

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VA'EIRA - 5765

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From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: January 06, 2005
Subject: Irony: A Divine Solution - Rabbi Benjamin Yudin to subscribe, email weekly@torahweb.org for anything else, email: torahweb@torahweb.org _ <http://www.torahweb.org/>

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN
IRONY: A DIVINE SOLUTION

While there are no mitzvos of the taryag in Parshas Va'eira, it does contain many lessons for life. At the end of Shemos Moshe throws up his hands in frustration, "me'az basi el Paroh, he'ra la'am hazeh" (5:23), from the time I came to Paroh to speak in your name, things have only deteriorated. The response is found in the beginning of Va'eira.

Hashem is teaching Moshe and the Nation of Israel that often what appears to us to be an insurmountable obstacle and problem is itself the seed and source of the solution and salvation.

The Gemara Shabbos (119a) teaches the famous story of the great reward that came to the man who honored the Shabbos. There was a wealthy non-Jew in the neighborhood of "Yosef Mokir Shabbos", Yosef who greatly honored the Shabbos. Astrologers informed the non-Jew that all his possessions would eventually pass to Yosef. Fearing their prediction and hoping to foil it, the wealthy man went and sold all his possessions and bought an extremely valuable jewel that he placed in his hat. He was convinced he could guard his wealth at all times by wearing this hat. As the man was passing over a bridge, a gust of wind cast his hat into the water, where upon a fish came and swallowed the jewel. Some time later, a fisherman caught the fish and brought it to market late in the day on Friday, by which time everyone had finished their purchases for Shabbos. Disappointed, they said, "who will buy this fish now at this late hour?" The townspeople directed the fishermen to Yosef Mokir Shabbos, as he was called, for he had the habit of buying any delicacy for shabbos that came his way. Indeed he bought it! When he cut it open, he found the jewel inside.

The Dubner Maggid, in his commentary to the Chamesh Megillos, Kol Yaakov, at the end of Megillas Esther asks, why was it necessary for the Talmud to give us the background on how the jewel landed in the fish? If the Talmud simply wanted to teach the reward for honoring Shabbos, just inform us that he found a jewel in a fish purchased for Shabbos?

Rather, this famous and popular story has an additional lesson to be taught. It was the will of Hashem that the wealth of the non-Jew be transferred to Yosef, and the owner, tipped off by his astrologers, wished to insure that it would never happen. Therefore Hashem planted the idea of the jewel, which he purchased immediately, and behold his faulty insurance policy turned out to be Yosef's prize dividend.

In Parshas Vayeishev when the brothers see Yosef from a distance they say "v'nireh mah yihiyu chalomosov - then we will see what will become of his dreams" (Brasihis 37:20). The medrash comments that Hashem said - you (the brothers) say "v'nireh - let's see", and I say "v'nireh" - let's see whose way will prevail - Mine or yours? Hashem

had a plan. To bring Yaakov down to Mitzrayim in the most dignified way, to be united with his beloved Yosef. He sets it all in motion, by planting the dreams in Yosef, causing hatred among the brothers, Yosef's sale and ultimately his languishing in jail for twelve years. One could only imagine how happy the brothers were to be rid of the dreamer and his dreams, and Yosef bemoaning his sharing them with the brothers. Yet, it was the very dreams that extricated Yosef from prison, allowing him to rise to a meteoric political career, and to offer ultimate salvation for the fledgling nation.

In Meggilas Esther we see this principle as well. It is not in spite of our troubles that our assistance comes, but literally through the trials and tribulations themselves; it is actually "matzmiach yeshua" - they have implanted within them seeds of relief. Haman (5:14) immediately erects the gallows for Mordechai, lest when the king Achashverosh gives the royal decree to hang Mordechai he has a chance to change his mind. This alacrity on Haman's part proves to be his downfall, when the king gives the irreversible order to "hang Haman on it" (7:8).

The Dubner Maggid brilliantly explains the medrash (Shemos Rabbah 23:3) that explains that since Moshe sinned with the word "az", as cited in the beginning, he corrects and atones for it by beginning his song at the Yam-Suf with "az". The Kol Yaakov says "az yashir Moshe" is understood to mean "then Moshe should have sung". The intensification of the oppression that caused Moshe to complain contained the foundation of deliverance, thus it was worthy of song. Moshe just didn't realize it at that time.

The phenomenon of the solution being an integral part of the problem is not only evident on a communal and national level, but applies to each individual as well. The Mishan (Avos 5:26) teaches l'fum tza'ara agra - commensurate with the pain is the gain. The Ramban in his commentary on this mishna applies the maxim especially to the study of Torah. Torah which is accompanied by diligent work and self-sacrifice will remain and endure long after that which is acquired effortlessly.

Perhaps pursuant to the above, Hashem's response to Moshe is found in the opening verse of Parshas Va'eira. "Vayedaber Elokim el Moshe vayomer eilav ani Adonay" - What you, Moshe perceived to be "vayedaber" - a stern expression - has within it "vayomer" - a kinder expression. Moreover, within the middas hadin - strict judgment - of "Elokim", is contained "Adonay" - the attribute of mercy.

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: January 06, 2005 Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eyra "RAV FRAND" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eyra -

Moshe and Aharon Never Let Their Mission Become Their "Career"

At the end of the section delineating the lineage of Moshe and Aharon, the pasuk [verse] says, "This is Aharon and Moshe, to whom Hashem said "Take the Children of Israel of out Egypt according to their legions." [Shmos 6:26] Rashi points out that there are places in the Torah where the name Aharon precedes that of Moshe, and there are places where the name of Moshe precedes Aharon. This teaches that they were both equal. Although it was Moshe who was charged with the primary task of leading the Jews out of Egypt, either brother was worthy of that mission.

In the next pasuk, the Torah says: "They are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; this is Moshe and Aharon." Rashi comments on the redundant mention of Moshe and Aharon in the second pasuk (27), after they were just mentioned as the subjects of the previous pasuk (26). Rashi

explains that the redundancy is teaching that "they remained steadfast in their mission and in their righteousness, from beginning to end." They remained the same Moshe and Aharon throughout the entire experience of the Exodus from Egypt and throughout the trials and tribulations of the Wilderness. They did not change. They remained loyal to their mandate and to their righteousness.

Rav Elya Meir Bloch points out a basic trait of human nature: There are many times that our intentions are pure and altruistic when we start a project or begin an endeavor. We do it strictly for the sake of Heaven (l'shem shamayim). But after a while, when a person invests of himself into an institution or into a project, it often becomes more about "him" rather than about the noble cause.

This is true in professional life as well. People enter professions - law or medicine, for example - sometimes with the most altruistic of reasons. They want to help mankind; they want to help humanity; they want to defend the poor and so on and so forth. But in the course of building up a practice and building up a business, they are often overtaken by other considerations. Suddenly, they are no longer doing it for the 'sake of Heaven' or for the altruistic reasons as when they had started. It is no longer the noble profession itself. It is 'me'. It is 'my ego.'

People become involved in a shul, in a school, or in other institutions. They start out l'shem shamayim. But they invest so much of themselves in it that it ceases to be a detached institution; it is now the person himself (with all the personal 'baggage' that he brings).

Chazal are pointing out that when Moshe Rabbeinu was first offered the opportunity of taking the Jewish people out of Egypt his reaction was "Not me. This honor should go to Aharon. He is my older brother. He is as worthy of the task as I am." Moshe started his mission with the most noble of intentions. Aharon also began with the most noble of intentions. He was not jealous of his younger brother one iota. When he greeted Moshe upon the latter's return from Midian, he was joyous in his heart [Shmos 4:14]. Both brothers entered their respective jobs with the most noble and pristine ambition.

However, the significance of Moshe's and Aharon's accomplishment is that "it was this same Moshe and Aharon" - throughout their mission they maintained the same righteousness and altruism. They never let the mission become merely their jobs or careers. They never let their egos become so involved that they overshadowed their missions.

The proof of Moshe's altruism is the fact that he broke the Luchos [Tablets of Stone]. After investing 40 days and 40 nights of super-human effort and fasting when he went to receive them, if he had one iota of ego in him, Moshe would not have broken the Luchos. "I should break the Luchos? No! I've put too much effort in them to break them." He overcame that natural instinct, because he never let his ego become bigger than the mission itself. He remained with his mission and with his righteousness throughout.

This is very important to keep in mind when we do become involved in communal activities and institutions. The mission must always be greater than us. We must always be able to stand back and ask: "What does the mission demand? What is good for the institution?" rather than being overcome by our personal ego gratification.

The Price of Pretending You Are a God

Sometimes when a person is trying to arrange a meeting with a busy executive, the trick is to figure out "Where can I catch him?" G-d tells Moshe where he can "catch" Pharaoh: "Go to Pharaoh in the morning - behold! He goes out to the water..." [Shmos 7:15]. Rashi provides background to this practice of the Egyptian monarch: "Behold he goes out to the water to relieve himself. For Pharaoh would pretend to be a god, and would say that he does not need to relieve himself. He would arise early and go out to the Nile and secretly attend to his bodily needs there."

Pharaoh deified himself. A major difference between gods and human beings is that gods don't have to use the bathroom. Therefore, Pharaoh had a problem. If he had a bathroom that everyone knew about, people would realize that he was not a god. Therefore, Pharaoh had a morning constitution. He would go to the Nile each morning when no one would see him and take care of his bodily needs. That was it for the rest of the day!

There are certainly at least occasions when 'once a day' would not suffice. This had to be a source of great distress and concern for Pharaoh. He had to at least sometimes ask himself, 'is this charade worth it?' Even assuming the people figured out that he wasn't a god, he was still an all-powerful ruler. He was an old world king who could say 'off with your head' if he didn't like the way someone parted his hair. For all intents and purposes it really didn't matter if he was a god or not. He was an absolute monarch regardless.

So then why did Pharaoh have to put himself through this daily discomfort to keep up this silly charade? It brought him very little in the way of added respect or admiration. But, says Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, this is how crazy people become regarding their kavod [honor]. People will twist themselves into pretzels for the smallest amount of kavod, in Pharaoh's case, for the difference between people thinking he is an omnipotent human being and their thinking he is an omnipotent god. For that insignificant difference, which was of no practical value to Pharaoh, he made himself painfully uncomfortable on a daily basis. This is the blinding power of kavod.

The Birkas Mordechai (Rav Mordechai Ezrachi) uses this insight to answer a well known question that many commentaries raise. Moshe Rabbeinu argued to G-d: "Behold even the children of Israel did not listen to me - how can I expect Pharaoh to listen and I am 'uncircumcised of lips'. [Shmos 6:12]." This is one of the few Biblical examples of the famous Talmudic principle: Kal V'Chomer [a fortiori]. If the Children of Israel who wanted to hear the words "you are getting out of Egypt" did not listen to me, argued Moshe, certainly Pharaoh who would be loath to hear such a message will not listen.

The commentaries all ask that this is not a valid Kal V'Chomer because the pasuk itself explains why the Children of Israel did not listen to Moshe -- "due to shortness of breath and hard labor" [Shmos 6:9]. Since this preoccupation did not apply to Pharaoh, perhaps he would listen to Moshe. The Kal V'Chomer is thus invalidated.

Rav Mordechai Ezrachi argues that this was a indeed a good Kal V'Chomer. True, Klal Yisrael was preoccupied. They couldn't pay attention to Moshe because of the pressure of hard labor. But Pharaoh could not listen either. He also had a terrible obsession and a terrible pressure. He had to go around the whole day playing 'god' to the extent that he had to control his bathroom habits to support his charade. This was at least as overwhelming a distraction as that faced by Klal Yisrael. Hence the Kal V'Chomer was a valid logical argument.

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 446, Shoveling Snow on Shabbos. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. RavFrand, Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 Baltimore, MD 21208

From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemaisrael.com]
Sent: January 06, 2005 To: What's Bothering Rashi
WHAT'S BOTHERING RASHI?
BY DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK - Parshas Vaera

Parashas Va'eira (65) This sedra is central in the events of the redemption from Egypt. The first seven plagues are related. The sedra begins with a very significant prophetic message from Hashem to Moses. In it we learn of the different meaning of G-d's different names in the Torah. I will focus on a "non-Rashi Comment".

Exodus 6:3

And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as Almighty Shaddai, but my name Hashem I did not make known to them.

RASHI

And I appeared: Rashi: To the Fathers.

This comment has led to much discussion. The verse says "And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob" in place of this, Rashi comments "To the Fathers." The comment itself does not seem to add much, if anything, to our understanding of the verse.

The Gur Aryeh offers a complex interpretation of Rashi's intent, while the Mizrahi says simply that Rashi does this just to shorten the verse and get to his main commentary on the verse - that G-d's appearance to them was in the form of a promise (see the next Rashi-comment).

But according to the Mizrahi we could ask -

A Question:

What need is there to shorten the verse. Rashi could have simply begun his comment with the words "as Almighty Shaddai." If the Lead Word "Va'eira ("And I appeared") and the names of the Fathers is unnecessary to his main comment, why cite it at all?

Can you answer this?

An Answer: Sefer Zicharon, an early commentary on Rashi, suggests that Rashi had no comment here at all. He cites the Ramban who quotes Rashi and in the Ramban's version he had "And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac & to Jacob" That is in the Ramban's Rashi text it names the Fathers (Abraham, etc.) and does not short-cut anything. On this basis Sefer Zicharon suggests that this was a copyist change introduced after the Ramban's time. (The Ramban lived two hundred years after Rashi.)

So we have no need to interpret Rashi's intent in this strange comment. He never wrote it and therefore he never intended anything. All commentary here would thus be just "pilpul" for the sake of "pilpul."

But as you think of Rashi's words, even as the Ramban quotes them, you may still have a question.

A Question: Again we ask, why does Rashi cite all these words at all since he does not comment on them.

An Answer: There is a rule about Rashi's use of Lead Words (Dibbur HaMaschil). At the beginning of every sedra Rashi writes a Dibbur HaMaschil which contains the words that include the name of the sedra. Sometimes (usually) he has a comment these words - but sometimes he does not! That is sometimes he will write these words without commenting on them. It is as if he wants to demarcate the beginning of a new sedra by writing Lead Words that contain the sedra's name. Rashi cites the name of the sedra about a dozen times in his Torah commentary without any commentary on these words! See for example sedras Vayelech in Devarim and B'ishlach in the book of Shemos for two examples.

So here too, Rashi writes "Va'eira" to the Abraham, etc, even though he has no comment on these words - just for the sake of demarcating the beginning of a new sedra.

By the way, Rashi does this, as well (and so does Tosefos), in his Talmud Commentary. He will cite the first words of the new Mishnah, even if he has no comment to make on them.

To summarize: Rashi has cited the words "Va'eira to Abraham, to Isaac", etc, even though he has no comment on them, because they contain the name of the new sedra. Then he goes on to cite words the words that he does have a commentary on - "The Almighty Shaddai."

Rashi has thus written "Va'eira to Abraham" etc. (And G-d appeared to Abraham etc.) not because he has a comment on these words, but because they contain the name of the sedra - "Va'eira."

A simple point, not particularly profound. But one that helps us understand Rashi's Torah commentary. You will find many Rashi commentaries attempting to understand these Rashi "Lead Word" (at the beginning of the sedra) even though they have no real "meaning." So knowing this rule gives us an important clue as to Rashi's style, thus we won't attempt to comment on his Lead Word, when no comment is necessary.

Shabbat Shalom Avigdor Bonchek

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]

Sent: January 06, 2005 To: Peninim Parsha

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

PARSHAS VA'ERA And G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am Hashem." (6:2)

Rashi comments that Hashem spoke to Moshe with words of rebuke for speaking harshly, asking, "Why have you harmed this People?" Later in parsha 9, Rashi explains that Hashem drew a contrast between Moshe and the Patriarchs. He exclaimed, "Woe for those who are lost and are not found! I have good cause to bemoan the deaths of the Patriarchs. Many times I revealed myself to them as Kel Sha-ddai, and they never asked Me, 'What is Your Name?' But you said to Me, 'If they will say to Me, what is His Name, what shall I say to them?'" In other words, Moshe questioned Hashem's actions, while the Avos, Patriarchs, never complained, even when they were confronted with situations that were incongruous to their faith, such as: Avraham Avinu, when he could not find a suitable place to bury Sarah Imeinu; Yitzchak Avinu, when his servants could not find water to drink; Yaakov Avinu, when he sought a place to pitch his tent, and was not successful until he was compelled to spend a large sum of money. They never questioned Hashem's Name, His manner of interacting with them. Yet, Moshe was concerned with Hashem's treatment of the Jews. He therefore, questioned His name.

The above seems to imply that Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential leader of our People - about whom it was said, "There never arose a Navi, prophet, like Moshe," who spoke to Hashem with a clarity of vision - was on a lower plateau than the Avos. Is this possible? Throughout Torah literature, it seems apparent that the spiritual level of Moshe transcended that of everyone else. How are we to understand Rashi?

The Dibros Shlomo, Horav Shlomo Lutzker, zl, cites the Tiferes Shlomo who explains that, as Klal Yisrael's consummate leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, sought ways to rationalize the actions of his flock. As such, he presented their case before Hashem in the most positive manner. Moshe was acutely aware that they were Hashem's chosen People; He was their compassionate Father in Heaven, and, thus, he was concerned with their every need.

With this preface in mind, we understand the background for Moshe's challenging question, "Why have You harmed the People?" When Chazal distinguish between Moshe Rabbeinu and the Avos, it is not a critique. On the contrary, Chazal are lauding Moshe's efforts as leader of Klal Yisrael, his total devotion to the needs of his people. The Avos were confronted with personal issues, personal challenges, personal questions to the faith. They transcended the challenges and triumphed in their conviction. Moshe Rabbeinu was a leader who could not permit his personal commitment to obstruct his sense of leadership. He was a Klal mench. His personal feelings did not play a role in his position as community leader. Klal Yisrael's pain was his pain; their anguish was his anguish, their torment was his torment. Is this not why Hashem chose

him to be their leader? His empathy was unprecedented, his compassion unparalleled.

At times, a leader recognizes that he cannot ease the pain or lighten the burden. This does not relieve him from the need to declare his empathy and cry out with emotion on behalf of his flock. This is what Moshe was doing - and Hashem praised him for his actions.

Throughout history, we have been blessed with leadership of this calibre. Horav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, zl, the Piaszner Rebbe, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, was such an individual. His personal grief only catalyzed greater empathy for his flock, who - together with him - were interred in the Warsaw Ghetto as victims of the Nazi master plan. His life was an incredible story of devotion and commitment. Above all, it demonstrated his ability to maintain intellectual stamina, which enabled him to transcend his personal tragedies in order to maintain his guidance over his people, to inspire them with love of Hashem and acceptance of His decrees. I take the opportunity to share some episodes from his war years that lend insight to his personality and leadership.

When the war broke out, the Rebbe was situated in Warsaw. His close chasidim insisted that he leave for a safer location. The Rebbe demurred, replying, "I am not going to desert my chasidim at this difficult time! Wherever my chasidim are - that is where I must be. I will not consent to saving myself, while I abandon my chasidim!"

Shortly before the war, the Rebbe had lost his life's companion, his Rebbetzin. Her death was a great blow to him, and his inner pain was intense. He consoled himself with his only son, Reb Elimelech, who was his trusted assistant. His son stood by his side prior to and during the difficult periods of the war. The Rebbe's love for his son was great. An accomplished scholar and an individual of exemplary character refinement, Reb Elimelech never departed from his father's side.

The Rebbe's home in Warsaw was the focal point of gathering for the refugees from Piaseczno seeking material and spiritual sustenance. Services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur were held in the Rebbe's Bais Hamedrash. Survivors recall the Rebbe's deep concentration in Tefillah, his sweet, poignant voice and his rapture of spirit, which transported him to a realm far above the bombings and the terror that had become daily ritual in Warsaw. Upon gazing at the Rebbe, his chasidim were filled with a measure of comfort.

Yom Kippur night, the bombing began with intensity. Throughout the night, the bombs fell and the fires burned, but the Rebbe's house was spared. Monday morning, the day after Yom Kippur, was a day of exceptional savagery, as destruction and death reigned throughout the city. The German planes flew low, with an arrogance that suited them, dropping all types of bombs and incendiaries. The people who were by then tormented, exhausted, starved and thirsty, thought they would go insane. They had nowhere to turn, nowhere to run. Indeed, thousands lost their sense of judgment and waited indifferently to meet the angel of death.

That day, the Rebbe's house was no longer spared. Shrapnel flew in and struck the Rebbe's son, wounding him in the arm. The blood loss was terrible. The Rebbe and his chasidim had no recourse but to bring Reb Elimelech to a hospital. They carried him through the street under the hail of bombs, which were still exploding. They went from one hospital to the next, but the answer was always the same, "We are filled to capacity." Finally, after several hours of trudging through the streets, they found a hospital that would treat Reb Elimelech's wounds. He was taken in, and he received medical attention.

The Rebbe would not leave the hospital. Exhausted and broken-hearted, he waited throughout the night to hear news of his son's welfare. The Rebbe was not alone. Together with him were his daughter-in-law and his sister-in-law, who had come from Eretz Yisrael before the war to visit. Together with a small group of dedicated chasidim, they waited at the door of the hospital.

They davened and cried the whole night for a refuah sheleimah. It was a long, terrible night of waiting. The situation looked bleak, so the Rebbe, accompanied by a few close chasidim, went to a doctor's house to ask him to come to the hospital. Perhaps he could do something to save his son. While the Rebbe was away, a bomb fell at the entrance of the hospital, killing all of those present.

The Rebbe returned to the hospital and was shattered by the news. One can only imagine his pain and grief in losing his daughter-in-law and sister-in-law. They thought the Rebbe would collapse; yet, he composed himself and recited the pasuk in Iyov 1:21, "Hashem gave and Hashem has taken away," directing that the deceased be taken immediately to the cemetery for a eulogy and burial.

On Wednesday, the city of Warsaw surrendered. Reb Elimelech struggled in agony, burning with fever from an infection that ravaged his body. That evening was the beginning of Succos. The Rebbe erected a small Succah, and the next morning he prepared for Yom Tov as if nothing had occurred. He instructed the Chazzan to sing the special Yom Tov melodies that were a tradition in Piaseczno. As the Sifrei Torah were being removed from the Aron, the Chazzan - in the middle of his favorite melody - broke down in tears. The Rebbe gave a shout, "Nu! Yom Tov!" The congregation attempted to fulfill the Rebbe's request, taking up the melody with as much joy as they could muster. This holiday spirit was kept alive for the first two days of Succos.

Late Friday night, immediately after Kiddush, the Rebbe's son breathed his last breath, and his soul rose up to Heaven. His passing had a devastating effect on the Rebbe. His closest chasidim feared for his health, but the Rebbe manifest superhuman strength and endurance. He did not utter as much as a sigh over the passing of his son. It was Shabbos, and he refused to mar the sanctity of the day. He conducted his Tish, festive Shabbos table, gave a Torah discourse and sang Zemiro. On Motzoei Shabbos, after nightfall, he broke down in heart-rending weeping for his beloved son. His words that night expressed his essence as a leader: "I am already done in my war. May G-d help the Jewish People to emerge victorious." He never thought of himself, only of his flock.

A few days later, on Simchas Torah, the usual joy and religious fervor of the Rebbe and his chasidim were noticeably subdued. The high point of the evening came when the Rebbe stood before the Aron Kodesh and sang Eishes Chayil. No doubt, he was focusing his thoughts on the Shechinah which was in exile, recognizing Its suffering on behalf of Klal Yisrael. He stood there for about an hour, singing the haunting melody with tears streaming down his cheeks.

A few weeks later, tragedy struck again as the Rebbe's elderly mother died suddenly of a heart attack. The pain resulting from the tragedies that had befallen her family was too much for her to sustain. The Rebbe now was saying Kaddish for five of his closest relatives. Left alone, bereft of his closest family members, the stricken Rebbe continued rallying for his chasidim not to despair. Their morale and spirit were not to waver. His self-control was incredible, conducting his Tishen, studying Torah, and writing his magnum opus, the Eish Kodesh, which was later discovered among the ashes of Warsaw. Everything continued as before, except this time it was all accompanied by tears. The Rebbe spoke words of Torah, strengthening and encouraging, uplifting and giving hope. He sang Zemiro and danced the traditional dances, but it was always accompanied by tears.

In addition to his spiritual leadership, the Rebbe was active in relief activities, organizing a public kitchen in his own home that serviced fifteen hundred people. His life was his people. His derashos, Torah discourses, were focused on reassuring them that one can function creatively and endure under conditions of great extremity. Perhaps the greatest contribution to his chasidim's welfare was neither the lectures nor the material sustenance; his powerful presence dominated their lives.

His greatest lesson to them was his ability to continue, not permitting himself to be crushed by the tragedies of the war.

Those... who feared the word of Hashem hurried his servants and his livestock into the houses. And those who did not take the word of G-d to heart left his servants and livestock in the field. (9:20,21)

Two distinct groups are described here: those who "feared the word of Hashem"; and their opposite, those who "did not take the word of G-d to heart." Since these two groups are contrasted with one another, we would have expected the contrast between them to be parallel: those who feared Hashem, and those who did not fear Hashem. Why is the second group referred to as "those who did not take the word of Hashem to heart"?

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, infers from here an important lesson in the Torah's definition of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. One who lacks this quality is not necessarily a person who sins blatantly or commits acts of sacrilege. The mere fact that one does not take Hashem's word seriously, that he relates to His commands with apathy or indifference, already qualifies him as a person who does not have yiraas Shomayim. There are many individuals who are observant and committed Jews, yet their conviction is, at best, complacent. They act automatically, and they perform out of habit. Their religious lives are conducted in an apathetic and unemotional manner. The dvar Hashem, "word of G-d," has no relevance to them. It does not penetrate the recesses of their hearts. Such people have no license to call themselves yarei Hashem.

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Covenant & Conversation
Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from
RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British
Commonwealth
[from 2 years ago]
Va'era Of Lice and Men

Throughout all Egypt the dust turned into lice. But when the magicians tried to produce lice by their secret arts, they could not. The lice attacked men and animals alike. The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of G-d." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen. (Shemot 8: 13-15)

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

The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers gather together against the Lord and His anointed one. "Let us break our chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." He who sits in heaven laughs, G-d scoffs at them. (Psalm 2: 2-4)

There is a marvellous example in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people in the plain of Shinar decide to build a city with a tower that "will reach heaven." This is an act of defiance against the divinely given order of nature: "The heavens are the heavens of G-d: the earth He has given to the children of men" (Psalms 115:16). The Torah then says, "But G-d came down to see the city and the tower . . ." (Bereishith 11:4-5) Down on earth, the builders thought their tower would reach heaven. From the vantage point of heaven, however, it was so miniscule that G-d had to "come down" to see it.

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

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

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

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

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

This brings us to the third plague, lice. One of the purposes of this plague is to produce an effect which the magicians cannot replicate. They try. They fail. Immediately they conclude, "This is the finger of G-d".

This is the first appearance in the Torah of an idea, surprisingly persistent in religious thinking even today, called "the god of the gaps". This holds that a miracle is something for which we cannot yet find a scientific explanation. Science is natural; religion is supernatural. An "act of G-d" is something we cannot account for rationally. What magicians (or technocrats) cannot reproduce must be the result of Divine intervention. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that religion and science are opposed. The more we can explain scientifically or control technologically, the less need we have for faith. As the scope of science expands, the place of G-d progressively diminishes to vanishing point.

What the Torah is intimating is that this is a pagan mode of thought, not a Jewish one. The Egyptians admitted that Moses and Aaron were

genuine prophets when they performed wonders beyond the scope of their own magic. But this is not why we believe in Moses and Aaron. On this, Maimonides is unequivocal:

Israel did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the signs he performed. When faith is predicated on signs, a lurking doubt always remains that these signs may have been performed with the aid of occult arts and witchcraft. All the signs Moses performed in the wilderness, he did because they were necessary, not to authenticate his status as a prophet . . . When we needed food, he brought down manna. When the people were thirsty, he cleaved the rock. When Korach's supporters denied his authority, the earth swallowed them up. So too with all the other signs. What then were our grounds for believing in him? The revelation at Sinai, in which we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears . . . (Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah 8:1)

The primary way in which we encounter G-d is not through miracles but through His word - the revelation - Torah - which is the Jewish people's constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of G-d. To be sure, G-d is in the events which, seeming to defy nature, we call miracles. But He is also in nature itself. Science does not displace G-d: it reveals, in ever more intricate and wondrous ways, the design within nature itself. Far from diminishing our religious sense, science (rightly understood) should enlarge it, teaching us to see "How great are Your works, O G-d; You have made them all with wisdom." (Psalms 104:24) Above all, G-d is to be found in the voice heard at Sinai, teaching us how to construct a society that will be the opposite of Egypt: in which the few do not enslave the many, nor are strangers mistreated.

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

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

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Rabbi Jachter's Halacha Files

Parshat Shemot 20 Tevet 5765 January 1, 2005

[Part 1 & Part 2 - See last week's parsha sheet]

APPLYING COSMETICS ON SHABBAT AND YOM TOV -PT 3 BY RABBI CHAIM JACHTER

Introduction In the last two weeks we have reviewed the strict and lenient approaches articulated by the twentieth century Poskim regarding the application of makeup on Shabbat and Yom Tov. This week we shall conclude our discussion by discussing the detailed issues regarding how exactly a woman may apply make-up on Shabbat and Yom Tov according to the lenient opinion.

Lipstick and Lipgloss Rav Moshe writes (in his first responsum on this issue) that lipstick is forbidden because it violates Tzovei'a and Memacheik (smoothing the lipstick bar; similar to our practice not to use bar soap on Shabbat, see Mishnah Berurah 326:30). However, Rav Heber reports that there are commercially available powders made for Shabbat use that are not long-lasting and meet Rav Moshe's criteria of

Eino Mitkayem Klal. There are some Rabbanim who object to the use of these lip powders claiming that the powder mixes with saliva and makes it long-lasting. However, Rav Heber reports that he consulted with three cosmetic chemists who all agreed that the saliva does not make the lip powder long-lasting. Rav Moshe writes that even liquid lipstick is forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov because of Tzovei'a. Rav Bleich explains that Rav Moshe refers to lipgloss. This appears difficult, as untinted and clear lipgloss only produces a shine but does not color the lips. The answer is that the Mishnah Berurah (327:12, as explained by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata 14: footnote 152) writes that he believes that there is concern for Tzovei'a even if one creates only a shine. Thus, both Rav Moshe and Rav Shlomo Zalman rule that clear lipgloss is forbidden to be used on Shabbat and Yom Tov (unless it is Eino Mitkayem Klal, in which case Rav Moshe would permit its use). Interestingly, Rav Heber reports that when Rav Moshe was shown clear lipgloss he responded that it is forbidden because it creates a shine. However, Rav Moshe remarked that some authorities were lenient regarding this issue. Indeed, the Mishnah Berurah does not cite a source for his assertion that creating a shine constitutes Tzovei'a, and he only writes that there is a concern for Tzovei'a, perhaps indicating that the Mishnah Berurah was not thoroughly convinced of his assertion. Nonetheless, I have not discovered any prominent Poskim who disagree in writing with the strict ruling of Rav Moshe and Rav Shlomo Zalman.

Loose Powder Rav Moshe writes (in his second responsum on this topic) that the make-up powder must be prepared before Shabbat. Rav Moshe does not present a reason for this requirement, but Rav Heber reports that Rav Moshe explained to his Talmidim that there is a problem of Tochein (grinding) if one removes the powder from the cake on Shabbat. Tochein is the Av Melachah forbidding the breaking of an item into a very small item. Rav Moshe's ruling is somewhat debatable in light of the fact that the powder was ground before it was formed into a cake during its manufacture. Thus, it would seem to be permitted for the consumer to grind the makeup cake as she would be grinding an item that was previously ground. In fact, the Rama (O.C. 321:12) specifically permits crumbling bread into crumbs to feed one's animals on Shabbat, since the bread was ground during its production and we apply the rule of "Ein Tochein Achar Tochein," (one cannot violate the prohibition of Tochein more than once on the same item). The same rule should, at first glance, apply to makeup powder. However, the principle of Ein Tochein Achar Tochein does not appear in the Gemara nor is it a self-evident principle. The Ran (32a in the pages of the Rif s.v. Amar Rav Papa) and the Yereim (274) present this idea, which is supported by the Tosefta (Shabbat 13:12). However, the Chayei Adam (Hilchot Shabbat 17:4) notes that a minority view does not subscribe to this principle (see the Rishonim cited in the Encyclopedia Talmudit 19:179, footnote 334 who seem not to subscribe to this notion). Indeed, the Chayei Adam urges us to avoid relying on this leniency. Thus, the principle of Ein Tochein Achar Tochein is a Chiddush (and is subject to some debate) and therefore some Acharonim seek to limit its application. In fact, the Ketzot Hashulchan (129:16) cites Acharonim who argue that the principle of Ein Tochein Achar Tochein applies only to food items. Thus, since the Rama's Chiddush is presented in the context of food (crumbling bread) perhaps one should not extend the Chiddush beyond the Rama's ruling (Ein Lecha Bo Ela Chiddusho). Rav Heber, in turn, reports that Rav Moshe explained to his Talmidim that one should be strict regarding makeup since he believes that the Rama's ruling that Ein Tochein Achar Tochein does not apply to non-food items. However, since this is a debatable matter, perhaps one could be lenient in case of very great need, such as if one forgot to remove the powder before Shabbat. One should consult her Rav for a ruling.

Moisturizers and Mimareiach Rav Moshe cautions women (in his second responsum on this topic) to avoid violating the Melachah of

Memacheik when applying makeup. A prime example of this is the application of moisturizer on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Rav Heber reports that almost all varieties of moisturizers are in a cream form and their application constitutes Memareiach, a subcategory (Toladah) of Memacheik. Memareiach (as defined by Rav Ribiat, he Thirty Nine Melochos, 3:913) refers to smoothing soft, pliable substances that may be pressed or molded to a shape. A prime example of this is the Mishnah (Shabbat 146a) that forbids spreading wax to seal a hole in a barrel. The Gemara (Shabbat 146b) records a dispute between Rav and Shmuel whether this prohibition applies to spreading oil to seal a hole in a barrel. Rav asserts that it is rabbinically forbidden to spread oil lest one come to spread wax, whereas Shmuel permits this activity as he does not believe in the necessity of creating such a Gezeirah (rabbinic enactment). The Halacha follows Rav (Rambam Hilchot Shabbat 23:11 and Shulchan Aruch O.C. 314:11) as is the usual protocol in the context of ritual matters (Issurei). Rav Ribiat (The Thirty Nine Melochos 3:919) writes that rouge creams, eye-shadow creams, petroleum jelly, and hand creams such as Nivea and Desitin are included in this rabbinic prohibition. However, it appears that even Rav concedes that this rabbinic prohibition does not apply to all substances. Rashi (ad. loc. s.v. Mishcha) adds that this prohibition applies only to thick oil. The Shulchan Aruch (ad. loc., as emphasized by the Mishnah Berurah 314:46) rules in accordance with Rashi. The Mishnah Berurah explains that since thick oil may be spread a bit, it is similar to wax and hence the Gezeirah is appropriate. The question, though, is how to determine precisely which items are included in this rabbinic prohibition. A classic illustration of this problem is the question of the permissibility of using liquid soap on Shabbat. The Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 326:11) and the Ketzot Hashulchan (146:32) permit the use of liquid soap on Shabbat. They believe that liquid soap is not comparable to thick oil and thus the prohibition of Memareiach does not apply. Dayan Posen (Kitzur Hilchot Shabbat p. 74) notes that common practice is to follow this lenient ruling. Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (14:16) essentially rules in accordance with this approach.

Defining Memareiach – Rav Moshe, Dayan Posen and Rav Heinemann
Based on this ruling, Dayan Posen (ad. loc.; p. 145, 32:19) sets a standard for what items are included in the rabbinic prohibition of Memareiach. He writes, "Anything that is thick to the extent that it cannot pour, does not flow by itself, and needs to be smoothed out is similar to Memareiach and is forbidden. Liquid soap is permissible as it pours, flows by itself, and does not need to be smoothed out." Dayan Posen adds that since the classic Poskim present no objective standard regarding this issue and that since this is only a rabbinic prohibition, one has the right to adopt a limited definition of the rabbinic level prohibition of Memareiach. Rav Ribiat (The Thirty Nine Melochos 3:920) essentially adopts this approach as normative. He discusses this at length in a Hebrew footnote (3:682-685). Rav Ribiat writes based on this standard, that baby oils, lubricating jellies (such as KY jelly) and olive oil are permissible to use on Shabbat. On the other hand, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 1:113), while noting the lenient practice of many to use liquid soap on Shabbat, expresses serious reservations about this lenient approach. He is concerned that even liquid soap can be spread and thus should be included in the rabbinic level prohibition of Memareiach. Based on this ruling of Rav Moshe, Rav Binyamin Zilber (Brit Olam) rules that any item that is even just somewhat thick is included in the rabbinic level prohibition of Memareiach. Rav Ribiat notes the practice of some to water down their liquid soap before Shabbat in order to accommodate the strict approach and Shmirat Shabbat Kehilchata (ad. loc.) writes that it is "good" (but not required) to accommodate Rav Moshe's strict opinion.

Rav Heber reports that Rav Moshe Heinemann, the Rabbinic Administrator of the Star-K, adopts a compromise position between Rav Moshe and Dayan Posen. Rav Heber reports that he and Rav Heinemann

(a major Poseik who is renowned for being highly mechanically adept) devoted a number of hours testing the viscosity (the property of resistance to flow in a fluid, that is measured in units called centipoise, cP) of various liquid soaps. Rav Heinemann concluded that only oils with a viscosity of 600 cP or less are not included in the rabbinic prohibition. Thus, he forbids the use of Softsoap Liquid Hand Soap on Shabbat since its viscosity is higher than 600 cP. On the other hand, he permits Ultra Dawn Concentrated Dish Liquid / Anti-Bacterial Hand Soap, because its viscosity is 600 cP. He notes, though, that this measurement applies only when the room temperature is 70 degrees Fahrenheit; the lower the temperature, the higher the viscosity. One might question the use of a viscometer regarding this issue, if Chazal and the classic Poskim did not use such a machine. Chazal and classic Poskim clearly used common sense perception to reach conclusions regarding this matter. One might reply that each generation is required to use the tools that are available at the time in rendering Halachic decisions. This is an example of a broad Halachic issue that has numerous applications in a wide range of issues: whether common sense judgment or accurate measurement is necessary. For further discussion of this issue, see my Gray Matter pp. 182-184 and my essay in Beit Yitzchak 33:450-453. We should note that a benefit of Rav Heinemann's standard is that it helps cosmetic chemists develop products that are permissible to use on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Thus, a precise technically accurate definition is beneficial regarding this issue. In sum, three standards exist regarding the definition of Memareiach on Shabbat – Rav Moshe, Dayan Posen and Rav Heinemann. One should consult his Rav for a ruling regarding which opinion to follow. This dispute impacts the question of the permissibility of using moisturizers, as a specially prepared watered down moisturizer is potentially permissible to use on Shabbat and Yom Tov. The question is how much must it be watered down in order to render it permissible for Shabbat and Yom Tov use.

Conclusion Many cosmetics are forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov according to all opinions. No consensus, though, has been reached regarding the permissibility of the use of temporary makeup on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Undoubtedly, it is best to avoid applying any makeup on these days. However, as a Talmid of Rav Soloveitchik, I believe that if a woman feels that it is essential for her to apply makeup on Shabbat and Yom Tov, she has the right to follow the lenient opinion if she strictly adheres to Rav Moshe's guidelines. This is especially true in light of the fact that the Rambam, Beit Yosef, Magen Avraham, Mishnah Berurah and Aruch Hashulchan all agree that the prohibition of applying makeup is only rabbinic in nature. However, only products that a competent and trained Posek has permitted for use on Shabbat and Yom Tov may be used even according to the lenient opinion. It is also strongly recommended that a woman who follows the lenient approach consult Rabbi Heber's essay (available at www.star-k.org) for a lengthy description of how to avoid the numerous pitfalls involved in applying makeup on Shabbat and Yom Tov. A woman should consult her Rav for a ruling regarding all of the matters that we have discussed.

Postscript It is evident from these past two essays that contemporary (and classic) Rabbanim are extraordinarily sensitive to the need that many women have to apply makeup on Shabbat and Yom Tov. Rabbanim such as Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Moshe Heinemann devoted many hours to insuring that women have an opportunity to use makeup on Shabbat and Yom Tov in a permissible manner. This follows the tradition of Chazal of being exceedingly sensitive to the needs of Bnot Yisrael.

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: January 06, 2005
To: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT65 -14: After The Tsunami
Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Student
Summaries Of Sichot By The Roshei Yeshiva

BASED ON A SICHA BY HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN

Adapted by Shaul Barth with Reuven Ziegler

Translated by Kaeren Fish with Naftali Balanson

During the past week, we have heard constantly changing estimates as to the nature and scope of the disaster that has befallen several countries in Asia. Our natural response has been to recite chapters of Tehillim after mincha in yeshiva, and this response is certainly appropriate. If we pray for a single individual who is caught in a stormy sea, even on Shabbat, then how much more appropriate this is for such a great number of people. Our prayers are not only for the Jews harmed by this disaster, but for the victims of all nations. In the sicha I gave on the day following the disaster, I emphasized that we are the descendants of Avraham, who saw fit to pray for a society that even he himself knew to be corrupt to the core – "exceedingly evil and sinful towards God." The Chafetz Chaim explains that Avraham's reference to finding a number of "righteous people" in Sodom did not mean people of elevated spiritual stature; he simply meant people who were not wicked and deserving of death at the hands of Heaven. He entertained no hope of finding more than fifty such people who were not deserving of death. This is the city on behalf of which he argued and negotiated with God, until he pled on behalf of only ten – and even that number did not exist. If for the sake of this city Avraham offered not supplication but insistent argumentation, shall we not pray on behalf of such a large and peaceful community? We are reminded of Yona's prayer concerning the "great city of Ninveh;" how can we not pray for entire countries? In this situation, we must remember the midrash concerning the splitting of the Red Sea, where G-d chastised the angels: "My creations are drowning in the sea, and you sing praise?" Not only, obviously, must we not sing praise; we must not go about our daily business either.

There is something about drowning in the sea that is different from other forms of death. Drowning is absolute loss, total annihilation, as though the person had never existed. There is a violation of the order of Creation, a departure from the natural course of the world, leading us to offer prayer and supplication. Could we possibly not have compassion for such a great number of people and offer our prayers on their behalf? This awareness, which is part of our Torah heritage, should also accompany us now. So far our obligation is clear: how could we possibly not react with compassion? But beyond prayer and supplication, we must ask ourselves whether there is something that can and should be said about this situation. Here the discussion assumes a different nature. Some people concern themselves with the question of why it happened, voicing opinions on why the tragedy occurred specifically in that place and that time. These same people, in different circumstances, also explain why infants and young children die. Apparently, they consider themselves experts in the ways of Divine Providence. We must distance ourselves completely from such shallow and false answers. Those are questions for Chazal – who spoke in terms of some kind of general correlation, rather than with reference to a directly retributive causal nexus – to deal with, not people like us. The message that arises in the wake of the events of the twentieth century is that we have no business poking our noses into the "why;" in the context of such questions, what is required of us is absolute humility. We have no business explaining, or pretending to explain, things that cannot be explained. We must remember Chazal's teaching concerning Bilam, who thought that he understood God's supreme wisdom. The Gemara derides him: "This person, who claimed to know God's mind – could he not understand his donkey's mind?" This pretentiousness – moral, philosophical and religious pretentiousness – we totally reject. If we want to try and sort the wheat from the chaff, the chaff is relatively easy to discern. We are reminded of Yehuda's words to Yosef: "What shall we say to my lord; what shall we speak, how shall we justify ourselves?" There is nothing to say. Yet this raises a question. Despite his protestations, Yehuda does speak: "Yehuda came near to him, and said...." The initial response is that there is nothing to say, but ultimately there is a need for a meaningful statement. What is the nature of such a statement?

I once had the unfortunate task of telling a woman that her daughter had died of cancer. Her reaction was, "What can you say to a woman who has lost her daughter?" Faced with a terrible tragedy, the appropriate reaction is shock – the shock of humility and of helplessness, the stunned silence that is itself a statement. Questions regarding the evil and suffering in the world – questions that lie beneath the surface of our existence, on the level of primal consciousness, from time immemorial – exist all the time; they arise at especially terrible times, such as now, following this disaster. We find ourselves torn between two tendencies. On the one hand, we certainly aspire to see God's hand in every event and in every phenomenon; the Chazon Ish expressed this by defining the

trait of "trust" (bitachon) as the recognition that everything that happens is the direct intervention of Divine Providence. On the other hand, when such horrific, terrifying events take place, we find a tendency to dissociate G-d from the terrible suffering. These tendencies are mutually contradictory, and we find ourselves revisiting the question of the scope of Divine Providence and the dispute between Rambam and Ramban as to God's guidance of the nations of the world in general. When these questions arise, we find no easy, comfortable solutions. In this sense, shock is the basic reaction that we are meant to adopt.

I know that in extremely difficult times we are meant to acknowledge Divine justice (tzidduk ha-din), the first stage of which consists of declaring, "G-d gave and G-d has taken away; may God's Name be blessed." Recall, however, that while Ivov offered this acknowledgment of Divine justice after his own personal world collapsed, it is not a simple matter for people to perform tzidduk ha-din on someone else's tragedy, as we learn from Ivov's friends. To the extent that the personal distance between the speaker and the person who is suffering increases, so does the moral difficulty of justifying his fate and acknowledging Divine justice. The bottom line, then, is that such acknowledgment has its place, but it clearly is not a simple matter – neither philosophically nor emotionally. We are left, then, with shock and silence. We accept God's judgment, despite our incomprehension. One question, then – beyond the matter of presenting our words so as to make them as acceptable as possible – is whether to say anything at all.

There is another facet of this tragedy that also causes us to ask what we can say – and that is the human facet. Here, without any doubt, the scope of the tragedy carries weight. Some people have criticized the media's obsession with the exact number of victims, as if an exact calculation makes the tragedy finite and therefore easier to assimilate. Our world view teaches us that a person who saves a single Jewish soul is considered as though he saved a whole world; what does it matter, then, whether we are speaking of a single person or tens of thousands? The "whole world" that was destroyed exists even in a single individual. While there is, indeed, a certain truth in such valuation of the individual, we know that Chazal do also address the quantitative aspect. In decreeing fast days and the suchlike, there is a distinction between makkat yachid and makkat tzibbur, personal distress and communal distress; Halakha recognizes numbers and quantities even when speaking of human death. Halakha even includes the concept of makkat medina, a "country-wide plague" or pandemic – and this certainly applies to a disaster affecting many countries. On the human level, it is difficult to grasp such a vast quantity of suffering. It is frightening to translate this communal suffering into the suffering of such a great number of individuals. Nevertheless, we feel an obligation to do so. Even when the mourning is mass-mourning, we must aspire to the same depth and meaning that we would accord to the mourning over an individual – although in such a sea of souls that have been washed away into oblivion this is very difficult.

What is appropriate, then, is a dual sense of shock. In terms of faith, there is the shock of humility, the message that prevents us from speaking nonsense. On the human level, we stand in shock faced with this collective suffering, as we struggle to address it and bring it down to the individual level with which we can identify. I am not certain that the problems I raised have an easy solution – or any solution at all – but we must try to point out certain general directions. The question is not only what we should say, but what we should do. On this level, our responses subdivide into actions with practical effects and actions with emotional effects. The practical response refers to the simplest, most elementary level of chesed, performing acts of kindness and charity. Yet in addition to direct aid, there is another type of action that is necessary for its attitudinal significance. At the beginning of the Intifada, I was in the U.S. and people asked me what they could do to help Israelis in their difficult situation – could they give tzeddaka or help otherwise. I told them that the first step is simple. The Gemara (Ta'anit 11b) teaches, "At a time when the Jews are in trouble, and one of them separates himself from the community, two angels arrive and place their hands on his head and declare, 'So-and-so, who separated himself from the community, shall not participate in the community's consolation.'"

Chazal regard such a situation, where a person does not participate in communal distress, as a most severe manifestation of egotism. The Gemara presents Moshe Rabbeinu as a foil to those who dissociate themselves from the community's distress. When the Israelites fought Amalek in the desert, Moshe sat on a rock, instead of on a chair or cushion: "Moshe said, 'Since Israel is suffering, I too am with them in suffering.' And whoever makes himself suffer with the community, will merit to experience the community's consolation."

Whether Moshe sits on a rock or on a sofa makes no difference at all to those who are waging the war against Amalek; nevertheless, Moshe would never think

of not identifying with the nation in its time of trouble, in the midst of war. We may add that, on a certain level, this identification may actually help. It helps the person who identifies, in terms of his moral level, and it also helps the person with whose suffering one identifies. When a person is suffering, he wants to know that someone cares. Perhaps on the material level, the sympathy and identification of others does nothing to improve the situation; however, psychologically, such identification means a great deal. Chazal teach us that sometimes it is important to perform even small acts in order to ensure that certain things will remain in our consciousness. Concerning our memorializing the destruction of the Temple, they teach (Bava Batra 60b) that anyone who prepares a meal for guests should leave out a little, in memory of the destruction – just a little. In a different context, the Shulchan Arukh (OC 575:7) rules that during a time of severe drought, one should lessen his engagement in business, building for pleasure, and sexual relations (if he has already fulfilled the mitzva of procreation). We must ask ourselves to what extent things that happen in the world affect our lives and our emotions. If the situation were reversed, would we not wonder why the world was indifferent? I spoke of two levels of action: practical action, in the form of charity and acts of kindness, and actions that concretize and externalize our feelings. Will all this help mitigate the tragedy? We cannot know. In any event, we must concern ourselves not only with practical success and tangible results, but also with inner emotions, with the development of human sensitivity. In that sense, we are now faced with personal and communal challenges. The philosophical and religious difficulties are present, and there is no point in denying them, but we are believers and descendants of believers. With great humility, even when our comprehension is lacking, we must regard ourselves, even at difficult times, as being able to cope psychologically, and also practically (to some extent). We must aspire at least to attain a level where we will have human sensitivity, on a universal level, to the death of such a great number of people. To an extent, our sensitivity and sympathy are necessary to aid those who have suffered loss and injury, while they are also demanded of us as part of our service of God. These feelings are important not only for the sake of our interpersonal relationships and our relationship with God, but also for the sake of our relationship with ourselves, namely, for developing our moral character and refining our religious personalities.

[This sicha was delivered on 21 Tevet 5765 (Jan. 2, 2005). This adaptation has not been reviewed by Harav Lichtenstein.]

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From: Kerem B'Yavneh Online [feedback@kby.org]
Sent: January 05, 2005 To: Parsha KBY Subject: Parshat Va'era
Parshat Va'era The CHARTUMIM did the Same with their Incantations

Rosh Hayeshiva RAV MORDECHAI GREENBERG shlita
Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky zt"l writes that because the world was created in spiritual balance, the magicians and devils of ancient times that are mentioned in the Torah are not encountered today. In order for freedom of choice to exist, the forces of tumah have to be allowed to oppose the forces of holiness. If Moshe had been the only one with the ability to perform wonders, Pharaoh would have had no choice but to listen to him. Therefore the chartumim (necromancers) of Egypt were given similar powers in order to balance the miracles' impact on Pharaoh. If the spiritual leadership of Israel has the power to act in miraculous ways, then the "sitra achra" (demonic force) has to be given the same ability. As the generation decline and miracle workers have ceased, since the world was created in balance – the devils and magic have also disappeared.

Chazal write on the pasuk: "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe" (Devarim 34:10) – but among the nations someone arose: Bilam b. Beor. Opposite Moshe, someone from the sitra achra had to be appointed, who would have similar abilities.

The Rambam writes in his commentary on the Mishna in Avoda Zara (ch. 4), that devils or ghosts are not real, and that all the stories about them are false. However, the Gra writes in Yoreh Deah (#179) that the Rambam was attacked on this point, because we find many stories in the Gemara about magic and devils. Rav Kaminetsky's explanation resolves

this difficulty. The Rambam does not intend to totally deny the existence of devils. He is saying that they existed only during the time of the Tannaim and Amoraim. Nowadays, though, when the spiritual forces have faded, the world needs to remain in balance, so they do not exist.

Rav Tzadok already mentioned this idea, and writes in his book, Resisei Laila, that during the First Temple period the Written Torah, prophecy and open miracles were the norm. During the Second Temple period, the Written Torah was replaced with the Oral Torah, prophecy was replaced with wisdom, and miracles became concealed. During the First Temple period these three elements could be felt tangibly, which explains the existence of idol worship, as the recognition of the Divine also sought a tangible expression. During the Second Temple period, when prophecy and open miracles had already disappeared, the inclination to worship idols was conquered and defeated.

This is what it says in the beginning of our Parsha: "I appeared to Avraham..." (Shemot 6:3) R. Tzadok writes (Resisei Laila):

Also in the prophetic influence He appeared to the patriarchs in the Divine manner spreading through the world. Therefore their prophecy was with image and vision, according to the cloaks and veils with which the Divine garbs itself in this world ... Hashem created the world in balance, so that always according to the Torah's manner with Am Yisrael is Hashem's guidance with all the other worlds. Even the nations act this way, with balance, so that the increase of idol worship, chartumim and magicians was only so long as the Shechina was revealed with Am Yisrael. When the Shechina departed and the Oral Torah began, Greek wisdom – which is also human wisdom – appeared among them."

Rav Kook zt"l writes about the relationship between idol worship and prophecy: "The imaginative power was banished from its widespread domination in Israel, and the inclination for idol worship was contained in a lead tank. (The members of the Knesset Hagedola sealed it in a lead tank; cf. Yoma 69b) ... In parallel, we no longer have a prophet" (Orot, pg. 36)

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Jan. 04, 2005 To: yhe-parsha@etzion.org.il Subject: PARSHA65 -14: Parashat Vaera By Rav Yaakov Medan

yeshivat har etzion israel koschitzky virtual beit midrash (vbm) parashat hashavua This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l. The htm version of this shiur is available at: <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha65/14-65vaera.htm> PARASHAT VAERA

Please pray for a refuah sheleimah for Chaya Chanina bat Marcel.

"I SHALL HARDEN PHARAOH'S HEART"

BY RAV YAAKOV MEDAN
HARDENING THE HEART

"I shall harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I shall lay My hand on Egypt, and I shall bring out My hosts, My nation - the children of Israel - from the land of Egypt, with great judgments." (7:3-4)

The commentators address this Divine promise in terms of both its justice and an understanding of its reality. In terms of justice - how can G-d present accusations against Pharaoh and punish him if He Himself hardened his heart? And in terms of understanding the reality - is all of the negotiating that Moshe conducts with Pharaoh and all the rebuke and warning that he gives him all just for show? After all, G-d is determining in advance what Pharaoh's answers are going to be; what, then, is the purpose of all the negotiating? Moreover, G-d is certainly able to perform whatever He chooses, but His involvement in a person's private realm - his will and his free choice - arouses the suspicion that perhaps a person is not truly free to choose. Who can guarantee, when we wish to punish a regular criminal, that he acted out of free will and that G-d did not interfere in his choice?

The Rambam, in his Introduction to Massekhet Avot and in his Laws of Teshuva, as well as the Ramban in his commentary on our parasha, maintain that

the negation of choice is one of the punishments that G-d may choose to inflict on a person. The Rambam teaches:

"It is possible that a person may commit a grave transgression, or several transgressions, such that the True Judge rules that the punishment for this sinner, for the transgressions that he has performed willingly and knowingly, is that teshuva will be withheld from him and he will not be allowed the right to turn from his evil, so that he may die and be lost in the sin that he performs... Therefore it is written in the Torah, "I shall harden Pharaoh's heart": because he first sinned on his own initiative, and did evil to the Israelites living in his land, as it is written, "Let us deal wisely with them..." - therefore it was ruled that teshuva would be withheld from him so that he may be punished; therefore G-d hardened his heart. But why does He then send a message to him via Moshe, saying, "Let [My people go] and repent [your evil ways]," if He has already told him, "You will not send them out" - as it is written, "You and your servants I know..." but for this I have placed you?" In order to teach everyone that when G-d withholds teshuva from a sinner, he is not able to repent; he dies in his wickedness which he performed at first of his own will. Likewise Sichon: because of his sins he was punished by having teshuva withheld from him, as it is written, "For the Lord your G-d hardened his spirit and toughened his heart." And likewise the Canaanites: because of their abominations, teshuva was withheld from them and they waged war against Israel, as it is written, "For it was from G-d that their heart was hardened for battle against Am Yisrael, in order that they may be annihilated..." G-d did not decree upon Pharaoh to cause evil to Israel, nor did He cause Sichon to sin in his land, nor the Canaanites to perform abominations, nor the Israelites to engage in idolatry. All of these sinned of their own accord, and all were punished by having teshuva withheld from them." (Laws of Teshuva, 6:3)

Ramban agrees, in principle, with Rambam, but to his view the withholding of teshuva throughout the ten plagues is not a punishment for the subjugation. During the first five plagues, where we read "Pharaoh's heart was hardened," "Pharaoh hardened his heart," etc., Pharaoh still had free choice. But after he had repeatedly refused God's command, G-d withheld the ways of teshuva from him, and thereafter the dominant expression in the final plagues is, "G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart."

Still, we are troubled. How is it possible that the gates of teshuva are locked? Furthermore, we know about Pharaoh's sins as well as those of the Canaanites. But the Torah makes no mention of the great sins of Sichon that precede his war against Israel; why, then, does G-d harden his heart? If we wish to rely on the contention that if G-d hardened his heart, and we know that all of God's ways are just, then obviously he must have been evil - then we can no longer presume to try and understand the justice of anything in Tanakh; we must simply believe that G-d acts justly, without any ability on our part to observe this. What, then, is the point of all these stories if there is nothing that we can learn from them?

THE WAY OF REDEMPTION Let us return to the essence of the story of the plagues in Egypt. Moshe and Aharon come to the nation, tell them about the Revelation at the burning bush, and perform the wonders before them. Renewed faith and new hope blossom in the hearts of the nation:

"Aharon spoke all the things that G-d had told Moshe, and he performed the signs before the eyes of the nation. And the nation believed, and when they heard that G-d had remembered Benei Yisrael and that He had seen their affliction, they bowed and prostrated themselves." (4:30-31)

But it very quickly becomes apparent that the miraculous redemption is going to take a bumpy road. Time after time, Moshe and Aharon, with their staffs and their wonders, are banished from before Pharaoh, and the servitude becomes increasingly oppressive. In their first meeting with Pharaoh in his palace, he sends them away and publicizes his decree concerning the straw. After Aharon's staff turns into a crocodile - even though it swallows the staffs of the magicians - Pharaoh's heart is hardened, and Moshe and Aharon return empty-handed. In the plague of blood, the magicians (almost) succeed in producing blood as Moshe and Aharon have done. Pharaoh returns to his palace, paying no attention to the plague, and it appears that the inhabitants of Egypt found a way of bypassing the problem:

"The magicians did likewise with their magic, so Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he did not listen to them, as G-d had said. Pharaoh turned and came to his home; he paid no attention to this either. All the Egyptians dug around the river for water to drink, for they could not drink from the water of the river. Thus seven days passed after God's smiting of the river." (7:22-25) In the next plague, the magicians once again manage to produce frogs, as Aharon did. The nation's spirit flags.

Now comes the great moment when the magicians are unable to remove the frogs. Pharaoh cracks; he calls Moshe and Aharon and asks them to remove the plague, promising to free the people:

"Pharaoh called Moshe and Aharon, saying: Pray to G-d that He should remove the frogs from me and from my nation, and I shall let the people go, that they may sacrifice to God." (8:4) But it is right here that great disappointment strikes: it turns out that Moshe and Aharon, despite the power of their wonders, are very bad businessmen and politicians. They ask for no guarantees; they believe Pharaoh's promise and remove the frogs:

"Moshe said to Pharaoh: 'Challenge me as to when I should pray for you and for your servants and for your nation, to cut off the frogs from you and from your house; they will remain only in the river.' [Pharaoh] said, 'Tomorrow.' And Moshe said, 'According to your word, in order that you may know that there is none like the Lord our God.'" (9:5-6)

Pharaoh - obviously - violates his promise, but Moshe and Aharon are nevertheless tempted to believe him once again during the plague of wild beasts; they remove the plague in return for a verbal promise by the lying king. The same innocent, embarrassing pattern repeats itself in the plagues of hail and locusts. It becomes clear to everyone that **A STRONG HAND, IN THE ABSENCE OF A TOUGH, WISE POLICY BASED ON A HEALTHY SUSPICION, WILL NOT LEAD THE NATION TO FREEDOM**, and that Moshe and Aharon are hopelessly amateur politicians.

Pharaoh, too, "understands" this, **AND THIS IS THE HARDENING OF HIS HEART**. G-d lets him off the hook time after time, giving him opportunities for teshuva. Had there been any conscience in the heart of the wicked king, he would have respected the fact that G-d relies on his promise. But as a person devoid of honor and altogether lacking moral conscience, Pharaoh concludes that one can make promises to G-d without having to fulfill them. G-d exploits this in order to pay Pharaoh back and show him His power time after time, but God's own justice and goodness are not affected at all; nor is the opportunity that He extends to the evil king to renounce his evil.

The same can be said concerning Sichon, king of the Emori. The hardening of his heart was not effected by means of G-d connecting an electrode to his brain or his heart, against his will. G-d does not do such things to His creations! Benei Yisrael ask the king of Edom for permission to pass through his land on the way to Eretz Kena'an. The king of Edom refuses, and comes out to meet them with a great show of force. Am Yisrael could have waged war against them, but G-d forbade them to do so, because He had promised that land to the children of Esav. So Benei Yisrael withdrew, and journeyed around the land of Edom. They did the same in the case of Moav (according to what we learn from Yiftah's words to the king of Amon in Shoftim 11), once again turning away for a similar reason.

Sichon misjudged these actions. He could not conceive of the measure of God's goodness towards the children of Lot and towards Esav, son of Yitzchak, and interpreted Israel's actions as arising from weakness and fear of war against the nations on the east of the Jordan. Sichon calculated as follows: if Moav, whom I conquered in war, had the courage to refuse Israel's request and Israel was afraid - then why should I be afraid of them and allow them to pass through my land?! Sichon gathered his army for war against Israel, and was vanquished. Concerning this we read,

"Sichon, king of Cheshbon, did not agree to let me pass through his land, for the Lord your G-d hardened his spirit and toughened his heart in order that He could deliver him into your hands this day." (Devarim 2:30)

The same picture emerges once again from the war against the nations of Kena'an. The fear that Rachav exposes in her words testifies to the fear of the nations of Kena'an prior to the arrival of Benei Yisrael:

"For we have heard how G-d dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you left Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Emori on the other side of the Jordan - to Sichon and to Og, whom you annihilated. We heard - and our hearts melted, and no-one had any spirit rise up in him against you, for the Lord your G-d is the G-d in the heavens above and upon the earth below" (Yehoshua 2:10-11).

Why, then, did the Canaanites not surrender to Benei Yisrael and make peace with them? To the view of most poskim, had they made peace, they would have been allowed to remain where they were! But the Tanakh answers this question explicitly:

"It was from G-d to harden their hearts before the war with Israel, in order that He could annihilate them, leaving them no favor, but that He might destroy them, as G-d had commanded Moshe" (Yehoshua 11:20).

I believe that the key to the meaning of this verse is to be found in the war against Ai. There the Canaanites learned that Israel can be defeated. Although

At Ai was destroyed in the second war, the sweet taste of victory from the first battle never disappeared, and they understood that they could defeat Israel if they invested the required effort. In this matter, G-d hardened their hearts.

I cannot resist including at least one modern parallel to the above descriptions in Tanakh.

The Palestinians had almost received everything they wanted, at that stage, from the Barak government, some three and a half years ago. An agreement had almost been signed that would have dismantled most of the Jewish settlement in Yehuda, Shomron and Gaza. Altogether by chance, during that very same period, the hurried and disgraceful flight of the I.D.F. from Lebanon took place, leaving behind computers, valuable ammunition, and even soldiers' tefillin. The Palestinians, viewing this, drawing its conclusions as to the staying power of an Israel seemingly dominated by the "Four Mothers" movement - and notified the Israeli Prime Minister that they had no interest in an agreement; they would liberate the land as Saladin did in his time. And that was how the present war broke out. Later, the modern "Saladin" sat in his ruins, in the Mukata, his Palestinian Authority crumbling before his eyes.

"For the Lord your G-d hardened his spirit and toughened his heart, in order that He might give him into your hands this day!" (Devarim 2:30) "For straight are the ways of God; the righteous shall walk in them, while the sinners shall stumble in them." (Hoshea 14:10)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Comments regarding this shiur may be sent to Parsha@etzion.org.il.

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