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*Turning Curses into Blessings*

Genesis ends on an almost serene note. Jacob has found his long lost son. The family has been reunited. Joseph has forgiven his brothers. Under his protection and influence the family has settled in Goshen, one of the most prosperous regions of Egypt. They now have homes, property, food, the protection of Joseph and the favour of Pharaoh. It must have seemed one of the golden moments of Abraham's family's history.

Then, as has happened so often since, "There arose a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph." There was a political climate change. The family fell out of favour. Pharaoh told his advisers: "Look, the Israelite people are becoming too numerous and strong for us"[1] – the first time the word "people" is used in the Torah with reference to the children of Israel. "Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase." And so the whole mechanism of oppression moves into operation: forced labour that turns into slavery that becomes attempted genocide.

The story is engraved in our memory. We tell it every year, and in summary-form in our prayers, every day. It is part of what it is to be a Jew. Yet there is one phrase that shines out from the narrative: "But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread." That, no less than oppression itself, is part of what it means to be a Jew. The worse things get, the stronger we become. Jews are the people who not only survive but thrive in adversity.

Jewish history is not merely a story of Jews enduring catastrophes that might have spelled the end to less tenacious groups. It is that after every disaster, Jews renewed themselves. They discovered some hitherto hidden reservoir of

spirit that fuelled new forms of collective self-expression as the carriers of God's message to the world.

Every tragedy begat new creativity. After the division of the kingdom following the death of Solomon came the great literary prophets, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Out of the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile came the renewal of Torah in the life of the nation, beginning with Ezekiel and culminating in the vast educational programme brought back to Israel by Ezra and Nehemiah. From the destruction of the Second Temple came the immense literature of rabbinic Judaism, until then preserved mostly in the form of an oral tradition: Mishnah, Midrash and Gemara.

From the Crusades came the Hassidei Ashkenaz, the North European school of piety and spirituality. Following the Spanish expulsion came the mystic circle of Tzefat: Lurianic Kabbalah and all it inspired by way of poetry and prayer. From East European persecution and poverty came the Hassidic movement and its revival of grass-roots Judaism through a seemingly endless flow of story and song. And from the worst tragedy of all in human terms, the Holocaust, came the rebirth of the state of Israel, the greatest collective Jewish affirmation of life in more than two thousand years.

It is well known that the Chinese ideogram for "crisis" also means "opportunity". Any civilisation that can see the blessing within the curse, the fragment of light within the heart of darkness, has within it the capacity to endure. Hebrew goes one better. The word for crisis, mashber, also means "a child-birth chair." Written into the semantics of Jewish consciousness is the idea that the pain of hard times is a collective form of the contractions of a woman giving birth. Something new is being born. That is the mindset of a people of whom it can be said that "the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread."

Where did it come from, this Jewish ability to turn weakness into strength, adversity into advantage, darkness into light? It goes back to the moment in which our people received its name, Israel. It was then, as Jacob wrestled alone at night with an angel, that as dawn broke his adversary begged him to let him go. "I will not let you go until you bless me", said Jacob. That is the source of our peculiar, distinctive obstinacy. We may have fought all night. We may be tired and on the brink of exhaustion. We may find ourselves limping, as did Jacob. Yet we will not let our adversary go until we have extracted a blessing from the encounter. This turned out to be not a minor and temporary concession. It became the basis of his new name and our identity. Israel, the people who "wrestled with God and man and prevailed", is the nation that grows stronger with each conflict and catastrophe.

I was reminded of this unusual national characteristic by an article that appeared in the British press in October 2015. Israel at the time was suffering from a wave of terrorist attacks that saw Palestinians murdering innocent civilians in streets and bus stations throughout the country. It began with these words: "Israel is an astonishing country, buzzing with energy and confidence, a magnet for talent and investment – a cauldron of innovation." It spoke of its world-class excellence in aerospace, clean-tech, irrigation systems, software, cyber-security, pharmaceuticals and defence systems. [2] "All this", the writer went on to say, "derives from brainpower, for Israel has no natural resources and is surrounded by hostile neighbours." The country is living proof of "the power of technical education, immigration and the benefits of the right sort of military service." Yet this cannot be all, since Jews have consistently overachieved, wherever they were and whenever they were given the chance. He goes through the various suggested explanations: the strength of Jewish families, their passion for education, a desire for self-employment, risk-taking as a way of life, and even ancient history. The Levant was home to the world's first agricultural societies and earliest traders. Perhaps, then, the disposition to enterprise was written, thousands of years ago, into Jewish DNA. Ultimately, though, he concludes that it has to do with "culture and communities".

A key element of that culture has to do with the Jewish response to crisis. To every adverse circumstance, those who have inherited Jacob's sensibilities

insist: "I will not let you go until you bless me." That is how Jews, encountering the Negev, found ways of making the desert bloom. Seeing a barren, neglected landscape elsewhere, they planted trees and forests. Faced with hostile armies on all their borders, they developed military technologies they then turned to peaceful use. War and terror forced them to develop medical expertise and world-leading skills in dealing with the aftermath of trauma. They found ways of turning every curse into a blessing. The historian Paul Johnson, as always, put it eloquently:

Over 4,000 years the Jews proved themselves not only great survivors but extraordinarily skillful in adapting to the societies among which fate had thrust them, and in gathering whatever human comforts they had to offer. No people has been more fertile in enriching poverty or humanising wealth, or in turning misfortune to creative account.[3] There is something profoundly spiritual as well as robustly practical about this ability to transform the bad moments of life into a spur to creativity. It is as if, deep within us were a voice saying, "You are in this situation, bad though it is, because there is a task to perform, a skill to acquire, a strength to develop, a lesson to learn, an evil to redeem, a shard of light to be rescued, a blessing to be uncovered, for I have chosen you to give testimony to humankind that out of suffering can come great blessings if you wrestle with it for long enough and with unshakeable faith."

In an age in which people of violence are committing acts of brutality in the name of the God of compassion, the people of Israel are proving daily that this is not the way of the God of Abraham, the God of life and the sanctity of life. And whenever we who are a part of that people lose heart, and wonder when it will ever end, we should recall the words: "The more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread." A people of whom that can be said can be injured, but can never be defeated. God's way is the way of life.

[1] Ex. 1:9. This is the first intimation in history of what in modern times took the form of the Russian forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In the Diaspora, Jews – powerless – were often seen as all-powerful. What this usually means, when translated, is: How is it that Jews manage to evade the pariah status we have assigned to them?

[2] Luke Johnson, 'Animal Spirits: Israel and its tribe of risk-taking entrepreneurs,' Sunday Times, 4 October 2015.

[3] Paul Johnson, The History of the Jews, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, 58 Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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**Meshech Chochmah**

**by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein**

Parshas Shemos

Moshe Had No Choice

Meshech Chochmah: We will be introduced to Moshe early in the parshah. Understanding his role and his uniqueness plays an important part in our relationship to all of Torah.

Know that Moshe's prophecy differed from that of all other prophets. We relied upon all other prophets because they established their credentials as speaking for Hashem through signs and miracles that they predicted and performed, or through a previously credentialed prophet certifying another navi, as Eliyahu did for Elisha.

As the Rambam[2] writes, belief that is born of miracles is ultimately deficient. The working of a miracle does not prove that the miracle worker speaks in the Name of G-d. (Chananyah ben Azur[3] demonstrates this. He was a proper, established navi, according to the gemara,[4] but later became a false prophet.) Rather, the Torah commands us to obey a prophet who has predicted and performed miracles on multiple occasions. It assigns legal credibility to such a person, even though what he tells us may not in fact be a

message he received from Hashem.[5] He is presumed to speak the truth, much as we rely on two eyewitnesses, even though we realize that witnesses occasionally lie.

Moshe was the sole exception. Hashem elevated the entire nation at Sinai. They rose to the level of prophecy. In that state, they witnessed Hashem speaking directly to Moshe. This explains the causal relationship in a later pasuk:[6] "I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever." The end of the verse seems to be a non sequitur of the beginning. The plain sense meaning of all of this, however, is that because they all prophetically witnessed the conversation between Hashem and Moshe, his role as the Divinely appointed conduit of Hashem's wishes could never and would never be doubted. While all other prophets could be challenged by other miracle workers, no number of them would ever be able to cast doubt on a single letter of Moshe's Torah.

Actually, however, this does not follow! While the people knew of Moshe's reliability at the instant they saw him conversing with Hashem, how could they know what he would do or say in the future? Perhaps he would exercise his free will, and interject his own thoughts and ideas later in his career! Chazal[7] tell us that all is caused by Heaven other than the fear of Heaven – meaning that humans make free-willed choices without interference from Above. Even G-d's knowledge of the future does not interfere with the human capacity to make choices without compulsion.

We are left with an inescapable conclusion: After ma'amad Har Sinai, Moshe ceased to possess the freedom to choose! He lived on in a state comparable to the angels, who exercise no choice between good and evil.

This is less surprising than it sounds. Chazal[8] speak of Dovid taking considerable pride when he finished writing his Tehillim. He believed that no one had ever done a better job. Then he encountered a frog, which claimed to indeed do the job far better than Dovid could. Every second of the frog's life was perforce a song of praise, in that he was incapable of anything but doing the bidding of his Master. Dovid, endowed with free will, could never match that constancy.

While Dovid accepted the mussar value of that encounter, we can still appreciate the advantage that the bechirah-endowed human being has over the frog. Our struggle to vanquish bechirah – to rise above the temptation to choose evil – affords us opportunities for spiritual advancement that no animal will ever know. (This was Chazal's intention in teaching[9] that if one who learns not with the intention of putting his learning into practice, it would be better if his embryonic sac had been turned on its face. In other words, there was no purpose for him to come into this world. We do not spend our time here in order to reach new levels of understanding. The neshamah comprehended far more than we do in its previous state, before it descended from Heaven. A person who learns for the sake of the knowledge alone, and not for the purpose of turning his knowledge into action, has gained nothing. Had his embryo's development been stopped, he would have had access to even greater knowledge! Our journey in this world has no purpose other than the vanquishing of our desires. Learning alone does not confer any advantage, unless it is the kind of learning (i.e. when pursued with the intent to implement it) that itself demonstrates a victory over the yetzer hora.)

Given that bechirah's value is not absolute but instrumental, we understand that Moshe got to a point where it was of no further use to him. He had reached the summit of accomplishment in pushing back against the choice of evil. Having purified his physical nature to the full extent possible, he had turned it into a spiritual instrument through which Hashem and His truth could be discerned. Bechirah at this point would have been a distraction. It had served its purpose in facilitating his growth. Having achieved that growth, bechirah became irrelevant to his needs.

None of this applied to the rest of the people. They had been elevated to a level of prophecy, of clear understanding, only for the purpose of establishing the authenticity of Moshe's message so that it would never be

doubted. They had not struggled up the mountain of human striving to arrive at the peak as Moshe did. Their absolute clarity at Sinai was not something they had earned, but was given to them in order to firmly establish the rule of Torah. (This clarity is what Chazal really meant[10] when they spoke of Hashem lifting the mountain over their heads to tell them that if they refused to accept the Torah, they would perish. The "mountain" means the incontrovertible understanding that without Torah, Hashem would have no purpose for the world, and everything would cease to exist. They understood so perfectly, that they rationally had no other choice but to accept it. Failing to do so would mean the end of existence.)

For all the people besides Moshe, bechirah remained the key element in their game-plan for growth. Their moment of sublime, angelic existence had achieved its purpose. They would now have to revert to their previous role of battling some of the options that bechirah would put on the table. Their experience at Sinai momentarily stripped them of their bechirah. They comprehended the nature and role of Torah so perfectly that their very understanding forced them to accept the Torah! But without bechirah, there is no opportunity for reward. The rest of the nation could enjoy their moment of angelic existence in order to establish the reliability of Moshe – but they needed to revert to ordinary existence thereafter.

This is what the Torah meant by "Return to your tents." [11] The tent is the body, together with the myriad forces, wants and desires that surround the neshamah that it hosts. This tent provides abundant room for bechirah, and for reward and punishment. Moshe, however, was told "You shall stand here with Me." He did not revert to the ordinary human state, but remained aloof from all physical needs and distractions. This allowed him to comprehend things with uncommon clarity – albeit, without bechirah. (Freed of any attachment to the physical, he separated from his wife.)

For all others, the brief moment of elevation at Sinai served to clarify what would be most important for the continuity of Torah – the role of Moshe as faithful conduit of the Divine Will.

[1] Based on Meshech Chochmah, introduction to Shemos [2] Yesodei HaTorah 8:1 [3] Yirmiyahu 28:1-17 [4] Sanhedrin 90A [5] Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah 7:7 [6] Shemos 19:9 [7] Berachos 33B [8] Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 103 [9] Yerushalmi Shabbos 1:2 [10] Shabbos 88A [11] Devarim 5:27

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>

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date: Thu, Dec 31, 2015 at 7:36 PM

subject: **Pennim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Parshas Shemos

Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro, his father-in-law, the Priest of Midyan. (3:1)

The Torah is informing us that Moshe Rabbeinu's vocation prior to his being selected as the man who would lead the Jewish People from Egypt, and who would shepherd them throughout their desert journey, was a shepherd. The Torah does not waste words. If the Torah mentions Moshe's background, it is because it is vital to his resume as leader. Chazal explain that our quintessential leader was first given a "trial run" as Yisro's shepherd, in order to ascertain his leadership abilities. After seeing how Moshe performed as a shepherd, Hashem chose him to lead our ancestors. What did he do that was so special?

Moshe distinguished between the needs of the younger, weaker sheep and the older ones. Young sheep need to drink; they cannot chew tough grass; they tire much quicker than older ones. Moshe's sensitivity to the little things, his empathy for the "little guy," indicated that he possessed the qualities inherent in a great leader.

Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl, expounds on the idea that an individual's sensitivity to caring about the little things, and the little people in life, determines his ability to be a manhig, leader. Chazal teach that Hashem is bochein, tests, a tzaddik, righteous person, concerning his sensitivity to the

bedikah ketaneh, small things. What is so important about small things? The Rosh Yeshivah compares this to the (then) newly-discovered science of molecular biology, chemistry, science. Molecules are something which we cannot see, but are the primary force behind the objects which we do see. He explains that there is tremendous symmetry within the molecular structure, thus allowing it to generate its greatest power. It is not the actual size of a product; it is the harmony, the symmetry, the perfection of its molecular components. One may not ignore the "little" things, the molecules which comprise the things we see. Likewise, in the spiritual dimension, there is a concept of molecular ruchniyos, spiritual molecules. A leader who ignores the little things, who lacks sensitivity to the spiritual molecules within each person, who ignores the spiritual molecules within himself - is not fit to be a leader.

Let us delve a little deeper into this idea. Chazal (Pirkei Avos 2) teach that the world was created through the medium of Asarah Maamaros, Ten Divine Utterances. Why? Hashem could just as well have ordained the world into being with one utterance. The Mishnah says that Hashem used ten, so that now there is license to punish the wicked who destroy a world through ten utterances. Obviously, Chazal's statement leaves us in an even greater quandary. What is achieved/what message is conveyed through the lesson of Ten Utterances?

The Maharal explains that the purpose of the Ten Utterances is to demonstrate that there is order and hierarchy in the universe; there is a system. All aspects of the cosmos - both physical and spiritual - function in accordance with a precise system, a vast and beautiful symmetry in which even the tiniest molecule has its place and fits in perfectly. The symmetry of Creation is supported by tov, good, and it is disrupted by ra, evil. Thus, good equals symmetry, bad begets chaos and disorder. Chazal are teaching us a very important lesson in life. All that supports the symmetry of Creation is good, while all that disrupts it is evil. Good - order; evil - chaos. Chazal have provided us with a powerful principle by which to navigate life.

The rules of symmetry are not rigid. Symmetry is fluid. Thus, we treat people with kindness and consideration, because, to do otherwise, would be chaotic and create an imbalance in the order/harmony of Creation. Since symmetry is fluid, we understand that sometimes we must be kind, but, at other times, we need to be cruel. At times, we laugh and are filled with joy, but, at other times, we must weep and mourn because the situation warrants it. This is the meaning of fluid symmetry. It is flexible, moving and changing as it flows through time, through various situations. All it takes is seichel, common sense, and daas, intelligence, which are both the result of our connection with Torah scholars who teach and hone our ability to think. Daas is a derivative of learning Torah from a rebbe. We are taught how to think, how to live, when to cry and when to laugh. Thus, we become symmetrical human beings who support Creation.

Simple/little things provide symmetry. They distinguish between a symmetrical moment and a crude experience. A reverberating "Good morning," rendered with a smile, creates symmetry within a person, causing him to feel happy and put together. That "Good morning," however simple, makes his day. Rav Freifeld remembers approaching Horav Arye Levin, zl, the tzaddik of Yerushalayim, at a wedding and giving him shalom Aleichem - a simple greeting. The tzaddik looked at him, took his hand in both of his and smiled warmly. He conveyed a message: "I care about you. You are important to me."

Kindness is all-important, but, at times it is necessary to suspend our kind emotions, such as when dealing with cruel, perverted people. To be kind to them means to be cruel to others. This is not symmetrical. Parents have to manifest love and affection toward their children, but we all know that misplaced kindness can be as detrimental as misplaced discipline. One must employ seichel (if he has any; if not, he should ask advice and listen). Molding children is one of the most difficult and complex undertakings. One must use daas to know what to do and when to do it; otherwise, he will create a lack of symmetry.

The Rosh Yeshivah relates hearing of a young child that fell off a fence on Shabbos and landed on his head. A young man ran out of his shul, his peyos flying, threw off his tallis, picked up the child, and immediately flagged a taxi to take the child to the hospital. (This occurred before Hatzalah had become a household term.) His friend came running over to him, "Perhaps you should not be so rash. Wait. It does not look so bad. There is no reason to be mechallel, to desecrate the holy Shabbos." Once again, the significance of Shabbos observance is immeasurable, but the symmetry of Creation may call for the opposite.

The Alter, zl, m'Kelm, Horav Simcha Zissel Broide, was the standard bearer of the Kelm Talmud Torah and of the community which also reflected his character and demeanor. The yeshivah maintained the services of a shamash, an attendant, who performed menial jobs around the yeshivah. He was paid a small salary for his troubles. In addition, he received an additional compensation for all of his troubles: grazing rights for his goat on a grassy plot of land next to the yeshivah.

One day, Rav Simcha Zissel crossed this plot of land on the way to the yeshivah. The students noticed their revered Rebbe stop as he was about to enter the yeshivah. He bent over, raised his foot and inspected his shoes. He then extracted a few blades of grass that had stuck to the heel of his shoe. Seeing this, one of the talmidim asked, "Rebbe, why do you do this?" (This, too, was part of the learning process in Kelm. No action was wasted; no action went unnoticed.)

The Alter explained, "You know, of course, that the grass on that little patch belongs to the shamash. This is food for his goat. The grass was high, and I was afraid that when I crossed the patch I might have inadvertently taken some of the grass that did not belong to me. So I returned it to its proper place."

This might be a bit extreme for us, but it certainly bespeaks the level of symmetry achieved by the Alter m'Kelm. His life was a work of art, a harmonious image of brilliant and perfect symmetry. For someone of his caliber, a blade of grass that was not his had to be returned to its proper place. We now understand the extent to which Moshe Rabbeinu concerned himself with the needs of the young sheep - and why Hashem chose him to be our leader.

Many ascribe to achieve symmetry, but, without the complement of daas/seichel, it is difficult. Indeed, what they think is symmetry is, in fact, chaos. Furthermore, once one achieves an exalted position in life, it does not excuse him from striving to maintain symmetry in his life. Rav Freifeld relates that he was once in a hotel in Tel Aviv in which the huge dining hall overlooked the Mediterranean Sea. It was truly a breathtaking view. The Ponevezer Rav, zl, was also staying at that hotel. While Rav Freifeld was eating breakfast, Rebbetzin Kahaneman, his wife, entered the room and approached the head waiter. They seemed to be looking all over the room for something. The head waiter walked out and returned a few minutes later with a vase. The Rebbetzin then proceeded to put a flower into the vase and place it on the table which was designated for the Ponevezer Rav. No other table in the dining room had a flower on it. It is the small things that can make a difference. A single flower strategically placed can lift a person's spirit, enliven his days and bring light into his life. The Rebbetzin wanted it for her husband - symmetry.

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**

**Shemot**

It should be obvious to all that Moshe is a very unlikely choice to head the Jewish people, to redeem them from Egyptian bondage, and to bring the

Torah down from Heaven to the Jewish people and eventually to all of humankind. It is also clear that Moshe would not be the likely one to guide them through the vicissitudes of war, thirst and forty years sojourn in the desert of Sinai.

Rambam writes that Moshe was of short temper. The Torah records for us that he was raised in the palace of the Egyptian Pharaoh. He kills an Egyptian and covers up his deed. He is a shepherd for a pagan priest of Midyan and marries one of his daughters. He is separated from his people for sixty years before returning to them and proclaiming himself as their leader. Not really too impressive a resume for the greatest of all humans and of the Jewish people! But there it is for all to see and study. So, what is the message that the Torah is sending to us with this narrative?

Who needs to know of his previous life before becoming the Moshe we revere? After all, the Torah does not explicitly tell us about the youth experiences of Noach, Avraham and other great men of Israel and the world. So, why all the detail – much of it not too pleasant – about the early life of Moshe? The question almost begs itself of any student of Torah. The Torah is always concise and chary of words, so this concentration of facts and stories about Moshe's early life is somewhat puzzling.

What is clear from biblical narrative and Jewish and world history generally is that Heaven does not play by our rules nor does it conduct itself by our preconceived norms and notions. We never would have chosen David as our king, Amos as our prophet or Esther as our savior from destruction. Jewish history in a great measure has been formed by unlikely heroes, unexpected champions and surprising personalities.

It is almost as if Heaven wishes to mock our pretensions and upset our conventional wisdom. Oftentimes it is our stubborn nature, our haughtiness to think that we are always privy to God's plans and methods that has led us to stray far from truth and reality. The greatness of the generation that left Egypt was that it not only believed in the God of Israel but believed in His servant Moshe as well.

Throughout his career as leader of Israel, according to Midrash, the rebels would always hold Moshe's past against him. They could not come to terms with Moshe as being their leader for he did not fit the paradigm that they had constructed for themselves. Eventually this disbelief in Moshe translated itself into a disbelief in God as well and doomed that generation to perish in the desert of Sinai.

God's plans, actions and choices, so to speak, are inscrutable. The prophet taught us that God stated: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts and My ways are not your ways." Moshe's life story is a striking example of this truism.

Shabat shalom

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

***The person in the parsha: Spiritual time management***

**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

**December 31, 2015**

*On learning a crucial lesson for life.*

The two old men couldn't have been more different from each other. Yet they both taught me the identical life lesson.

The first, a cagey old Irishman, was one of my mentors in the postgraduate psychotherapy training program in which I was enrolled many years ago. He wrote quite a few books in his day, but they are all out of print now and nearly forgotten, like so many other wise writings

The other was an aged Rabbi, several of whose Yiddish discourses I was privileged to hear in person. He was but moderately famous in his lifetime, but is much more well-known nowadays because of the popularity of his posthumously published writings.

The lesson was about the importance of time management. Neither of these two elderly gentlemen used that term, which is of relatively recent coinage. Yet their words, while far fewer than the words of the numerous contemporary popular books on the subject of time management, made a lifelong impression upon me.

It was long after my encounter with these elderly gentlemen that I first realized that their lesson was implicit in a verse in this week's Torah portion, Parashat Shemot.

The Irishman, Dr. Hugh Mullan, was a master psychotherapist with fifty years of experience under his belt. A small group of us gathered in his office every Tuesday evening. We went there not only for his wisdom, but for the warm and comfortable furnishings and splendid view of the city of Washington, D.C.

Dr. Mullan was an existentialist philosopher. He was heavily influenced by his encounters with Martin Buber, and because of this, he felt a special affinity to me, thinking that since Buber and I were both Jewish, we must have had much in common. He wasn't aware that my Judaism was very different from Buber's, but I wasn't about to disabuse him of his assumption. He was a diligent and persistent teacher and, true to his philosophical perspective, doggedly encouraged us to appreciate the human core of the patients we were treating. He was convinced that he had a foolproof method of comprehending that human core. "Tell me how the patient uses his time, how he organizes his daily schedule, and I will tell you the secret foundation of his soul."

Dr. Mullan firmly believed that you knew all you needed to know about a person if you knew how he used his time. Or, as he put it, "if he used his time, and how he used it." He would then make his lesson more personal, and would ask, carefully making eye contact with each of us, "How do you busy yourself?"

In the summer following that postgraduate course, I took advantage of the rare opportunity of hearing the ethical discourses, the mussar shmuessen, of the revered Rabbi Elya Lopian. He too spoke of the fundamental importance of one's use of time, and he too, though he did not even know the term, was quite an existentialist.

He began his remarks quietly, almost in a whisper. Gradually his voice reached its crescendo, and when it did he uttered the words I will never forget: "Der velt sagt," he said in Yiddish, "the world says that time is money. But I say time is life!" I was a young man then, but not too young to appreciate the profound meaningfulness of that simple statement. Time is life.

He went on to say that we all allow ourselves to become busy, and busyness detracts from life.

It was quite a few years later that it dawned upon me that the Irish psychiatrist and the Jewish spiritual guide were preceded in their teaching by the 18th century ethicist and mystic, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, known by the initials of his name as the Ramchal. Furthermore, the Ramchal was preceded in antiquity by none other than the Pharaoh himself.

In the second chapter of his widely studied ethical treatise, Mesillat Yesharim, Path of the Upright, Ramchal writes of the tactics of the yetzer, the personification of the evil urge which is buried within each of us: "A man who goes through life without taking the time to consider his ways is like a blind man who walks along the edge of a river... This is, in fact, one of the cunning artifices of the evil yetzer, who always imposes upon men such strenuous tasks that they have no time left to note wither they are drifting. For he knows that, if they would pay the least attention to their conduct, they would change their ways instantly..."

"This ingenuity is somewhat like that of Pharaoh, who commanded, 'Let the heavier work be laid upon the men, that they may labor therein, and let them not regard lying words' (Exodus 5:9). For Pharaoh's purpose was not only to prevent the Israelites from having any leisure to make plans or take counsel against him, but by subjecting them to unceasing toil, to deprive them also of the opportunity to reflect."

To become so busy and have no time to reflect, no time to really live, is bondage. Ramchal's insight into Pharaoh's scheme epitomizes the essential nature of our years of exile in Egypt. To have no time, that is slavery. How prescient were the words of Rav Elya Lopian. Time is life. And how germane is his teaching for contemporary man, who despite the "time-saving" technological devices which surround him is even busier than those who came before him. Contemporary man has no time for himself, certainly no quality time, and thus no life.

Time is life.

Millennia ago, an Egyptian tyrant knew this secret.

Centuries ago, an Italian Jewish mystic was keenly aware of it.

Decades ago, I learned it from a Gentile existentialist psychiatrist and a gentle and pious rabbi.

It is the secret of spiritual time management, and it is the secret of life.

Would that we would learn it today.

Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb is the Executive Vice President, Emeritus of the Orthodox Union. © Arutz Sheva, All Rights Reserved

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**Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Shemos**

***The True Mark of an Adam Gadol***

The pasuk in Parshas Shmos says: "The boy grew up (vayigdal hayeled) and she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh and he was a son to her..."

[Shmos 2:10] The next pasuk states, "It happened in those days that Moshe grew up (vayigdal Moshe) and went out to see his brethren and he saw their burdens..." Rashi comments on the apparent redundancy of the term vayigdal [and he grew up]. As we have mentioned in previous years, the pasukim refer to different types of maturity. Vayigdal hayeled is referring to the fact that Moshe became physically a bigger child. However, the words vayigdal Moshe teach us that Moshe became a Gadol in the sense that we say "an adam Gadol" – a great person.

Moshe became a great person by virtue of one thing: He went out to his brethren and saw their burdens. Moshe had the option of remaining in the lap of luxury in Pharaoh's palace and turning a blind eye to his Jewish brethren. However, he chose otherwise. As Rashi says, "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them." The true mark of greatness is when a person expands his own universe and both thinks and cares about other people.

The resume of Moshe Rabbeinu up until the point where he is given his mission to take the Jews out of Egypt is extremely thin. There are very few things we know about his early life. However, the few incidents we do know about those years have a common thread – feeling compassion for a fellow Jew. This defines greatness. He had the ability to expand his concerns and his horizons and not just think about himself. The extent to which a person can feel the sense of pain of another is a mark of a person's own greatness. A famous Gemara [Megillah 28a] discusses the reasons various Amoraim attributed to their own longevity. Rav Zeira explained to his disciples that he felt he merited his long life because (among other reasons given), "I was never happy at the downfall of my friend". A basic philosophy of the Torah is "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice." [Mishlei 24:17]. However, when we think about Rav Zeira's comment about himself, it does not seem to represent personal greatness. It merely seems like basic decency on the part of the Rabbinic scholar.

I once saw – in a Chassidische Sefer – that the expression "I did not rejoice at the downfall of my friend" ("lo sasti b'takalas chaveiree") means "When I was celebrating a personal simcha and heard that another Jew had a downfall, I could no longer rejoice even at my own simcha, knowing that another Jew was in pain." I had a legitimate reason to be happy: I married off a child, a baby was born to my wife and I, whatever it may be – but if I

knew someone else was suffering, I could not fully rejoice at my own simcha, because of the compassion and empathy I had for that other person. This is the concept of "Vayigdal Moshe" – he became a Gadol [great person] because "Vayare b'sivlosam" – he saw the suffering of his brothers: "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them."

In September 1970, Rav Hutner, zt"l, was held hostage by Palestinian terrorists who hijacked the plane on which he was flying from Israel to New York. He and his fellow Jewish passengers were hostages in Jordan for several weeks. Finally, Rav Hutner was released. When Rav Hutner arrived back to America, his students and admirers made a huge welcoming reception at a hangar in Kennedy Airport. Thousands of people came. All of Yeshivas Chaim Berlin came, almost all of Brooklyn came, the entire Yeshiva world came.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, was among those who came to welcome his colleague. Rav Moshe walked into the hangar and observed the singing and dancing and music. Rav Moshe walked over to the band and ordered them to stop playing. He observed, "Rav Hutner is back and it is a tremendous simcha. He is a great man and we have to celebrate his return home.

However, there are seven other families in Flatbush whose relatives are still held in captivity. How can we have a band playing when there are still other Jews who do not know whether their relatives are going to live or die?"

This is the attribute practiced by Rav Zeira: "I could not rejoice when my friend had a downfall." This is a function of Vayigdal Moshe. The true measure of the greatness of a person is the measure of the expanse of his universe. A person caring for others almost as much as he cares for himself is the true mark of an Adam Gadol.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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**Rabbi Benjamin Yudin**

***Having Faith in Faith***

"Aharon spoke all the words that Hashem had spoken to Moshe; and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed, and they heard that Hashem had remembered the Children of Israel and the He saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves." (Shemos 4:30,31)

The flow of the pesukim would lead one to understand that the people believed in Hashem due to their seeing the signs/miracles that Aharon performed, i.e. the staff changing to a snake and then again back to a staff, the leprous and healed hand, and the water of Egypt turning to blood, caused the people to believe. The Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 5:13), however, has a very different understanding of the pesukim. If indeed their belief came as a result of the signs, it should not have said "the people believed", but rather "the people saw", since when we describe something as a belief we are referring to something one cannot see tangibly with his eyes. The Medrash therefore teaches that they believed in the message of Moshe, not the signs. They believed in the exact formula that was safeguarded by Serach bas Asher - that the redeemer would present the credentials of "pakod yifkod", that Hashem has not forgotten you. Why, then, were the signs/miracles presented before the people? The Yefei Toar on the Medrash suggests that it was a dress rehearsal which was preparing Aharon for his presentation before Pharoh.

The powerful message of this parsha is that faith does not only reflect the supernatural, rather it creates it.

The miracle of Chanukah came about only after the effort of the Jewish Nation and their unrelenting desire to utilize pure oil to consecrate the

menorah caused Hashem to respond in kind. The Talmud (Chulin 91b) teaches that Yaakov was privileged to have his majestic dream of the ladder only after reaching Charan and realizing his failure to pray where his forefathers did, and began to retrace his steps; only then did he merit k'fitzat haderech, the miraculous contracting of the earth on his behalf. The daughter of Pharoh was determined to save baby Moshe, even though he was impossibly out of reach. She stretched out her hand, and Hashem miraculously extended it to reach Moshe. Man has to take the first step, and his belief triggers the Divine miraculous response. While winding the strap of the Tefillin shel yad around our finger like a wedding ring, we recite the passuk, "v'eirastich li b'emunah - I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness" (Hoshea 2:21-22). The Yalkut Shimoni (619) comments that we are redeemed from exile in the merit of our emunah. For example, we merited Divine inspiration and sang the shirah upon our deliverance at the Red Sea in the merit of the emunah we displayed during that episode.

The Chidushei Harim insightfully asks "why does the Torah introduce the shirah with "v'yaaminu b'Hashem - they believed in Hashem", when in reality they saw Hashem? They literally pointed with their finger and said, "zeh Keili v'anveihu - this is my God and I will glorify Him", so where was there room for belief? They saw/knew Hashem and were convinced of His control of nature and His mastery of the universe by the events they witnessed! The answer lies in the juxtaposition of "v'yaaminu" and "az yoshir". The passuk should have said, "az shar - then they sang", in the past tense; why does it instead say "az yoshir" in the future tense? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 91b) teaches that this is a source in the Torah for the belief in techiyas hameisim - the resurrection of the dead, because the passuk is telling us that Moshe will sing again in the future. While the Jews saw Hashem in all His might and glory at the splitting of the Red Sea, one thing they did not see was techiyas hameisim. A Jew cannot live without emunah, which is our constant connection to Hashem, and thus even at a moment of great revelation like krias Yam Suf we still needed to have belief in Hashem. The first of the Aseres Hadibros, which explicitly includes the belief that Hashem took us out of Egypt, is understood by the Sefer Mitzvot Katan (by Rabbi Yaakov of Corbeil) to also include belief in Hashem as the future redeemer; just as He redeemed us from Egypt, so will He redeem us in the future. The requirement for our active belief is exemplified in the teaching (Sanhedrin 90a) that one who does not believe in techiyas hameisim will not be resurrected.

As we start anew Sefer Shemos, the book of our geulah/redemption, we are not only reading about our past, but also learning how to affect the forthcoming geulah. The Talmud (Sotah 11b) speaks of the incredible faith of the Jewish women in Egypt, cajoling their husbands to procreate and give rise to the next generation despite the horrific environment. Hashem responded in kind by miraculously preserving and tending to these children. Let us realize the very special times in which we are living. If our tefillos are not as effective as we would like, perhaps it is because we do not really believe in their efficacy and power. May our emunah in Hashem, His Torah, His people, and His land, speedily have the meritorious effect described by the navi Hoshea, just as it has in the past (ma'aseh avos siman labonim).

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**The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz**

***Shmot: Necessary Anti-Semitism***

***December 28, 2015***

*There is no medicine to cure hatred. -Publilius Syrus*

Anti-Semitism has plagued the Jews from the moment we became a people, perhaps even beforehand. The first organized expression of anti-Semitism occurred during the formation of the people of Israel, from a large family to a nation, during their centuries in Egypt. The Egyptians, slowly but surely, enslaved most of the Jewish population.

The Sfat Emet in 5634 (1874) quotes the Kabbalistic tome, the Zohar, which states that the slave labor the Egyptians forced over the Jewish people was actually a good thing, as it kept the young Israelite nation from mixing with the other nationalities. He continues that it was God himself who planted hatred of the Jewish nation in Egyptian hearts – that the Egyptians really wanted to like the Jews, but that it was a divine decree in order to distance the two peoples from each other.

The Sfat Emet then states that hatred of the Jews did create a widening gap between the two nations and that the further the Israelites moved from the Egyptians, the stronger Israel actually became.

May we be strong enough as a people and no longer “need” anti-Semitism in the world.

Shabbat Shalom

*Dedication - To Masa Israel that does so much for strengthening Jewish identity. Ben-Tzion Spitz is the Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of two books of Biblical Fiction and over 400 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes The Blogs | The Times of Israel*

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**Rav Kook List**

**Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

**Psalm 144: No Breach in Our Street**

In this psalm, King David acknowledged God’s assistance in his battles against treacherous foes. The chapter concludes with a prayer for hardy sons and regal daughters, plentiful crops and peaceful streets.

אלוֹפֵינוּ מְטַבְּלִים, אֵין-פְּרִיץ וְאֵין יוֹצֵאת, וְאֵין צְוֹתָהּ בְּרוּחַבְתֵּינוּ. תְּהִלִּים קָלֵד: אִד'

“Our leaders (alufeinu) are burdened. There is no breach nor rumors going out, and no outcry in our streets.” (Psalms 144:14)

The Hebrew word alufeinu is not clear. Many of the commentaries understand it to mean ‘our cattle’ - a reference to the healthy state of the livestock. The Talmud, however, interpreted alufeinu as leaders and teachers. “Our leaders are burdened” - they are laden with weighty responsibilities in matters of Torah and mitzvot (Berakhot 17b).

But what about the continuation of the verse - the wish for tranquil streets, without breaches and outcries? What do Torah scholars have to do with quiet streets?

'Burning Food in Public'

The Talmud explains that this is a prayer that our rabbis not be plagued by errant students. The Sages noted that many of the Jewish people’s greatest scholars and prophets suffered from unworthy disciples and associates. King David’s chief counselor was the traitorous Ahitophel, who backed the rebellion of David’s son Absalom. King Saul employed Doeg the Edomite, who was responsible for the slaughter of the innocent priests of Nov. And the prophet Elisha had to endure the ruses of his greedy servant Gehazi.

The Talmud explains that the phrase “in our streets” means that that we will not be disgraced by “a student who burns his dish in public.” The expression “to burn one’s dish” means to follow a ruinous and heretical path. Doing so “in public” means that the wayward student has openly promulgated such a path, seeking to lead others astray.

Still, this curious idiom requires clarification. Ruining one’s dish, Rav Kook explained, is an appropriate metaphor for one who perverts the words of Torah for erroneous and dangerous ideas. The ingredients were healthy, the food was wholesome - but the final dish was ruined. So, too, the words of Torah are certainly correct and noble; but the wicked misuse them for devious and unscrupulous purposes.

Where did the errant student go wrong? He saw his teachers expounding the words of Torah, using traditional methods of exegesis in an appropriate and sound fashion. The student thought that he too would establish a new vision - but one contradictory to Judaism’s fundamental tenets.

For this reason, the reference to the errant disciple is inferred from the word בְּרוּחַבְתֵּינוּ (birhovoteinu). Literally, this means “in our streets.” But it can also mean, “in our expansion,” - i.e., our methods of expanding and elaborating the Torah’s teachings.

This is certainly a matter that deserves earnest prayer: that irresponsible students do not misuse the tools for interpreting the Torah in order to distort the true meaning of God’s message.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 87)

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**Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

**BS”D - Parashat Vayechi and Shmot 5776**

**Dec 31, 2015**

**Moshe, the Runaway from Responsibilities**

At the heart of our parsha is one of the most emotionally-charged human dramas in history, before which the greatest plays of Shakespeare pale. It is the story of the child with the Hebrew name Tuvia, who later became the Egyptian called Moshe.

The Torah relates that Moshe went out one day “to his brothers and he saw their suffering, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew of his brothers.” Moshe is so reviled by the scene that he kills the Egyptian.

Why was Moshe so shocked at the beating of a Jewish slave? Did he not know that millions of Jews were being beaten daily?

If indeed the conduct of the Egyptian taskmaster justified his being punished, why did Moshe opt to run away rather than bring the matter before his adopted father?

Of all the people in the land of Midian, how is it that Moshe finds himself “by chance” in the house of Yitro?

At the scene of the mysterious burning bush for a period of seven days, Moshe rejects HaShem’s command that he return to Egypt. How does one argue with the Creator for even an instant, much more a whole week?

How does Moshe enter the palace and attain an audience with Paro seemingly at will? And when he orders Paro to free millions of slaves, in effect suggesting the undermining of the Egyptian economy, why does Paro tolerate Moshe at all? Why does he not give the order to rid himself of this man?

At the first meeting with Paro which transpired before the first plague, a full year before the death of the first-born Egyptians, Moshe already warns Paro that his own bechor (first born) will “die.” But Paro had no bechor, his only child being his daughter Batya (or Bitya)!

I suggest the following reservedly and with apologies if I am wrong.

We meet Moshe for the first time as an infant, with his real name Tuvia – the one, according to Chazal, that was given to him by his parents. The next time he appears in the Torah as an adult with the Egyptian name Moshe.

As a member of the royal family, being the adopted son of Batya, he was certainly well versed in all aspects of Egyptian culture. He undoubtedly completed the officer’s training course at “West Point” and was the honored guest at the cocktail parties given by the movers and shakers of Egyptian society.

Don’t fool yourself into believing that Amram and Yocheved had visitation rights with the young Moshe, at which opportunities his true father could have taught him Yiddishkeit. Moshe was culturally an Egyptian. He was the beloved “son” of Paro; and as the Midrash tells us, Paro would often hold him on his lap. Paro, his daughter, and many of the older courtiers (and probably Moshe himself), were aware of Moshe’s background. He was a Hebrew who was adopted by the childless Batya.

With this in mind, Paro – who very much loved the clever and handsome Moshe – was anxious to eradicate every semblance of Moshe’s past from the boy’s consciousness, and certainly anxious to hide from him the intolerable servitude of the Hebrew people. The way to do this was to distance Moshe from life’s realities. And as Rashi comments, Paro appointed Moshe al beito

– “over his palace”, whereby Moshe would remain far from matters of the realm by having to concentrate on the complex affairs of the royal court. One day, Moshe ventures out to see the hinterland. He comes upon a totally unexpected scene – the mass oppression of the Jewish people as the basis of the Egyptian economy. He is overwhelmed when he sees a taskmaster beating a Jewish slave. Moshe’s sense of outrage arouses him to punish the oppressor.

Moshe is not distraught because he killed the man, but because he discovers that Paro, the man he loves as a father, is capable of this inhuman treatment of a people who did only good for the Egyptian nation. It is like waking up one day to find out that your father was the commandant of the Auschwitz extermination camp.

Moshe could have confronted Paro with the fact that he was now aware of the secret which Paro had been holding back from him. But to do so would be to accuse this man whom he loved, of heinous crimes, this man who had saved him from death and had provided him with the life of a prince. Moshe’s only way out was to escape, because to fulfill his moral obligation of standing up to Paro and the entire Egyptian leadership was too awesome a task.

Moshe arrives at the home of Yitro. Who was Yitro? The Talmud (Tractate Sota) tells us that Paro had three advisors: Yitro, Bil’am and Ei’yov. When Paro brought up the matter of enslaving the Jews, Bil’am agreed, Ei’yov gave no opinion and Yitro RAN AWAY.

HaShem plans it that Moshe, the RUNAWAY from his responsibilities, finds himself in Midian at the home of the original runaway. While sitting around the fire on a cold winter night, Moshe looks at Yitro and thinks that if Yitro had not run away from his moral responsibilities and had, instead, opposed Paro’s proposal to enslave the Jews outright, there would have been no slavery. And Yitro, who had known Moshe as a child, looks at him and thinks that Moshe could have been the only person in the kingdom to influence Paro, if he had not run away!

One day, while Moshe is tending the sheep at Mount Chorev, he sees a wondrous sight – a burning bush which is not consumed. He draws closer and hears a voice, but it is not the voice of HaShem. It is the influence of this holy place which arouses Moshe’s conscience and, for seven days, paralyzes him to that spot. Should he return and confront Paro with the fact that he is a despot or let time run its course? At the end of seven days, Moshe resolves his conflict and decides to return and help his Jewish family. At this point, and only after Moshe decides to do the right thing, HaShem appears to him. Moshe returns to Egypt and to the palace – to the place of his childhood, to his beloved “mother” Batya, and to Paro whom he dearly loves.

I picture the scene as follows: Moshe arrives at the palace gates, after being away (according to one opinion) for forty years. He asks the sentry to allow him to enter the palace in order to speak with Paro. The sentry asks him if he has an appointment? Moshe says he does not, but requests that Paro be informed of his presence. The sentry approaches Paro’s personal secretary telling him that a certain “Moshe” wants to see Paro. The secretary probably answers that without a previous appointment no one can see Paro. The sentry tells the secretary that the strange-looking man demands an audience. The secretary goes into the throne room and tells Paro that a certain “Moshe” wishes an audience. Paro jumps up and calls out to Batya to come immediately. “Moshe is back!” Moshe comes in. Paro looks at Moshe and asks, “Where have you been all this time? Not a letter. Not an e-mail. Look. Your mother Batya who saved your life, look at her eyes which have not stopped crying out of longing for you.” Then Paro says to Moshe, “What do you have to say for yourself?”

Moshe looks at Paro and at his beloved Batya, and with tears in his eyes calls out to Paro sh’lach et ami – “let my people go!” Paro descends from his throne and says, “Moshe, WE are your people!” Moshe answers, “The Israelite slaves are my people.” And Moshe continues, “And if you do not send out the Jews, then HaShem will kill your firstborn son.” But since Paro has no son, Moshe is telling Paro that if he does not free the Jews, then he

Moshe will no longer feel as a son to Paro. Paro cannot bear this threat from his beloved Moshe, but he also cannot free the slaves.

I cannot prove that this is in fact what transpired, but it must have been very similar. It must have been Paro’s love for Moshe that prevented Paro from killing the man who would overturn the entire national order. And it had to be a person like Moshe, who was intimately associated with Paro and the royal court, who could come and not be overwhelmed by the grandeur of the ambience.

It is Moshe’s love for Paro and Paro’s rejection that stirs the highly emotional reaction recorded in our Parasha when Paro warns Moshe that he never wants to see his face again.

The emotional scenes between Moshe and Paro end in a very surprising way. Chazal say that the entire Egyptian army was destroyed at the crossing of Yam Suf except for Paro himself. HaShem spares Paro’s life because of the mutual love between Moshe and his Egyptian “father”.

If not for HaShem’s direct intervention in the life of Moshe, Prince of Egypt, master of the royal court, he would never have become Moshe Rabbeinu (our rabbi).

It was HaShem who brought Moshe to the place at the exact moment when an Egyptian taskmaster was beating a Jewish slave.

Of all the many thousands of homes in Midian, it was HaShem who led Moshe to the home of Yitro, the original runaway from moral responsibility. And HaShem led Moshe’s flock to Har Chorev to witness the burning bush.

#### *American Olim Selected by Hashem*

Similar to Moshe Rabbeinu, the people I know who came on aliya from the US went through a ‘God-induced experience’. It is as if HaShem holds a pincer and plucks out the individuals whom He wants to bring to Eretz Yisrael.

In these weekly writings, I try not to relate personal matters. However, every time parashat Va’yechi comes around, I am gripped with feelings of thanksgiving to HaShem for all that He has done for me, as I will explain.

#### *Efrayim and Menashe*

In parashat Va’yechi, Yosef brings his sons Efrayim and Menashe to receive a deathbed blessing from their grandfather Ya’akov.

Ya’akov looks at the the two young men standing before him and calls out:

מי אלה

Who are these (young men)!?

And Yosef replies:

בני הם אשר נתן לי אלהים בזה

They are my sons whom HaShem has given me here

What happened at that moment?

Human nature is such that on a person’s deathbed, life passes before his consciousness as a closing epilogue of a book.

Ya’akov probably reviewed his life of 147 years, recalling the sweet and less- than-sweet experiences. The sweet years were when he learned Torah with his illustrious grandfather Avraham and illustrious father Yitzchak. It was when they took the young Ya’akov into the highest realms of kedusha through Halacha and mysticism, and then how he transmitted these teachings to his great sons, who in turn would pass them on to their children.

Except for his years in exile at the home of Lavan, Ya’akov surrounded himself with people of moral and ethical stature and kedusha – his parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren who were all ‘bnei Torah’.

Yosef enters and interrupts Ya’akov’s sweet memories of a totally spiritual life in order to have his father bless Efrayim and Menashe.

Ya’akov looks at his two grandsons but cannot believe what he sees. Two Egyptians in dress, mannerisms and language. And Ya’akov calls out

מי אלה

Who are these (young men)!??

Yosef replies:

בני הם אשר נתן לי אלהים בזה

They are my sons whom HaShem has given me here.

Imagine the dialogue between them as Yosef explains to his father that he had been sold as a slave here in Egypt and that it was the best he could do under the circumstances. "The land here is unholy. There are no yeshivot, there is no kedusha. I bring my sons to you for a bracha that HaShem should arouse their pure Jewish souls to return to a life of kedusha."

At that moment, Ya'akov could have rejected the two young men whose other grandfather was Poti-Ferah the priest of Ohn. But not only does he not reject them, he elevates Efrayim and Menashe to a full and equal status with his other sons to be the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel.

#### ***A Personal Story: My Yitro and My Burning Bush***

My father was born in 1904 in the holy city of Tzfat. He entered chaidar at three years old. At his Bar Mitzva he received a shtreimel, as did all the other young Tsanzer chassidim. Shortly afterwards, my grandfather Nachman Kahana took his young son to Galizia to learn at the yeshiva in the town that was later to be known as Auschwitz, where our family had relatives.

From there, my father went to learn at the Chatam Sofer yeshiva in Pressburg, Slovakia. Eventually, he arrived in New York.

My parents married and settled in Flatbush where my father served as a pulpit rabbi. My father was a great talmid chacham, and my mother's father was known as the 'gai'indiker shas' (the walking Talmud), because he knew the entire Talmud by heart.

My brother Meir and I grew up as all the other kids in the neighborhood who were of Italian and Irish descent.

It is not difficult for me to imagine what my parents thought of my brother and me. We were very much American despite the kippa on our heads. We studied at the Yeshiva of Flatbush of 70 years ago, which was far different than it is today. It was a yeshiva in name only, but not in spirit nor in its curriculum. As an example, we did not begin learning Gemara until the eighth grade, only twice a week, and each time for 45 minutes.

My mother's parents, who came from the city of Dvinsk in Latvia where my grandfather was on the bet din of the illustrious Rav Meir Simcha (Or Samayach), probably said to themselves like Ya'akov:

מי אלה

Who are these (young men)!?"

And my parents surely replied, like Yosef:

בני הם אשר נתן לי אלהים בזה

They are my sons whom HaShem has given me here in the United States of America!

My parents decided that I would continue at the Yeshiva of Flatbush High School, where, at best, I would become a chemist or, at worst, a Conservadox rabbi in a place like Corpus Cristi, Texas. I would have marched for the Blacks in Selma, Alabama or would today be a backer of the BDS movement against the 'racist, fascist, apartheid State of Israel'.

What saved me from a fate worse than death was the unpredictable hand of HaShem.

My brother Meir was a student at the Brooklyn Talmudical Academy (BTA). One day, when he was 16, he announced to our parents that he wanted to transfer to Lincoln High School because he wanted to be a member of their renowned track team.

I recall my father saying that he would not prevent him from transferring, but he predicted that it would not be long before Meir would come back begging to return to yeshiva. My father also required Meir to learn Gemara every day with a private teacher.

The deal was struck. Into our lives stepped Rav Moshe Bunim Purotinsky z"l, from the Mirer Yeshiva who taught Meir every day. A few months later, Meir returned to BTA because of the very goishe atmosphere of the public HS and because he could not compete with the black students who are born with springs in their legs.

Rav Moshe Bunim once asked my father where I was to continue for high school. When he was told that my destination was the Yeshiva of Flatbush HS, he convinced my parents to send me to Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef HS on

Manhattan's lower East Side, where I was awarded the first prize for Gemara studies at graduation.

I owe much to President Lincoln and the NY Board of Education for naming a school after him and to Meir's desire to join their track team. They were responsible for bringing Rav Moshe Bunim Purotinsky to my family, and he in turn was responsible for making a 180-degree change in my life.

Rav Moshe Bunim was my Yitro and my burning bush, behind whom stood HaShem eventually bringing me and my family and my wife's parents to Eretz Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom

See more at: <http://nachmankahana.com/vayechi-and-shmot-5776/#sthash.WZ6DFQwl.dpuf>

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**What do I do with my Sheimos?**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

*I know that the name of the parsha is Shemos, and not Sheimos, but...*

#### **Question #1:**

One of the *shul's baalei batim* calls the *rav* with the following concern: "The *shul's sheimos* collection is a fire hazard – a catastrophe waiting to happen. Can we just burn everything before a dangerous fire breaks out?"

#### **Question #2:**

I receive the following question from Cheryl:

"Rabbi, this has got to be the most interesting e-mail question you receive today. I am on a cruise in the Mediterranean, courtesy of, and with, my not-yet-observant parents, and today I spent the day looking at Jewish sites and other tourist attractions at our port-of-call. At one of the places, an elderly gentile lady gave me a large bag of old, tattered *siddurim* – no value. I have no idea what to do with them, and they are with me now in my cabin on the ship. May I bury them at sea?"

#### **Response:**

Answering the above questions provides an excellent opportunity to understand the topic called either *genizah* or *sheimos*. The particular emphasis in this article will be: what is the proper way to dispose of worn-out *seforim*?

#### **Should it be called *sheimos* or *genizah*?**

Which is the "correct" term? The word used in Modern Hebrew for a religious item whose discarding must be handled in a special way is *genizah*, which literally means that they must be *hidden*. Indeed, this is the term used by the *Gemara* for the process of disposing of these items, and it is easy to understand how the term came to refer to items that require *genizah*, although technically *genizah* refers to the place where the item is placed. The Yiddish word for these items is *sheimos*, whose source is the term *sheimos she'einam nimchakim*, meaning the names of G-d that the Torah prohibits erasing. In *Parshas Re'eih*, the Torah commands: *Destroy all the places where the gentiles that you are driving out worshipped their gods, whether they are on high mountains, on hills, or beneath foliate trees. Raze their altars, smash their pillars, burn their worshipped trees, and demolish the images of their gods. Obliterate the names (of their deities) from that place (Devarim 12:2-4).*

The Torah then closes this passage: *Do not do this to Hashem your G-d!*

When the Torah states: *Obliterate the names from that place. Do not do this to Hashem your G-d*, it is prohibiting obliterating Hashem's Name (*Shabbos 120b; Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 6:1*). The *Gemara (Shavuos 35a)* calls the names of Hashem that we may not erase *sheimos she'einam*

*nimchakim*, which later became the origin of the term *sheimos* as a generic term to describe religious items whose discarding must be handled in a special way. Thus, either word, *genizah* or *sheimos*, may be used.

#### **That which we call Hashem...**

Although there are many expressions, such as the All-merciful One and the Creator, which refer to *Hashem*, *halachah* recognizes a major distinction between erasing the actual holy names of *Hashem*, and between erasing terms that describe *Hashem*, but are not actual names. Erasing the actual "names" of *Hashem*, the *sheimos she'einam nimchakim*, violates a *lo saaseh* of the Torah, one of the 613 mitzvos, and qualifies as a prohibition as serious as desecrating *Yom Tov* or eating non-kosher (see *Makkos* 22a). The names of *Hashem*, of which there are about ten, include, among others, *Elokim*, *Elokeinu*, *Keil*, *Shakai*, *Tzevakos*, *Eloak*, and, of course, the names I will call *havayah* and *adnus*. (Following the usual practice, I have substituted the "k" sound somewhere in the above names, so that readers do not err and recite these holy names in vain.) Erasing any of these names is prohibited *min haTorah*.

#### **Erasing attributes**

On the other hand, expressions that describe attributes of *Hashem* -- such as *Rachum*, All-merciful one; *Chanun*, He Who bestows kindness -- may be erased, even when they refer to *Hashem* (*Shavuos* 35a; *Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, 6:5). The Torah's prohibition, *do not do this to Hashem your G-d*, applies only to a name of *Hashem*, not to an attribute that describes *Hashem*.

Similarly, there is no prohibition to erase His names written in other languages, such as G-d, even when spelled with the "o" in the middle (*Shach, Yoreh Deah* 179:11), although one must exercise care that these names do not become treated disrespectfully (*Urim*, 27:2, quoted also by *Nesivos HaMishpat* and *Aruch HaShulchan* ad loc.). The reason we are accustomed to spelling the name G-d, rather than with the added "o," is because of concern that the paper it is written on might end up in the garbage or treated in some other disrespectful way.

#### **Does the prohibition include commentaries, Gemaros, et cetera?**

Although the Torah violation, *do not do this to Hashem your G-d*, applies only to actual names of *Hashem*, *Chazal* prohibited destroying other holy writings, including commentaries, works of *Mishnah*, *Gemara* or *halachah*, and other Torah works (see *Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 6:8; *Shu't Tashbeitz* 1:2).

#### **What happens when they wear out?**

Granted that the Torah prohibited destroying works that include *Hashem's* Name, eventually a *sefer Torah* becomes worn out and unusable. What does one do with it, then, if it is prohibited to destroy it? The precise details of how to dispose of these items is exactly the topic for today's article.

#### **Buried in earthenware**

The *Gemara* teaches that worn out *sifrei Torah* should be placed in earthenware vessels and then buried next to a *talmid chacham*, or, minimally, next to someone who learned *halachah*, meaning someone who at least studied *Mishnayos* (*Megillah* 26b). Placing them inside these vessels forestalls the decomposition of the *sifrei Torah* for a very long time (*Ran*), and placing them together with someone who studied Torah is a more respectful way of treating *sifrei Torah* that can no longer be used. It is very unfortunate that *Hashem's* Name becomes obliterated, even in an indirect way, and we must delay the decomposition for as long as possible.

#### **Genizah of printed sefarim**

From after the time of the *Gemara* until the invention of the printing press in the 1400's, we find little discussion about how to dispose of holy works. Since everything was handwritten and therefore scarce and very expensive, we can presume that there were not a lot of worn out *sifrei kodesh*, and there was no difficulty in following the *Gemara's* description for their retirement. However, after the invention of the printing press, the sheer volume of printed material increased geometrically, and we find *halachic* discussion

concerning whether wornout printed *sefarim* must be disposed of in the same manner as the *Gemara* describes for *sifrei Torah*.

#### **The teshuvah of the Be'er Sheva**

The earliest responsum I have seen on the subject is printed in the *sefer Be'er Sheva*, authored by one of the great Torah leaders of the early seventeenth century, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Eilenburg. He was a *talmid* of the *Levush*, and his *sefer* includes a *haskamah* from the *Maharal* of Prague! The *Be'er Sheva* reports that in his day, it was not uncommon for people to burn the worn-out printed editions of *sifrei kodesh*. Those who burned the *sifrei kodesh* claimed that this was more respectful than burying them, because burial often resulted in the *sifrei kodesh* being unearthed and therefore becoming treated disrespectfully.

The *Be'er Sheva* takes strong issue with this approach, noting that it is prohibited to destroy any type of *kisvei hakodesh*, and that burning them certainly violates *halachah*. The claim that burying the *sefarim* leads to their desecration is unfounded, he states, because the desecration is a result of not burying the *genizah* correctly. As we mentioned above, the *Gemara* describes burying in earthenware vessels. If, indeed, all *genizah* were to be buried this way, argues the *Be'er Sheva*, then the *kisvei hakodesh* would never be strewn about after their burial. He concludes that worn-out, printed Torah material must be buried in earthenware vessels, just as one is required to bury *sifrei Torah* this way. This responsum of the *Be'er Sheva* is subsequently cited authoritatively by the *Magen Avraham* (154:9).

#### **Not enough earthenware to go around**

Notwithstanding the rulings of the *Be'er Sheva* and the *Magen Avraham* prohibiting the burning of wornout *kisvei hakodesh*, we find the issue of burning *sheimos* resurfacing a century later. It appears that burying the massive amounts of *sheimos* in earthenware vessels was not practical, presumably because appropriate earthenware vessels were not easily available in the quantities required. Since no other practical solution was acceptable to the *Be'er Sheva* and the *Magen Avraham*, accumulations of *sheimos* were doing just that -- accumulating. Thus we read: *The shul's sheimos collection is a fire hazard – a catastrophe waiting to happen. Can we just burn everything, before a dangerous fire breaks out?*" This is the exact question asked three hundred years ago by members of the Jewish community in Metz, Alsace-Lorraine, from their *rav*, Rav Yaakov Reischer, one of the great *halachic* authorities of his era, famed for his many classic Torah works, including *Minchas Yaakov* (on the laws of *kashrus*), *Chok Yaakov* (on *Hilchos Pesach*), *Toras Hashelamim* (on *Hilchos Niddah*), *Iyun Yaakov* (on *Agadah of Shas*), and his responsa, *Shevus Yaakov*. In a responsum published in *Shevus Yaakov*, Rav Reischer reports that previous attempts to bury the amassed *sheimos* had resulted in gentiles unearthing the *kisvei hakodesh* and using them in a highly degrading way. For lack of any solution, the *sheimos* were accumulating and indeed were a fire hazard. Because of the life-threatening emergency that now resulted, the *Shevus Yaakov* ruled that it was preferable to burn the *sheimos*, which he felt was the most viable resolution of the problem, since burial in earthenware vessels was no longer feasible.

#### **Corresponding mechutanim**

In Nissan 5483 (1723), Rav Reischer sent his *teshuvah* permitting, under these circumstances, the burning of *genizah*, to his *mechutan*, Rav Yechezkel Katzenellenbogen, the *rav* of Hamburg, for review, presumably hoping that Rav Katzenellenbogen would agree. The correspondence between these *gedolei Torah* was subsequently published in two different places -- in Rav Reischer's *Shu't Shevus Yaakov*, as *Yoreh Deah*, Volume 1, #10-12, and in Rav Katzenellenbogen's *Shu't Keneses Yechezkel* as responsum #37. The two versions of the correspondence are not absolutely identical, but comparing the two versions broadens one's understanding of the dispute. In general, the *Keneses Yechezkel* account is somewhat truncated in places, but includes the dates of the letters. Apparently, when Rav Katzenellenbogen decided to print this correspondence, he abbreviated his own letters, although he published his *mechutan's* letters in full.

A more important fact is that the account published in *Keneses Yechezkel* includes a final letter from Rav Katzenellenbogen that does not appear in *Shevus Yaakov*.

#### **Family feud**

Although both *gedolim* correspond to one another with great respect, they dispute strongly regarding what one should do with the accumulated *sheimos* material when burial in earthenware vessels is not a practical solution. In his response dated 17 Kislev, the *Keneses Yechezkel* rejects fully his *mechutan's* proposal that the circumstances permit burning the *sheimos*, but instead rules that one should construct wooden boxes around the *genizah*, find an abandoned lot, and bury the wooden-entombed *sheimos* with three *tefachim* (about 9-11 inches) of earth above them.

#### **The second volley**

On the 23 of Teiveis, the *Shevus Yaakov* penned his retort to his *mechutan*, rejecting the idea that wooden boxes are as good as earthenware, and insisting that if all *kisvei hakodesh* must be buried in earthenware, burying in wood, which decays much more quickly, will not suffice. He contends that burying in wood is the equivalent of burying directly in the earth, which he prohibits as a tremendous *bizayon* to the *kisvei hakodesh*. He feels that burying in earth, either with or without a wooden protection, is a far greater *bizayon* to the *kisvei hakodesh* than burning them. Thus, unswayed by his *mechutan's* rejection of his proposal, he remains with his original suggestion – that since burying all the *genizah* in earthenware containers is not practical, and burying them in wooden containers is not acceptable, the remaining option is to burn the *sheimos*.

The response from the *Keneses Yechezkel* was not long in coming. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of Shvat, the *Keneses Yechezkel* penned his retort, again reiterating his position that it is absolutely forbidden to burn *sheimos*, and that it is perfectly acceptable, and therefore required, to bury them in wooden boxes. (This last letter is the part of the correspondence that does not appear in *Shu't Shevus Yaakov*, but only in *Keneses Yechezkel*.)

#### **Packing the printed material**

It is noteworthy that both of these authorities rule that printed *sefarim* must be packed properly before burial, which was also the position of the *Be'er Sheva* and the *Magen Avraham* that I quoted above. On the other hand, the *Pri Megadim* (commenting on the above-quoted *Magen Avraham*), who was born shortly before the passing of the *Keneses Yechezkel* and the *Shevus Yaakov*, notes that the custom is to bury worn-out printed *sefarim* without placing them inside vessels, and to require burial in earthenware vessels only when burying worn-out, hand-written *nevi'im* and *kesuvim* that are written on parchment. (The *nevi'im* he is describing are used contemporarily by many *shullen* for reading the *haftaros*.) The custom mentioned by the *Pri Megadim* disputes the above quoted authorities, the *Be'er Sheva*, the *Magen Avraham*, the *Keneses Yechezkel*, and the *Shevus Yaakov*, all of whom held that printed *sefarim* must be packed in earthenware or with other protective means before burial.

#### **What is the accepted halachic practice?**

The prevalent accepted practice follows the *Pri Megadim's* observation -- that is, although we insist that worn-out printed *sefarim* must be buried, they are not packed in either earthenware or even wood boxes before burial. The *Mishnah Berurah* (154:22, 24), when discussing this issue, quotes only the *Pri Megadim*; he does not even mention the disputing earlier opinions.

#### **How can we permit this?**

Granted that the *minhag* follows the *Pri Megadim*, but what is the *halachic* basis to permit this? Neither the *Pri Megadim* nor the *Mishnah Berurah* explains the rationale to permit burying these items, without first packing them appropriately. However, an authority contemporary to the *Pri Megadim*, the *Zera Emes* (Volume II #133), does discuss this issue.

The *Zera Emes* was asked the same question that was asked of the *Be'er Sheva*, the *Keneses Yechezkel* and the *Shevus Yaakov* -- whether there is any basis to permit the burning of printed *sheimos*. In response, the *Zera Emes* first cites many early authorities who held that all printed *sefarim* require

burial in earthenware vessels. He indeed concludes that all *genizah* items require burial. He then analyzes whether all *genizah* items require to first be packed in earthenware vessels. He notes that the *Gemara*, itself, implies that there are different levels of *kedushah* when burying holy items. Although the *Gemara* mentions several items that require *genizah*, such as the coverings of the *sefer Torah* (often called *mantelach*), *mezuzos*, *tefillin*, *tefillin* bags and straps, it requires only that these items have *genizah* and does not mention that they be first placed in earthenware. The requirements of placing the *genizah* item in an earthenware vessel and burying it near a *talmid chacham* are mentioned only regarding a *sefer Torah*. Other holy writings do not require this, and it is sufficient to provide them with what the *Zera Emes* calls "a minimal burial" -- meaning burial in earth. Burial is a respectful way to allow for the decay of holy works, both because burial is *halachically* a respectful way of disposal, and because the deterioration is caused indirectly. The *Zera Emes* adds one more requirement -- that the *sheimos* must be placed into some type of bag or covering before it is buried. This covering is necessary, in his opinion, because placing directly into the ground is not considered a respectful way to treat *kisvei hakodesh*. We should note that, according to the contemporary *sefer Ginzei HaKodesh*, Rav Elyashiv held that, in a situation where it is difficult to wrap the *genizah*, one may bury it without wrapping. This means that, in his opinion, placing *kisvei hakodesh* directly in the ground is not disrespectful.

#### **Burial at sea**

At this point, we can answer Cheryl's question:

I am on a cruise in the Mediterranean. At one port-of-call, a gentile lady gave me a large bag of old, tattered *siddurim*, which are now in my cabin on the ship. May I bury them at sea?

As you can by now imagine, I answered Cheryl that she is not permitted to bury the *genizah* at sea. According to all opinions quoted above, disposing worn-out *kisvei hakodesh* in water is considered destroying them directly. According to the *Be'er Sheva* and the *Keneses Yechezkel*, all *kisvei hakodesh* require burial in the earth, and in earthenware. According to the *Pri Megadim* and the *Zera Emes*, although burial is permitted in earth, this is only in earth, where the deterioration takes time, but "burial at sea" is a *bizayon* to the holy works. Even the *Shevus Yaakov*, who permitted burning *kisvei hakodesh* when one cannot bury them in earthenware vessels, expressly forbade burial in earth without packing them first, because the moisture of the earth is considered directly destroying them and forbidden, and certainly, disposal directly in water is forbidden.

#### **Conclusion -- contemporary practice**

Common practice of those who bury *genizah* today is to pack all handwritten *kisvei hakodesh*, including *sifrei Torah*, *mezuzos*, and *tefillin parshiyos*, in earthenware or glass containers before burial; whereas worn-out, printed *sefarim* are simply placed in bags or cardboard boxes and buried. Thus, it appears that although we are following the distinction between *sifrei Torah* and other holy writings as explained by the *Zera Emes*, contemporary practice is to be slightly stricter than his ruling regarding how we wrap *mezuzos* and *tefillin parshiyos* prior to burial.

Thousands of pages of Torah rattle off presses and home and business printers every day, spreading Torah to every corner of the globe. By disposing of this material appropriately, we help ensure that this glory of Torah does not lead to its desecration.

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**Rabbi Yehuda Spitz**

*Understanding Shnayim Mikra V'Echad Targum*

*For the week ending 2 January 2016 / 21 Tevet 5776*

There is a well-known Gemara in Brachos[1] that states: "A person should always complete his [study of the] parsha with the congregation[2] - [by

studying] shnayim mikra v'echad targum. Anyone who does this will have long days and years." Learning the text of the weekly parsha twice with the targum (keep reading for explanation) is a segula for long life[3]. What many do not know is that this statement of Chazal is actually codified in halacha[4]!

The Ba'al HaTurim[5] famously comments that this halacha can be gleaned from the first verse in Parshas Shemos: The parsha begins "V'aileh shemos Bnei Yisrael" - "And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael". The Ba'al HaTurim remarks that this passage stands for (roshei teivos) - 'V'adam asher lomed haseder shnayim mikra v'echad targum b'kol naim yashir, yichyeh shanim rabos aruchim l'olam' or "And the person who learns (or sings) the weekly parsha shnayim mikra v'echad targum in a sweet straight voice will live many long years (have an extremely long life)."

Translating 'Targum'

Now that we have seen that such a great reward[6] awaits those who strictly this, there is only one thing left to ascertain: What precisely is the Mitzvah? Obviously, it means to recite the weekly Torah portion twice, plus targum, but what exactly does targum refer to, and what is the purpose of it?

This is actually a dispute among the Rishonim. Several are of the opinion that the purpose of targum is that it is not just a simple translation, but also adds layers of explanation to every word[7]. Consequently, according to this opinion, the purpose of reading the parsha with targum is to learn the Torah in a way that allows us to understand it better. Practically, according to the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, this means that targum here would mean learning the parsha with Rashi's commentary, as it is the best commentary to unlock the pshat (basic understanding) of the Chumash[8].

Others maintain that the halacha is referring to the targum as we know it: Targum Onkelus, as the Gemara in Megillah[9] states that this translation of the Torah was actually given to us by Moshe Rabbeinu[10]. The Rema[11] held that, therefore, reading Targum Onkelus is like reading from the Torah itself! Accordingly, by reading the parsha with its original targum, we are representing the Torah weekly in the same manner as it was given at Har Sinai. Some opine that this is Rashi's own opinion when it comes to shnayim mikra v'echad targum. The result of this dispute is that Rashi would maintain that Targum Onkelus is preferable, while the Rosh was of the opinion that Rashi's commentary is preferable. That means according to Rashi, ironically, it's possible that one might not even fulfill his obligation of targum if he learns Rashi's own commentary[12]!

The Shulchan Aruch[13] cites both opinions and rules that one can fulfill his obligation with either one, Targum Onkelus or Rashi. However, he concludes that it is preferable to do both, as that way one can satisfy both interpretations[14].

The Taz[15] explains that if someone does not understand either one, he can read the original Tzennah U'Renna in German (presumably Yiddish) to enable his understanding, and with this he fulfills his targum obligation. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Mishnah Berurah rule this way as well. In this vein, several contemporary authorities, including Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Moshe Sternbuch, ruled that nowadays one may perform his targum obligation by reading an English translation of Rashi's commentary, if that is the way one best understands it.

What time is Mincha?

The Shulchan Aruch[16] rules that the proper time to fulfill this Mitzvah is from the Sunday[17] of the week when a given parsha is read, over the course of the whole week and preferably finishing before the Shabbos day meal[18]. If one has not yet done so, then he has "until Mincha" to finish. [B'dieved one has until Simchas Torah to catch up for the whole year.]

The Shulchan Aruch's enigmatic choice of words led to an interesting dispute among several authorities: What did the Shulchan Aruch mean by "until Mincha"? Some posit that he was referring to a personal Mincha, meaning that a person can finish this Mitzvah up until he himself actually davens Mincha[19]. Others maintain that his intent was until the time of Mincha, meaning Mincha Gedolah, the earliest time that one may daven

Mincha[20]. A third approach is that it refers to the time when Mincha is davened in the local shul[21]. Interestingly, there does not seem to be any clear cut consensus on this issue[22].

One Small Step For Man...

Another issue that raises much debate among the halachic decisors is what the proper order and way to do shnayim mikra v'echad targum is, and at which points one may stop; whether pasuk by pasuk, section by section, or parsha by parsha. There does not seem to be a clear consensus on this either.[23] Although for many, to clear a time-block to do shnayim mikra at once may be difficult, it might be a good idea to follow the Mishna Berurah's[24] advice and employ the Vilna Gaon's method of immediately after one's daily Shacharis, doing a small part every day (i.e. on Sunday do up to Sheini; on Monday up to Shlishi, etc.). By following this technique one will have finished this Mitzvah by Shabbos, every week.

Just Do It!

Many contemporary authorities are at a loss to explain the perceived lackadaisicalness that many have concerning this Mitzvah. These Gedolim, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, and Rav Ovadia Yosef, stressed its significance[25], and decried the fact that it seems to have fallen into disuse, with several averring that there is even a Mitzvah of chinuch for a parent to teach shnayim mikra's importance to his children[26]! So, although there is halachic discussion as to what the proper order and way to fulfill this Mitzvah is, one shouldn't lose sight of the forest for the trees; the most essential point is that one should actually make the effort to do it. Who would willingly want to turn down a promise by the Gemara for an extremely long life?!

This article was written L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh Yeshiva Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben Yechezkel Shraga, R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for R' Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Rina Geulah bas Dreiza Liba, and L'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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[1] Gemara Brachos 8a - 8b, in the statement by Rav Huna ben Rabbi Yehuda in the name of Rabbi Ami.

[2] The Sha'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha (vol. 2, 72, 25), citing Sefer HaPardes L'Rashi (99) and Rav Yosef Engel's Gilyonei HaShas (Brachos 8a), explains that the reason the Gemara adds to complete shnayim mikra 'im ha'Tzibbur' is that the minhag in the times of the Rishonim, and possibly dating back to the Amoraim, was that after davening, the entire congregation would stay in shul and recite shnayim mikra v'echad targum!

[3] Interestingly, and although it is not the actual halachah [see Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 285, 7; who conclude that even so there are those who are noheg to do so; citing the Mordechai on Brachos - Halachos Ketanos 968, and Terumas HaDeshen vol. 1, 23 & vol. 2, 170), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 13), Taamei Minhagim (pg. 180, 346), and Shu"t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 3, 40)], nonetheless, there are decisors who extend the obligation of shnayim mikra to include the weekly haftara [see Magen Avraham (ad loc. 12; citing the Knesses HaGedolah), Shlah (Maseches Shabbos, Perek Torah Ohr, 22; cited in Pischei Teshuva ad loc. 9), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (72, 11), and Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Lech Lecha 11)] and the special maftir of the Shabbos, for example the Arba Parshiyos - Shekalim, Zachor, Parah and HaChodesh [Magen Avraham (ibid.), Ben Ish Chai (ibid.); see also Shu"t Divrei Moshe (Orach Chaim 12), quoting several earlier authorities; this was known to be the Terumas Hadeshen's personal minhag as well - see Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 685, par. Parshas HaChodesh 9).]

[4] Rambam (Hilchos Tefilla Ch. 13, 25), Tur & Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285, 1). The Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 2) posits that this is a takkana from Moshe Rabbeinu! See Shu"t Maharsham (vol.1, 213 s.v. ulam) who states that although it is not technically a "chiyuv gamur" like reading the Torah, it has since been equated to the status of "chiyuv". The Maharal M'Prague (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaAvodah Ch. 13), expounding the significance of shnayim mikra, explains that it is meant as a weekly commemoration of the giving of the Torah, which was first given over to Klal Yisrael at

Har Sinai, repeated over at the Ohel Moed, and a third time at Arvos Moav. At Arvos Moav the Torah was explained in 70 languages to ensure that each person understood the Torah in his own language. At the time, the language most of Klal Yisrael spoke then was Targum. Therefore, the enactment of shnayim mikra v'echad targum, as the targum is meant to serve as a 'Biur HaTorah'.

[5] Ba'al HaTurim in his commentary to Shemos (Ch. 1, 1). The Levush (Orach Chaim 285, 1) and Pri Megadim (ad loc Mishbetzos Zahav 1) write similarly (with slight variations) that this passage alludes to this Mitzvah, "V'chayev Adam likros (or lehashleem) haparsha shnayim mikra v'echad targum", and conclude "v'zeh chayavim kol Bnei Yisrael". See also the Chida's Chomas Anoch (beginning of Parshas Shemos, brought in Toras HaChida to Parshas Shemos, 8) who credits this allusion to Rabbeinu Efraim, and gives a Kabbalistic explanation to its meaning, and its relevance to Parshas Shemos. [Thanks are due to R' Yitzchak Botton for showing me this source.] It is also cited by Rav Chaim Fala'ji in his Kaf Hachaim (27). See also Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's recent sefer Birchasa V'Shirasa (on Maseches Brachos pg. 73, s.v. shnayim) who cites a variation of this statement found in Midrash Rabbi David HaNaggid (a grandson of the Rambam).

[6] See Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 285, 32) who cites many other rewards for those who do shnayim mikra v'echad targum faithfully.

[7] See commentary of Tosafos and the Rosh on this Gemara, as well as the Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 285, 2).

[8] Tur, Beis Yosef, Shulchan Aruch, Taz (Orach Chaim 285, 2), Shlah (Maseches Shabbos, Ner Mitzva 15); see also the Chafetz Chaim's Likutei Ma'amrim (Ch. 5). The Chasam Sofer (Shu"t vol. 6, 61) used to stress the importance of additionally learning the parsha with the Ramban's commentar

[9] Gemara Megillah 3a. See there further on the importance of Targum Onkelus and Targum Yonason.

[10] Beis Yosef (ibid), quoting the Smag in the name of Rav Notranoi Gaon. See also Biur HaGr"a (ad loc. 2), Pri Megadim (ad loc Misbetzos Zahav 1 s.v. hataam, who explains this based on the words Ba'er Heitiv), and Biur Halacha (ad loc s.v. targum).

[11] Shu"t Rema (127 - 130), based on Tosafos in Bava Kamma (83a s.v. lashon). This is a famous dispute the Rema had with Rav Shmuel Yehuda Katzenellenbogen, as to Tosafos's intent with his statement that 'The Torah spoke in Aramaic'.

[12] See Rabbi Yosef Meir Radner's recent sefer Nachlas Mayim (vol. 3, Al Sugyos HaShas B'Inyanei HaMoadim, Ch. 34) at length.

[13] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285, 2) as does the Tur. Explained at length in Biur Halacha (ad loc. s.v. targum).

[14] Regarding whether one can fulfill his Targum obligation with Targum Yonason, Rav Asher Weiss (Shu"t Minchas Asher vol. 1, 13, 4) maintains that indeed one does (even though it is probable that Targum Yonason al haTorah is not really the one referred to in the Gemara - see the Chida's Sheim Gedolim, Maareches HaSeforim 96), as it would be considered similar to reading Rashi's pshat, as it explains the pesukim as well as adds chiddushim. Nevertheless, he concludes that it is still preferable to stick to Targum Onkelus, as Chazal intended. However, others, including Rav Chaim Kanievsky, are quoted (see Rabbi Yaakov Skoczylas's recent Kuntress Ohel Yaakov on Shnayim Mikra pg. 17 - 18, footnote 36) as holding that one is not yotzei shnayim mikra with Targum Yonason.

[15] Taz (Orach Chaim 285, 2), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (72, 11), Mishnah Berurah (285, 5). Rav Moshe Feinstein's opinion is cited in sefer Yagel Yaakov (pg. 208, quoting his son Rav Dovid Feinstein); Rav Moshe Sternbuch's is found in Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 261, s.v. v'hisakmiti).

[16] Orach Chaim 285, 3 & 4, based on Tosafos and the Rosh (ibid).

[17] Although the Rema in Darchei Moshe (ibid, based on the Kol Bo 37) mentions that this truly means Sunday [see also Pri Megadim (ad loc Eshel Avraham 5)], nevertheless, the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc 7, and Shaar HaTziyun 12) and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc 24), citing many Rishonim, rule that this really means the preceding Shabbos after Mincha, when the next week's parsha is already read. However, the Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 285, 5) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (72, 11) rule that optimally one should wait until Sunday to start the next week's shnayim mikra. Additionally, the Birur Halacha (Orach Chaim 285, 25) cites many other Rishonim who hold that one may not start until Sunday. See also Shu"t Minchas Chein (vol. 2, Orach Chaim 17), who concludes that lechatchila one should wait until Sunday to start shnayim mikra, however, b'dieved if one already started on Shabbos after Mincha, he would certainly be yotzei.

[18] Most authorities understand this to mean the Shabbos Lunch meal (Chayei Adam, Shabbos Ch. 7, 9; Shulchan Aruch HaRav Orach Chaim 285, 5; Aruch Hashulchan ad loc 8; Mishnah Berurah, 9 & Biur Halacha s.v. yashlim); however the Chazon Ish (cited in Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 3, pg. 234) held that this was referring to Seudas Shlishis.

There are those who hold that it is preferable to complete shnayim mikra on, or at least finish, by Friday - See Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 285, 5 & 6, quoting the Shlah),

Shaarei Teshuva (ad loc. 1, quoting the Arizal and Rav Chaim Vital), Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parshas Lech Lecha 11), and Mishnah Berurah (ibid 8 & 9 and Biur Halacha s.v. kodem).

[19] Including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo, Tefilla Ch. 12, 35) and Rav Chaim Kanievsky (cited in Halichos Chaim vol. 1, pg. 95, 278).

[20] Including the Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasa (vol. 2, 42, footnote 218) and possibly Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (see Shguyos Mi Yavin vol. 2, 40, footnote 9; although some report his opinion as Mincha Ketana). This is also the mashmaos of the Mishnah Berurah (above, 10).

[21] This is the opinion of Rav Chaim Na'eh (Ketzos Hashulchan 72, Badei Hashulchan 7).

[22] See Mv"R Rav Yosef Yitzchak Lerner's award-winning sefer Shguyos Mi Yavin (vol. 2, 40, 2& 3).

[23] See the major commentaries to the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285), including the Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Aruch Hashulchan, Mishnah Berurah (who concludes that 'd'avid k'mar avid u'd'avid k'mar avid') and Kaf Hachaim, as well as Emes L'Yaakov on Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285), and his introduction to Emes L'Yaakov al HaTorah. See also Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer (vol. 16, 18), Shu"t Ba'er Moshe (vol. 8, 3), Shu"t Rivevos Efraim (vol. 5, 216), Shu"t Shevet HaLevi (vol. 7, 33, 1), Chut Shani (Shabbos vol. 4, pg. 115, 2), and Orchos Rabbeinu (vol. 1, pg. 123).

[24] Mishnah Berurah (ad loc 8), quoting Maaseh Rav (59). Although the Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc 4) writes that there is no reason to separate shnayim mikra by aliyos, nonetheless, see Derech Sicha (from Rav Chaim Kanievsky, page 2) who commends this mehalech. It is well known that Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l would use this method of performing shnayim mikra, daily prior to the 6:30 A.M. Shacharis in his shul (see Gadol HaDor pg. 48).

[25] Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 5, 17), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo on Tefillah Ch. 12, 36 7 footnote 106), Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner (Shu"t Shevet HaLevi vol. 8, 46) and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 1, 261). See also Shu"t Kinyan Torah B'Halacha (vol. 6, 22), Rav Ovadia Yosef, aside for what he wrote in Shu"t Yechaveh Daas (vol. 2, 37), dedicated his broadcasted weekly shiur several years ago to exhort the masses to perform this weekly Mitzvah. See also Rav Chaim Falaj'i's Kaf Hachaim (27, 3) and Shmiras Shabbos K'Hilchasa (Ch. 42, 57). In fact, around a century ago, the Minchas Elazar (Shu"t vol. 1, 26, in the footnote), in a quite telling comment addressing the Rema's statement (Yoreh Deah 361, 1) that generally speaking everyone nowadays is in the category of someone who 'reads and learns (Torah)', remarked that in his day this was certainly true; as 'who doesn't sit in shul over Shabbos and recite shnayim mikra v'echad targum!'

[26] Including Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner (Shu"t Shevet HaLevi ibid, s.v. pshita), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos ibid, s.v. ulinyan), and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo, Tefilla Ch. 12, 36). Rav Ovadia Yosef (Shu"t Yechaveh Daas ibid, s.v. u'v'siyum) exhorts schools to teach children the Taamei HaMikra (trop); that way when they do the Mitzvah of shnayim mikra they will be able to fulfill it in the optimal manner. Chinuch for shnayim mikra would not include a daughter, as a woman is technically exempt from the Mitzvah of Torah study, and therefore also from this Mitzvah [see Shu"t Ba'er Sarim (vol. 7, 52, 10), Shu"t Mishna Halachos (vol. 6, 60), Shu"t Rivevos Efraim (vol. 6, 115, 35), Shu"t Mishnas Yosef (vol. 6, 15), Chut Shani on Hilchos Shabbos (vol. 4, pg. 215), Shmiras Shabbos K'Hilchasa (Ch. 42, 60), and Yalkut Yosef (Otzar Dinim L'Isha U'Ivas Ch. 5, 3)]. On the topic of women being exempt from targum in general, see Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 282, 11). However, since shnayim mikra is part of the Mitzvah of Torah study, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (Emes L'Yaakov on Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 285, footnote 308) ruled that a boy who becomes Bar Mitzvah in the middle of the year does not have to repeat the Parshiyos that he read shnayim mikra as a kattán, as even a kattán still has a Mitzvah of Talmud Torah (as explained in his Emes L'Yaakov on Kiddushin 29b - 30a).

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority. L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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