moshe at the burning bush: "...Then you and the elders shall go to the King of Egypt and tell him: The G-d of the Hebrews had come and told us - we must embark upon a journey of a three day distance into the desert to offer sacrifices to our Lord" (see 3:18).

As you review this pasuk and its context, note how this demand to Pharaoh makes no mention of any request for freedom from slavery. Instead, Moshe is instructed to demand that Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael the right to worship their G-d in the desert (at a site a three day distance from Egypt). And this is precisely what Moshe does when he first goes to Pharaoh. Let's take a careful look at the Torah's description of their first confrontation: "Afterward, Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh: Thus said the G-d of Israel, let My People go and worship Me in the desert. [Pharaoh refuses.] And they answered: the G-d of the Hebrews has called upon us to embark upon a journey of a three day distance into the desert in order that we may sacrifice to our G-d, lest He strike us with 'dever' (pestilence) or 'cherev' (sword)." (5:1-3)

Note once again that all we find is Moshe's request to allow Bnei Yisrael to worship G-d in the desert; no more - no less! However, we must also pay attention to the implication of the final phrase of this pasuk - "lest he strike us with dever or cherev". Moshe warns Pharaoh that should he not allow Bnei Yisrael this journey to worship their G-d in the desert, a severe Divine punishment will ensue and many people - Egyptians & Hebrews - will die from 'dever' or 'cherev'. Hence, Moshe's demand implies that it may be in the 'best interests' of the Egyptian people - to allow Bnei Yisrael this 'short vacation' to worship their G-d in the desert. [See Ibn Ezra & Chizkuni on 5:3.] The results of this first encounter are disastrous, as Pharaoh not only says no, but also doubles Bnei Yisrael's workload (see 5:4-10). Nonetheless, G-d commands Moshe once again to go to Pharaoh and demand that he grant them permission to worship Him in the desert. This time, however, G-d will provide Moshe with some 'leverage' by performing miracles whose purpose will be to convince Pharaoh to take his warning seriously. This background explains G-d's introduction of the Ten Plagues to Moshe in chapter seven, as they appear to come in response to Pharaoh's refusal statement of: "lo yada'ti et Hashem" [I never heard of this G-d] (see 5:2). The purpose of the plagues will be to convince Pharaoh that the G-d of the Hebrews indeed exists and will bring plagues if His people do not worship him: "And Pharaoh will not listen to you, so I will put My Hand against Egypt, and I will take People out with great punishments - 've-yad'u Mitzrayim ki Ani Hashem' - so that Egypt will know that I am G-d" (see 7:4-5).

It will take Ten Plagues to finally convince Pharaoh that this 'dever' and 'cherev' that they have suffered was because Bnei Yisrael did not worship their G-d. But even when Pharaoh finally allows Bnei Yisrael to leave (after the Tenth Plague), it was only in order to worship their G-d. To our surprise, Pharaoh never granted Bnei Yisrael freedom from slavery, or permission to emigrate!

To prove this interpretation, we need only note how Moshe prefaces each and every warning to Pharaoh before a plague begins. For example, before the first plague, G-d instructs Moshe: "Go meet Pharaoh in the morning... and say to him: Hashem, the G-d of the Ivrim has sent me to you demanding Let My People Go and worship Me in the desert, and behold you have yet to listen. Thus says the Lord, with this (plague) you will know that I am G-d..." (see 7:14-17).

Then, in each successive plague we find an almost identical opening warning: "shlach et ami - Let My people go - ve-ya'avduni ba-midbar - so that they can worship Me in the desert", [or else ...] See 7:16 (first plague); 7:26 (second plague); 8:16 (fourth plague); 9:1 (fifth plague); 9:13 (seventh

plague); and 10:3 (eighth plague). [Note that Plagues 3,6, and 9 don't have any pre- warning.]

As you review these psukim and their context, you will also notice that this is all that Moshe requests. Not even once does he ever even hint to Pharaoh that Bnei Yisrael plan to leave for good!

**NEGOTIATIONS & MORE NEGOTIATIONS** Furthermore, when we follow the various negotiations between Moshe and Pharaoh that take place during the Ten Plagues, we find that they focus ONLY on this issue of a three- day journey to worship G-d, NEVER on 'emigration rights to Palestine'. Let's cite several examples that show the progression of these negotiations. Note how Pharaoh slowly acquiesces to Moshe's demand (to allow Bnei Yisrael to worship G-d in the desert).

**ROUND ONE:** After 'makkat arov' (the fourth plague), Pharaoh finally budes. He grants Bnei Yisrael permission to worship their G-d, but not in the desert, rather within the Land of Egypt (see 8:21-23). But once again, pay careful attention to how Moshe rejects this proposal for technical reasons. Moshe claims that if Bnei Yisrael would offer sacrifices in the land, the local population of Egypt would 'stone them'. Therefore, Moshe insists that Bnei Yisrael can only worship G-d in the desert. Pharaoh then agrees to allow a short journey into the desert, but not a three-day distance: "And Pharaoh said, I will send you out so that you can worship your G-d in the DESERT, but don't go too far away..." (see 8:24).

However, once that plague ended, Pharaoh hardened his heart once again and reneged on his promise (see 8:25-28). Even though Pharaoh is clearly worried about giving Bnei Yisrael permission to leave, he never accuses Moshe that he may be planning to run away! Likewise, Moshe himself never mentions the possibility that they may not return. [Later in the shiur we will discuss what Pharaoh is afraid of.]

**ROUND TWO:** Later, after Moshe warns of the impending plague of locusts, Pharaoh's own servants demand his concession to Moshe (see 10:7). In response, Pharaoh enters into a new round of negotiations with Moshe that eventually reach an impasse over the issue of WHO can leave. Moshe insists that even the women and children come along, while Pharaoh allows only the men to leave (see 10:7-11). Again, note the reason for Moshe's insistence on allowing the women and children to join; not because they are leaving forever, but rather - "for all family members need to worship G-d" (see 10:9). Never does he tell Pharaoh that everyone must go because the entire nation plans to migrate to Eretz Canaan. Moshe's various 'excuses' all imply that he plans to return.

**ROUND THREE:** Finally, after the ninth plague ['choshech'], Pharaoh conducts one final round of negotiations. This time, he is willing to grant permission even for the women & children to leave, but not their sheep and cattle (see 10:24-25). Once again, Moshe counters with a 'technical reason', claiming that all the animals must come along, since they are not sure precisely which type of animals G-d will request for a sacrifice (see 10:26!).

In summary, at every stage of these negotiations, Moshe consistently rejects any concession or compromise, insisting that EVERYONE must go. Still, despite numerous opportunities, he NEVER even suggests that they plan to leave for good. Likewise, no matter how resolutely Pharaoh sticks to his hard line, he NEVER states a suspicion that Bnei Yisrael may be leaving forever.

**THE EXODUS - THE 'REAL TRUTH'** In the Torah's account of the Exodus (in the aftermath of the Tenth Plague / see 12:29-36) we find conclusive proof for this interpretation. Note Pharaoh's immediate reaction when he hears reports of the death of the Egyptian first born: "... and he [Pharaoh] called to Moshe and Aharon at night and said: Get up and get out... and GO WORSHIP your G-d - "ke-daberchem" - as you (originally / in 5:3) requested! Even your sheep and cattle take with you, as you requested (in 10:26), and BLESS ME AS WELL..." (see 12:31-33).

The tenth plague awakens Pharaoh to the realization that Moshe's original warning of 'dever' or 'cherev' (see 5:3) has actually come true. Now, he finally gives in to the very last of Moshe's demands - that they can even take their sheep and cattle with them (recall that is where the last set of negotiations broke down). Not only does Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael a three-day journey to offer 'korbanot', he even requests that pray on his behalf (to make a MISHEBERACH for him - "u-berachtem gam ot" / see 12:32)! Clearly, even after the Tenth Plague, Pharaoh only permits Bnei Yisrael to worship G-d in the desert! And after all, why not? That's all that Moshe ever asked for!

This explains why the entire Egyptian nation urges Bnei Yisrael to leave as quickly as possible (see 12:33-35). They want to make sure that Bnei Yisrael can sacrifice to their G-d as soon as possible - thereby bringing this

horrifying plague to an end (see 12:33). This explains beautifully why the Egyptians 'LEND' ['va-yish'alu'] Bnei Yisrael their finest wares, to encourage them to leave as quickly as possible (see 12:35-36). After all, since Bnei Yisrael are only taking 'holiday leave', the Egyptians assume that their slaves will soon return to Egypt and bring back what they 'borrowed'. The Torah uses the word 'borrowed' to describe what Bnei Yisrael took from the Egyptians, for that's exactly what they did!

**THE LAST 'TRICK'** A final proof for this interpretation is found in Parshat Beshalach when Pharaoh is totally astonished when he finds out that Bnei Yisrael had 'run away': "And it was told to the King of Egypt - ki BARACH ha-am - that the people had RUN AWAY..." (see 14:5).

Now, this pasuk makes sense only if Pharaoh had not granted them total freedom, but only a permit to temporarily worship G-d in the desert. Had he actually set them free, why would he be shocked to hear that the people had 'run away'? However, according to our interpretation, Pharaoh is shocked for the opposite reason - because Bnei Yisrael DID NOT travel into the desert. This may sound a bit complicated, so let's explain by taking a careful look at these psukim. First of all, recall from 12:37 and 13:17-18 that Bnei Yisrael had left Egypt traveling toward the desert. Then, in the middle of that journey, G-d suddenly commands Moshe to execute a 'turn-around' maneuver. "And G-d told Moshe, tell Bnei Yisrael to TURN AROUND and set up camp... near the Red Sea. [In order that] Pharaoh will say they are wandering in the land (of Egypt), for the desert has closed them in" (see 14:1-4).

In other words, G-d commands Bnei Yisrael to turn around in order to convince Pharaoh that they are not going to the desert. Had Bnei Yisrael continued on their journey towards the desert, Pharaoh would have had no reason to chase them. After all, he wants them to go to the desert to worship their G-d, as they requested. It is specifically because they DON'T go to worship G-d, but instead RETURN TO EGYPT and set up camp by the Red Sea, that Pharaoh concludes: "...what have we done [we've been tricked!], for we have set Bnei Yisrael free from their slave labor!" (see 14:5).

It is only now that Pharaoh realizes that Bnei Yisrael have left slavery. What leads him to this conclusion? The answer is quite simple. Let's consider what Bnei Yisrael have done. Clearly, they did not travel to the desert (as they had requested). However, they also do not return to their homes in Goshen, i.e. to their slavery. Nor do they travel towards Eretz Canaan. Instead, they stay in Egypt, and set up camp by the sea. So what are they up to? Pharaoh reaches the obvious conclusion. Bnei Yisrael have implicitly declared their independence - in the Land of Egypt! Therefore, for the sake of his national security, Pharaoh must immediately declare war on this rebellious nation (see 14:6-10). If he doesn't attack them first, they surely will soon attack him. After all, they are numerous, and armed (see 13:18). In fact, this was Egypt's greatest fear from the very beginning. Recall that the enslavement began because Bnei Yisrael had become so numerous that Egypt feared that they would take over their own country (see 1:8-10, and Rasag, Rashi and Ibn Ezra on 1:10)! Pharaoh's decision to attack ultimately leads to Bnei Yisrael's momentous salvation at the Red Sea. [That topic will be discussed in detail in our shiur on Parshat Beshalach.] It also explains why Bnei Yisrael can keep the various wares that they had 'borrowed' from the Egyptians. After Egypt declared war on Bnei Yisrael, their 'bank accounts' are 'frozen'.

There can be no two ways about it. This is the 'story of the Exodus' in the Bible. Despite the numerous movie versions and the popular understanding that 'Let My People Go' is a request for 'freedom from slavery', in Chumash it is simply a request for the 'freedom to worship G-d in the desert!'

Surely, this interpretation raises many questions. First of all, with the Ten Plagues 'up his sleeve [or staff]', Moshe is in a position to demand just about anything he wants from Pharaoh. Why should he ask for a 'three day vacation' when he can ask for total freedom? Furthermore, what does he gain by not telling the 'whole truth'? In Part Two of our shiur, we will first discuss Rashbam's approach to this question, showing how the above analysis forms its basis. Afterward, we will suggest an explanation of our own.

#### LET MY PEOPLE GO - PART TWO

In our introductory shiur to Sefer Shmot, we explained that G-d did not appear to Moshe (at the 'sneh') simply to provide him with some information, rather G-d charges Moshe with a MISSION: "And now go for I am sending you to Pharaoh - and TAKE My people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (3:10).

Note that at first, G-d instructs Moshe to take His nation out of Egypt, without providing even a clue concerning HOW to get the job done! **MISSION IMPOSSIBLE** As we would expect, Moshe Rabeinu is startled by G-d's commandment. Considering his having been a fugitive from Egypt for many years, why should Pharaoh even allow him an audience? Furthermore, Moshe has been away from his people for most of his adult life. [Recall that he ran away at a rather young age and returns only at age eighty!] How could they possibly accept him as their official leader? Therefore, Moshe's immediate response to this command is quite understandable: "And Moshe said to G-d: WHO am I that I can go to Pharaoh, - VE-CHI OTZI - and [HOW can I] take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt?!" (See 3:11, read carefully.)

No matter how we translate the phrase 've-chi otzi' in this pasuk (its precise definition is a bit problematic), it certainly seems that Moshe is asking HOW he is supposed to take Bnei Yisrael out. However, G-d's answer to his question does not seem to address this issue at all: "And He said: For I will be with you, and this is the sign that I have sent you - WHEN you take the Nation out of Egypt, you shall worship Elokim on this mountain" (see 3:12).

How does this answer Moshe's question? Moshe asks HOW he is supposed to take them out, and G-d tells him what to do AFTER he takes them out! What Moshe asks - G-d never answers, and what G-d answers - Moshe never asked! Now there are two basic approaches to solve this problem. Either we can 'reinterpret' Moshe's question to fit G-d's answer [see Rashi & Seforno], or we can 'reinterpret' G-d's answer to fit Moshe's question [see Rashbam]. In our shiur we will deal primarily with the latter interpretation. But before we begin, let's take a quick glance at Rashi's approach.

**RASHI - 'FOR WHAT PURPOSE!'** Rashi (on 3:12) deals with this difficulty by reinterpreting Moshe's question (in 3:11). When Moshe asks 'VE-CHI OTZI', he asks not HOW to take them out, but rather WHY am I (and/or Bnei Yisrael) WORTHY of being taken out of Egypt? To this G-d responds that AFTER they leave Egypt, Bnei Yisrael are to worship Him and receive the Torah on this mountain. This merit alone renders them worthy of Yetziat Mitzrayim. In other words, G-d here explains the PURPOSE of Yetziat Mitzrayim - that Bnei Yisrael will receive the Torah at Har Sinai!

**RASHBAM - 'HOW TO GET THE JOB DONE!'** Unlike Rashi, Rashbam refuses to reinterpret the question. Instead, he reinterprets G-d's answer. He accomplishes this by dividing G-d's answer into two parts, corresponding to both the two parts of G-d's original command & the two parts of Moshe's original question. The following table maps out this parallelism in psukim 3:10-12:

THE FIRST HALF OF EACH SENTENCE 3:10/ COMMAND:	Go, I have sent you to Pharaoh! 3:11/ QUESTION: Who am I, that I can go to Pharaoh? 3:12/ ANSWER: For I will be with you, and this [the sneh] is the sign that I have SENT you...
THE SECOND HALF OF EACH SENTENCE 3:10/ COMMAND:	Take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt! 3:11/ QUESTION: [HOW] can I take them out of Egypt? 3:12/ ANSWER: [In order to] take them out of Egypt, [tell Pharaoh that] this nation must worship their G-d on this mountain.

Rashbam's interpretation of 3:12 is very creative. He claims that Moshe asks (in 3:11) that even if he is allowed to speak to Pharaoh, HOW can he possibly convince Pharaoh to let them free? G-d answers Moshe by telling him to 'TRICK' PHARAOH - "Tell Pharaoh that you must take Bnei Yisrael [for a short time] out of Egypt, in order that they can worship their G-d on this mountain." In other words, Rashbam claims that G-d instructs Moshe to 'deceive' Pharaoh requesting permission to worship G-d in the desert. Once they leave, Moshe will lead Bnei Yisrael to the Promised Land, where they will live forever, never again to return to Egypt! Rashbam clearly reads into this pasuk much more than is written. In fact, Rashbam himself admits to doing so! However, he explains that he bases this interpretation on a later pasuk in this 'hitgalut' - where G-d issues more specific instructions to Moshe regarding his meeting with Pharaoh: "... Then you and the elders shall go to the King of Egypt and tell him: 'The G-d of the Hebrews had come and told us that we must go for a three-day journey into the desert [to Har Chorev] to offer sacrifices to our Lord'" (3:18).

As we explained in Part One, Rashbam's approach is based on the above analysis that Moshe never asks for freedom, rather for a journey of a three day distance to worship G-d in the desert. Considering that Moshe's true intention (as he tells Bnei Yisrael) is to take them to the Promised Land, the 'three day journey' request must be part of a 'master plan' to 'sneak' Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Furthermore, the final phrase of 5:3:

"lest he strike us with DEVER or CHEREV" - explains G-d's intention in 3:12. The plan is rather simple. Moshe warns Pharaoh that if he does not allow Bnei Yisrael to journey into the desert and worship their G-d, a severe Divine punishment will ensue and many people will die (including Egyptians). As we explained above, a careful analysis of the entire Exodus narrative renders Rashbam's explanation that G-d commands Moshe to employ 'trickery' as the simple 'pshat'.

Even though we have referred to this plan as 'trickery', Rashbam does not call this 'lying' - he refers to it instead as 'derech chochma' - a wise scheme. He brings a parallel example from Sefer Shmuel. When G-d instructs Shmuel with the mission to anoint David as king, Shmuel expresses his fear that Shaul may find out and then kill him. To solve this problem, G-d provides Shmuel with a 'cover up', telling him to claim that he is going to Bet-Lechem to offer a public sacrifice. Once there, he will secretly anoint David as king. [See Shmuel I/16:1-3!] When you read this Rashbam inside, note the 'confident' style with which he begins his explanation: "Anyone who would like to understand the primary 'pshat' of these psukim should study my interpretation of this pasuk, for those who explained it before me did not understand it at all!" [See Rashbam 3:11-12.]

Later on, Rashbam is so sure that his interpretation is correct that he concludes his commentary by stating: "Anyone who explains these psukim in any other manner is totally mistaken!" [See end of peirush to 3:11-12.]

'NOT SO FAST ...' Despite the charm and appeal of Rashbam's explanation, there appears to be a major 'hole' in his theory. Let's explain:

Recall that, in addition to his mission to Pharaoh, Moshe's mission also included that he tell Bnei Yisrael that G-d had now come to take them out of Egypt to the Promised Land (see 3:16-17). And this is exactly what Moshe does in 4:29-31. Is it possible to expect that over one million people know the 'real' plan, and Pharaoh won't find out? Can it be expected that no one will leak the story? Doesn't Pharaoh have his own CIA [KGB, Shin Bet... take your pick]? Furthermore, it appears that Moshe has nothing to gain by not telling Pharaoh the whole truth? Either way, G-d tells Moshe that Pharaoh won't listen in any event (see 3:19), so why not tell Pharaoh the whole truth in the first place? Finally, is G-d not powerful enough to bring plagues capable of forcing Pharaoh to grant Bnei Yisrael total freedom? Is it better to deceive Pharaoh rather than tell him the truth?

**NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE** When we read the story of the Exodus, it is commonly assumed that the only obstacle preventing Bnei Yisrael's return to Eretz Canaan was their enslavement to Egypt. However, if we consider their condition more realistically, we realize that Bnei Yisrael had no alternative other than remain in Egypt. Let's explain why: Bnei Yisrael's population is over two million. [The census included 600,000 men over the age of twenty. Figure an equal amount of women, and considering the high birth rate figure as many children under twenty as adults over twenty, and you arrive at a figure of about two million!] To provide food and water for this size population is not an easy task. Egypt, thanks to the Nile River and Nile Delta, could provide their needs. However, survival of a nation of this size in desert conditions, even for a few weeks, would be impossible. Even if Pharaoh had granted them permission to emigrate, could a nation of some two million people [ex-slaves] survive the lengthy, arduous journey through the desert? And even if they could make it to Canaan, could they conquer the land with its walled cities and formidable, armed enemies? As the 'meraglim' themselves concluded, such a plan would be suicidal - and that's a conclusion reached by people who had witnessed the miracles of Yetziat Mitzrayim! [See Bamidbar chapters 13->14.] Without anything less than a 'miracle', Bnei Yisrael have no option other than to remain in Eretz Mitzrayim. Furthermore, Bnei Yisrael had been living in Egypt for (at least) the last two hundred years. Certainly, in the eyes of the Egyptians (and most likely in their own eyes), even though they may be 'third class citizens', they remain a distinct ethnic group within Egyptian society and culture. In fact, it is for this very reason that their enslavement begins when Bnei Yisrael become so numerous. Egypt fears that they may soon take over! Many dynasties in Egypt had been taken over by enemies from within or by foreign powers. They now fear that Bnei Yisrael may soon become powerful enough to take over their own country or help others do so (see 1:8-10). Thus, despite the hardships of their enslavement, [without some sort of miraculous, divine intervention] Bnei Yisrael had no realistic alternative other than staying in Egypt. When Bnei Yisrael cry out for salvation in 2:23-25, they are an oppressed working

class who desire a lighter workload and better living conditions; they are NOT yearning for Zion.

With this in mind, let's imagine what would have happened had Moshe presented Pharaoh with this plan of an en-masse emigration to Eretz Canaan. Pharaoh most probably would have dismissed him as insane! Moshe would have lost all credibility in the eyes of Pharaoh as a responsible leader of the Hebrew Nation. Instead, G-d instructs Moshe to make a fairly reasonable request - to allow his afflicted brethren to worship their G-d. Moshe does not lie to Pharaoh, nor does he deceive him. He simply claims the legitimate right of religious freedom for an oppressed people! Furthermore, G-d can demand that Pharaoh grant religious freedom to an oppressed people, and hence punish him for not obeying; but He can't expect Pharaoh to act as 'an ardent supporter of Zionism' - allowing an entire nation to embark on a journey that would most certainly be suicidal! Hence, there would no point for Moshe to demand that Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael to emigrate. Instead, he demands that Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael the right to worship their G-d in the desert. This is not a lie, for this is exactly where Bnei Yisrael first plan to go (to Har Sinai), and there they will offer korbanot (see Shmot 24:4-11).

This explains why Pharaoh never accuses Moshe (during the Plagues) that he may really be planning to take Bnei Yisrael to Eretz Canaan, for Pharaoh never considers this a realistic option!

So what is Pharaoh worried about? Why is he so adamant not to allow them to worship their G-d in the desert for a few days? The answer is quite simple, and it explains every problem that we have raised thus far. Pharaoh has ONE fear, and only one fear: From the time that the enslavement began until the day of the Exodus, Pharaoh's only fear is that Bnei Yisrael may take-over his country. That is exactly why he enslaved them in the first place (see 1:8-10), and this is exactly why he is reluctant to allow the entire nation to leave with all their belongings. Pharaoh fears that should he let them free to worship their G-d, they will take advantage of the situation, and instead of returning to slavery, they will return and rebel; or join with other nations and attack. By not allowing them to travel too far, and by leaving their women and children (or at least cattle) behind, Pharaoh remains with a clear advantage. But should the entire nation leave to worship their G-d, nothing guarantees that Bnei Yisrael will return to their servitude. Instead, they could take advantage of the situation and declare their independence when they return to Egypt, or possibly even attack Egypt. And when Bnei Yisrael finally did leave Egypt, what Pharaoh feared most is exactly what happened. Bnei Yisrael DON'T go to the desert. Instead they march away 'armed' (see 13:18), with all of their own possessions, and with a significant amount of 'borrowed' Egyptian gold and silver - everything they need to declare independence! As soon as Pharaoh realizes that they are not going to the desert, he concludes that he has a rebellion on hand, and he launches a pre-emptive strike before they attack him (see 14:1-6). With this in mind, we can suggest an answer to our other questions as well.

**KEEPING A SECRET** Even though Moshe had told Bnei Yisrael of G-d's promise to take them to Eretz Canaan, had the Egyptians heard this 'rumor', they would have scoffed at the very thought. Could a multitude of slaves possibly organize themselves into an independent nation? Could they survive the journey through the desert? Could they conquer the kings of Canaan? Are there any neighboring lands as good as Egypt? No one was keeping any secrets. Even the majority of Bnei Yisrael felt that this idea would lead to national suicide (see 14:12!). Why should the Egyptians believe this 'rumor' any more than Bnei Yisrael did? Throughout Sefer Shmot and Sefer Bamidbar, we find the people time and time again expressing their desire to return to Egypt. As the "meraglim" (spies) themselves later conclude, it is the only logical alternative (see Bamidbar 14:1-4). Although G-d's promise of a land 'flowing with milk and honey' (see 3:8,17) was originally endorsed by the elders (see 4:29-31), only a short while later, after their workload was doubled, these hopes fizzled out (see 5:1-21).

**THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE** In addition to our explanation that G-d has no intention to fool Pharaoh, one could even suggest that there is a certain thematic value in the fact that Moshe's request from Pharaoh is specifically for 'religious freedom' and not the right to emigrate. The story of the Exodus, and hence G-d mission to Moshe at the 'sneh', focuses on two independent issues: 1) To redeem Bnei Yisrael from Egypt - to fulfill Brit Avot; 2) To 'teach' Pharaoh and his country the lesson of 'ANI HASHEM' - that G-d of Israel exists.

In His 'hitgalut' to Moshe at the 'sneh', G-d charges Moshe with the responsibility of dealing with both issues. Let's begin with the latter by

asking a more basic question: why must Moshe confront Pharaoh in the first place? If the entire purpose of Yetziat Mitzrayim is simply to fulfill 'brit Avot' and take Bnei Yisrael to Eretz Canaan, why involve Egypt in this process at all? Surely G-d could create circumstances whereby Bnei Yisrael would emigrate without official Egyptian authorization. For example, let G-d cause a sudden change in Egyptian policy, or make just one miracle where all the Egyptians would fall asleep for 48 hours, etc. [See Ramban on 3:13 for an interesting perspective.]

Nonetheless, at the 'sneh' we see how G-d insists that Bnei Yisrael must receive Pharaoh's permission to leave. Note how the psukim emphasize this point: "Now go, I have sent you to PHARAOH..." (3:10) and Moshe responds: "Who am I that I should go to PHARAOH?..." (3:11).

Moshe's confrontation with Pharaoh constitutes a critical element of G-d's plan. G-d does not tell Moshe to 'trick' Pharaoh. Rather, Moshe must confront Pharaoh over the fundamental issue of religious freedom - the basic right of any people, especially an oppressed nation, to worship G-d. The fact that Pharaoh, the king of Egypt - the world superpower and center of ancient civilization - rejects this request shows that he considers himself above his fellow man. He acts as though he himself is a god; G-d must therefore teach him (and any future Pharaoh/monarch) the lesson of "ve-yad'u Mitzrayim ki ANI Hashem" (see 7:5,9;16,11;9,14:4). [One could suggest that the natural resources of Egypt, especially the inestimable Nile river, granted power to the Egyptian people. [See Yechezkel 29:1-3.]

This power not only allowed their monarch to claim divine power and authority, but also led Egypt to their self-proclaimed privilege to oppress other nations - to act as though they were gods. It is not by chance that the first plague strikes specifically the Nile River.]

**TWO PERSPECTIVES** Therefore, from a universalistic perspective, the primary goal of Yetziat Mitzrayim is that Egypt - the center of ancient civilization - realize that G-d is above all Man - "ve-yad'u Mitzrayim ki Ani Hashem." Moshe must deliver this message to the Egyptian people, in G-d's Name, directly to Pharaoh (as explained in 3:10-12, 18-20). The MAKKOT ensure that the Egyptians will ultimately internalize this message.

Hence, when Moshe is commanded to go to Pharaoh and demand Bnei Yisrael's right to worship their G-d, it's not a 'trick', but rather a basic, human demand. On the other hand, from Am Yisrael's perspective, the central purpose of Yetziat Mitzrayim relates to the fulfillment of G-d's covenant with the Avot, that Bnei Yisrael return to Eretz Canaan in order to become G-d's special nation. As Bnei Yisrael must prepare themselves for this redemption (as we will explain in next week's shiur), Moshe must convey this message to them (see 3:7-9, 13-17). Ultimately, this redemption will take place in wake of the events that unfold once Pharaoh allows Bnei Yisrael to leave after the Ten Plagues.

**FROM MAKKOT TO DIBROT** In conclusion, it is interesting to note the inter-relationship between these two aspects of the Exodus. As we explained in Sefer Breishit, an ultimate goal of the Nation of Israel is to establish a model society that can bring all mankind to recognize G-d. At Yetziat Mitzrayim - when Israel becomes a nation - it is significant that Egypt - the center of ancient civilization and the epitome of a society that rejects G-d - must recognize G-d, specifically at the moment when Am Yisrael becomes a nation. Initially (and unfortunately), this goal must first be achieved through force, by Moshe's MATEH and G-d's TEN Plagues. Ultimately, when Israel becomes a nation in its own land, this very same goal can be achieved in a more 'peaceful' manner - i.e. through education - should Bnei Yisrael integrate the message of Moshe's DIBUR and the principles of G-d's TEN Commandments. shabbat shalom,

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