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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAEIRA - 5772

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"RavFrاند" List - **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eyra**

The Differential Between Potential and Realized Potential

This week's parsha contains the first time in the Torah that we are explicitly told the name of Moshe Rabbeinu's father – Amram ben Kehas ben of Levi. The pasuk says that Amram married his aunt Yocheved and together they had two sons – Aharon and Moshe [Shmos 7:18-20].

We first learned about the birth of Moshe in last week's parsha. There the pasuk ambiguously says: "A man went from the House of Levi and took Levi's daughter (and they had a son and called him Moshe)" [Shmos 2:1]. It would have been more logical, it would seem, to tell us about Moshe Rabbeinu's father when initially mentioning his birth. Why does the Torah omit the identity of the parents when first narrating Moshe's birth?

Rav Moshe Feinstein explains that when two people bring a child into the world – at that early stage in the child's life – the parents really have no great "claim to fame." At that stage, we do not know who the baby is or what the baby will become. At that point, the baby is only "a bundle of raw potential" (b'koach, not b'po-al).

Therefore, giving accolades and honors to the parents of Moshe Rabbeinu at the stage of his birth would be premature. He was only a baby!

In this week's parsha, the situation has changed. In Parshas VaEra we already know who Moshe Rabbeinu is. This is a person who could have remained comfortably in the house of Pharaoh, but he grew up and went out amongst his brethren and saw their suffering. Moshe Rabbeinu stuck

up for the oppressed Jew. Moshe Rabbeinu had to flee for his life and go to Midian. Moshe Rabbeinu stood up for the oppressed daughters of Yisro at the well. This is only a fraction of what he will yet accomplish. But he is now 80 years old; he has already demonstrated his character.

Now the pasuk can inform us that he is the product of an Amram and a Yocheved. Here the parents can now proclaim: "See the child that we have raised." They can now stand up and take credit. Let the world know who Moshe Rabbeinu's father was. Let the world know who is mother was. Moshe Rabbeinu is more than just raw potential. The potential has been realized.

The Rabbeinu Bechaye in Parshas Bereshis alludes to the same point. Throughout the days of creation the Torah uses the refrain "The L-rd saw that it was good." At the end of creation the pasuk says "And the L-rd saw everything that he did and behold it was VERY good." [Bereshis 1:31]. Rabbeinu Bechaye notes that we find three distinct expressions: "ki tov", "tov", and "tov me'od". The first expression ("ki tov"), he says, is used when we are looking at the potential of an item or a person or a day. Each day of creation was "ki tov". There was tremendous potential in each and every day. But it was only a part of a much greater sum that was going to yet happen.

However, when G-d reviewed all of creation at the end of six days, the full creation was "tov meod" – potential realized. The sum is greater than all of the parts. The "parts" are merely "ki tov". The sum is "tov meod."

The Rabbeinu Bechaye – back in Parshas Bereshis - references the language used in connection with Moshe Rabbeinu here in Shmos. When Moshe Rabbeinu was born, the parents knew they had something special in their hands. The Medrash says that the room filled with light. His cry was that of a mature child. This was not just any little baby. This was someone special. The Torah uses the expression "ki tov hu" at that point [Shmos 2:2]. He was only potential. Therefore, just like the intermediate stages of creation, he was designated "ki tov". He was potential, unbelievable and unimaginable potential, but only potential, nevertheless.

But, says Rabbeinu Bechaye, later, when Moshe matured and proved himself, he in fact merited the accolade "meod" as it is written "And the man Moshe was 'anav meod' (exceedingly humble)" [Bamidbar 12:3].

Even Moshe Rabbeinu had to reach his potential. Until he did he was merely "ki tov". When he reached that potential he was "tov meod."

At the end of Parshas Bo, we learn the laws of the firstborn. There is the law of the firstborn of man, the firstborn of a kosher animal, and the law of the firstborn of a non-kosher animal. There is a seemingly strange-law called "Petter Chamor." The firstborn of a donkey has to be redeemed with a sheep. If the owner chooses not to redeem the donkey in this way, he must decapitate the animal.

The Netziv of Volozhin says that a firstborn who wastes his potential forfeits his right to remain in the world. The firstborn is special. He has special capabilities and special potential. He must develop that potential and maximize the powers he was given. Failure to do so justifies the harsh fate that befalls the donkey who was not utilized properly to fulfill the mitzah of "petter chamor."

The Netziv generalizes this to be a "klal gadol b'Torah" [over-arching principle of the Torah]: Someone who has the capacity for greatness and is lazy and does not realize his potential is far worse than someone who never had the potential in the first place. It is a terrible thing to waste potential. It would have been preferable to have never been born into the world than to waste one's potential.

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Netziv: Davar B'Ito

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein To sponsor an edition

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Parshas Vaera Four and a Half Cups I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt. I will rescue you from their service. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will teake you to Me for a nation, and I shall be a G-d to you.

We hardly give a moment's thought to the reason for the wine at the Seder. We've internalized the argument that the four expressions of redemption at the beginning of our parshah are memorialized through the four cups. The argument, however, is not particularly strong. The four varieties of redemption we experienced at the Exodus may call for four of something, but why wine? So many other items could have served the same function. We could eat four kinds of meat, or four vegetables, or even four different kinds of matzah.

Additionally, we must account for the mysterious fifth cup – the one over which the gemara[2] tells us to recite Hallel, and yet whose very presence at the Seder table is considered halachically optional. If this cup belongs to Hallel, why should it not be mandatory?

Chazal wanted us to appreciate another dimension of our redemption – a factor so important that it explains why the four expressions of redemption were not just welcome manifestations of Hashem's love for us, but integral parts of the process of redemption. The purpose of the Exodus was to bring the Bnei Yisrael to Sinai. But a nation of slaves, used to nothing more than toiling with bricks and mortar, cannot receive a Torah. Nor can it transition in an instant to the state of preparedness necessary to make them suitable candidates to live by its expectations. The four expressions of redemption trace the path of inner change that turned slaves into proper recipients of the Torah. Chazal underscored this change by using wine to remind us about the four expressions. Wine is a handy instrument of change. When people drink it, their appearance and conduct changes rapidly, and in different ways. It is the perfect substance with which to mark the transformation of the state of mind of a person or people.

In the first stage, Hashem took them out of the burdens of Egypt. In other words, He freed them from their harsh servile labor in making bricks. The first step they took in forming new identities and self-images came when they were released from this mind- and spirit-numbing occupation. This happened when the Egyptians were stricken with the fourth plague, arov.

They were still technically slaves, though. While no longer forced to labor as they had done before, they were still legally the property of others, and therefore seen as not quite as human as others. They were still seen as slaves in principle, fully obligated to do whatever their master demanded of them. Barad changed the equation. Paroh for the first time began to hold them in some regard, to begrudgingly give them some respect, even as he struggled to maintain his authority over them. This was the second stage, brought about by the second expression of

redemption, in which Hashem “saved them” from their work” – in principle, as well as practically.

They won their complete freedom with makas bechoros, achieving the third stage in their reconstruction. Entering into a covenant with G-d at Sinai – “and I will take you to Me as a nation” - they arrived at the fourth stage, becoming what they were meant to become.

An aside: the Torah is not consistent in describing the first stage. If sometimes speaks of “a strong hand;” at other times, such as our pesukim, it speaks of “an outstretched arm.” Sometimes, it speaks of both. This is certainly not random.

The Mechilta comments upon a pasuk later on with two images. “Hashem saved Yisrael on that day from the hand of Egypt[3]” – like a person holding a bird in his grasp, who can instantly strangle it; like a person who dislodges a fetus from the innards of a cow.” By this they mean to point out that the Bnei Yisrael were endangered in multiple ways, requiring Hashem to show His ability and strategy on several planes.

The gemara[4] tells us that our dispersion to far-flung regions of the globe benefits us. Those who wish to harm us never have all of us within range. Paroh, however, did. Hashem's show of His “strong hand” would not keep His people out of danger. A stronger person intent on stealing a bird in the hand of a much weaker one will not prevail through his strength alone. When it becomes clear to the weaker person that he will be overpowered, he will simply strangle the bird in hand to prevent his adversary from benefiting from his aggression. Similarly, Paroh could have responded to Hashem's display of strength by destroying the Bnei Yisrael quickly and efficiently.

To prevent that, HKBH reached out with “an outstretched arm.” He provided no respite for Paroh to strategize between makos, to plan a quick program of extermination. He did this through unrelenting pressure – an arm constantly poised to strike again and again. He picked off Paroh's associates and advisors one by one, keeping him on the defensive and preoccupied with maintaining a functioning regime. Paroh had no time to implement a plan to counterstrike against the Bnei Yisrael. (The authors of the Haggadah explain the “outstretched hand” as “the sword.” They mean the process whereby Hashem kept assassinating key individuals between the plagues.)

Yet another factor prevented Hashem's strength alone from accomplishing the complete removal of the Jewish people from Egypt. Many Jews simply did not want to leave. They had become indispensable to their masters, bettered their positions, and even enriched themselves. Some refused to leave because they had no interest in accepting a Torah! Yet the Exodus, when it came to pass, was complete. No Jew stayed behind. Those who refused to leave left against their wills, by leaving earthly existence. The “strong hand” of G-d pursued them, killing them during the plague of darkness. (The authors of the Haggadah call this “strong hand” the dever, meaning a death-dealing plague visited upon recalcitrant Jews.) This strong hand is compared to that of a person assisting the birth of a calf. His strength alone, his mastery of the mother will get him nowhere when the calf is not ready to move, unless he dislodges the calf against its nature.

We now understand why our pesukim do not include any reference to the “strong hand.” That displayed itself only after some Jews later opted to remain behind. At this earlier stage in the process, only the “outstretched arm” became apparent, in preventing Paroh from quickly eradicating the Jews.

We return to our original subject. The basis for a fifth cup of wine is a fifth expression: “You will know that I Hashem am your G-d[5].” This knowledge should not be confused with belief. Rather, it means comprehending and understanding, to the point that one's knowledge allows him to become davek/attached to Hashem. This expression is not part of the same textual sequence as the other four. This is perfectly reasonable. No one could have reached any level of deveikus without

first receiving the Torah, something that would not happen for quite a while.

Such deveikus cannot be attained by all. Only some people can hope to attain it. This fifth expression of redemption, then, does not apply to the entire nation. It promises, however, that some Jews will be successful in achieving it. The fifth cup does not make demands on all equally. It belongs at the Seder as part of the story, but it is not obligatory.

1. Based on Ha'amek Davar and Harchev Davar, Shemos 6:6-7
2. Pesachim 118A
3. Shemos 14:30
4. Pesachim 87B
5. This approach is markedly different from that of other commentators.

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PARSHAT VA'ERA -- "ANI HASHEM" -
Part One

Should Bnei Yisrael's redemption from slavery be 'unconditional'?
According to God's original promise to Avraham Avinu at Brit Bein ha'Btarim (Breishit 15:13-15), it certainly seems that way. Furthermore, the opening lines of Parshat Va'era also leave us with this impression that the forthcoming redemption will be unconditional - after all, could God have any higher expectations from a nation that had endured so many years of oppression?

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

AND

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

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

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

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

GETTING BETTER, OR GETTING WORSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1) What God tells Moshe (see 6:2-5), and hence:

- 2) What Moshe must tell Bnei Yisrael (see 6:6-8).

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

ANI HASHEM

Review the opening line of God's response to Moshe (see 6:2), as it appears to contain a rather superfluous statement:

"And Elokim spoke to Moshe, and told him: ANI HASHEM".

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

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

"Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael:

ANI HASHEM,

and I will take them out from their suffering in Egypt...

and I will save them from their enslavement,

and I shall redeem them with an outstretched arm....

and I shall take them for Me as My Nation

and I will be their God... then they shall know that:

ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM

who has taken them out of Egypt.

And I will take them to the Land...

and I will give it to them as an inheritance...

ANI HASHEM."

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

Clearly, God wants Bnei Yisrael to hear this 'message' of "Ani Hashem".

But how does this 'statement' answer the people's complaint? Would the repetition of this phrase, together with yet another promise of redemption lighten their workload?

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

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

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

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

A STATEMENT, or A COMMAND?

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

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

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

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

- ve'lo SHAMU el Moshe mi'kotzer ruach u'm'avoda kasha-

But they did not LISTEN to Moshe, due to their crushed spirits and hard work. (see 6:9).

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

'TO BELIEVE' OR 'TO OBEY'?

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

* They did not HEAR what Moshe said.

That can't be its meaning in this pasuk, as they obviously heard what Moshe said. [If not, he could have simply raised his voice, and repeated it again.]

* They did not COMPREHEND what he said.

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

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

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

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

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

* They did not OBEY what Moshe told them.

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

Or did they?

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

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

A PROOF FROM YEchezkel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TAKING 'EGYPT' OUT OF THE JEWS

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

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

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

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

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

Much to our amazement, Sefer Yechezkel states explicitly that which Sefer Shmot only alludes to. God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent prior to the Exodus, to cleanse themselves from the "tum'a" of their Egyptian culture - in preparation for their redemption. Unfortunately, at that time Bnei Yisrael did not

OBEY ["ve-lo avu l'ISHMOA" / see 20:8] and thus deserved to be destroyed in the land of Egypt.

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

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

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

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

A LOGICAL 'KAL VA-CHOMER'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TO KNOW or TO INTERNALIZE

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

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

THE FIRST TWO 'DIBROT'

This interpretation can help us appreciate the deeper meaning of the first two of the Ten Commandments that Bnei Yisrael receive when they arrive at Har Sinai.

The first commandment: "ANOCHI HASHEM ELOKECHA asher HOTZEITICHA me-eret Mitzrayim..." (see 20:2-3, compare w/6:6!) is simply a more emphatic form of "Ani Hashem"; and the next commandment: "lo yihyeh lachem elohim acherim al panai..." - not to follow any other gods - reiterates this warning that accepting God requires the rejection of decedent cultures.

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

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

A DIFFICULT MISSION

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

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

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

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

[See Ramban's interpretation of this pasuk!]

SOME HELP FROM SEFER VAYIKRA

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

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

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

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

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

Keep My laws, for by them man lives... ANI HASHEM"

(see Vayikra 18:1-5).

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

A THEME IN SEFER SHMOT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, as we explained above, this explains why the very first DIBUR of the Ten Commandments is "ANOCHI [=ANI] HASHEM ELOKECHA who took you

out of Egypt - LO YIHIYEH... Do not have any other gods INSTEAD of Me" (see 20:2).

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

ELIYAHU AT LEIL HA-SEDER

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, January 20, 2012 THE ARAB WINTER :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The cold blasts of winter have arrived here in the Middle East over the last weeks with snow on the mountain tops and with the especially cold temperatures at night here in Jerusalem.. But all of this is normal and expected for the middle of January and the rain and snow is begrudgingly welcomed by all of us here in arid Israel.

Winter is winter and we pray for a normal winter to take place and this is the type of weather that a normal winter always brings. And, having passed the midpoint of winter, our thoughts naturally turn towards probably the most welcome season of the year, the springtime.

This year the spring season will mark the one year anniversary of the upheavals in the Arab world that toppled the governments and dictators of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and are still causing civil war in Yemen and Syria. The Western world optimistically dubbed this wave of violent unrest as the "Arab Spring" and proclaimed the arrival of democracy to this area of the world - an area that has known democracy in only one country in the vicinity, the lonely little country of Israel.

Though it still may be a bit premature to judge the consequences of the "Arab Spring" I think that the signs point to a further destabilization and a state of unrest for all of the countries involved. The Western world's wishful thinking for stable, democratic governments appears to be unattainable and the "Arab Spring" carries with it a great deal of wintry blasts.

The hallmark of the previous and current dictatorial regimes in the Middle East (perhaps with the exception of Saudi Arabia) was the opposition of the authorities to the Islamist groups within their societies. They realized the dangers of mixing fundamental extreme religious beliefs and policies with politics and diplomacy.

This ruthless keeping of the lid on a potentially boiling pot resulted in the peace treaties between Egypt and Israel and Jordan and Israel and the clandestine commercial relationships between Israel and many of the Gulf states. There never was a majority of the populations of these countries - poor, backward and appallingly illiterate in many cases - that backed any Arab rapprochement with the Jewish state.

The governments of these countries, in recognition of this widespread basic anti-Jewish sentiment, allowed anti-Semitism to flourish on the local level even while they maintained diplomatic correctness with Israel on the international level. These governments, instead of trying to create a base of support for their policies and long term welfare, created the very forces that undermined their authority and exposed their venality and duplicity.

Their very policies and their treatment of the masses, their continued encouragement of the anti-Semitic hatred by their controlled media, guaranteed that the Islamists would certainly rise to power in any sort of democratic election. And so, this has occurred across the entire spectrum of the Arab Middle East where the Islamists are now poised to be the majority force in these governments. Only the continued repression of these Islamist forces by the armies of Jordan and Egypt will keep the peace with Israel ongoing.

Once again we find ourselves between the rock and the hard place.

Either we support this repression which reviles our conscience and worldview or we face implacable enemies that surround us and clearly believe that our destruction, God forbid, is religiously ordained by their faith.

What has clouded all dealings here in the Middle East over the past many decades has been an unwilling ability to face facts as they are – an inability to see the clearly. The United States, Europe and Israel have all followed policies that are based on wishful thinking rather than on reality.

The complete misreading of Arafat and the PLO by Israel and the West in the past has led to the current diplomatic stalemate and the inability of the parties to move forward. Even the so-called secular Palestinian leadership is very Islamist in its statements and attitude towards Israel. The Arab mentality towards Israel has been created by centuries of Islamist doctrine that is anti-Jewish and uncompromisingly hostile to the Jewish historical narrative and to any Jewish national aspirations. The “Arab Spring” and its consequences only reinforce this judgment of the reality of our situation. Feel good proclamations and humanitarian gestures make no dent in this mindset. We can only look realistically at these developments and cautiously guard our strategic advantages - militarily, diplomatically and territorially. Perhaps some sense of reality will sink into our part of the world and the necessary changes in the Islamist Arab mindset will slowly begin to occur.

Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: VAEIRA :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The Lord, so to speak, apparently is disturbed by Moshe’s complaint against the treatment and continued oppression of Israel by the Egyptians. Moshe’s complaint, voiced at the conclusion of last week’s parsha, that no salvation has come to Israel as of yet does not receive a sympathetic hearing in the Heavenly court.

The Lord, so to speak, according to Rashi and the Talmud, longs for the previous generations of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel who seemingly bore their trials and difficulties without complaint even

though God’s revelation to them was in a lesser level than was the case with Moshe. Yet we do find that the patriarchs, Avraham and Yaakov did challenge God at moments of crisis.

Avraham says to God; “What can you grant me as I go childless?” And Yaakov says to God: “And You promised me that You would be good to me [and now Eisav threatens to destroy me.]” So why is the Lord disturbed by Moshe’s statement that the lot of the Jewish people in Egypt has not yet been improved? Where do Moshe’s words differ radically from those of Avraham and Yaakov?

And why does God, so to speak, long for the previous generations over the behavior of the current generation? And according to the aggadic interpretation of the verses in the parsha, Moshe is punished for asking that obvious question as to why the Jewish situation has shown no improvement even though Moshe is apparently fulfilling God’s mission accurately and punctually. Where is the shortcoming that provokes such a critical response from Heaven?

I think that the answer perhaps lies in recognizing the difference between the individual Jew as an individual and the belief in the fate of the Jewish people as a nation and community. The individual Jew, Avraham, Yaakov, you and me, regularly face crises and difficulties in our lives as individuals. We have no guarantee that the Lord will extricate us from our difficulties.

As Yaakov put it; “Perhaps my sins will have cancelled out any Heavenly promises of success and aid.” Avraham realizes that perhaps God’s promises to him can also possibly be fulfilled through his faithful disciple and servant Eliezer. The doubts of the patriarchs are personal, not national. They never for a moment waver in their belief in the ultimate survival and triumph of the Jewish people, of the truth and justice of their cause and code, and of the validity of the mission of the Jewish people.

Moshe’s moment of complaint is not only personal but it is national. Maybe this people will never leave Egyptian bondage. Maybe the Jewish people as a nation will not be able to come to Sinai and accept the Torah and become a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Maybe they are not worthy of the grandiose promises made to them.

Moshe is forced to account for doubting the people and implying that God has not chosen well, for the troubles of that people have not subsided. One can doubt one’s own place in the story of Israel. One can never doubt the validity of Israel and the Heavenly promises made to it itself.

Shabat shalom.

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Va'era

"Behold, Bnei Yisrael have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips!" (6:12)

Moshe Rabbeinu raises the issue of his speech impediment. He feels that, as a result of his inability to speak eloquently, he is not qualified to serve as Hashem's spokesman to Pharaoh. Furthermore, if the Jewish people had not listened to him, how could Pharaoh be expected to listen? Rashi cites the Midrash which notes that this is one of the ten kal v'chomer, a fortiori logical arguments, in the Torah. A kal v'chomer reasons: If a rule or fact applies in a situation in which we have limited reason for it to apply, certainly it applies in a situation in which we have clear reason for it to apply. The Jews should have absorbed every word that emanated from Moshe's mouth. He was addressing the long-awaited concept of liberation from bondage. Surely, this was an idea upon which they should have fully focused. Regrettably, they did not. Apparently, the people were not in a listening mood. If they, who wanted to leave, were not listening, what should be expected of Pharaoh, who clearly wanted them to stay? He would surely ignore Moshe's request. This kal v'chomer is fraught with difficulty. The issue to be resolved is: The Jews did not listen due to their kotzer ruach, shortness of breath, and avodah kashah, hard work (ibid 6:9). They were physically and emotionally spent. A wasted person has great difficulty believing that all of his troubles are coming to an end. The commentators - each in his own inimitable fashion - offer their explanations. In his

Shemen HaTov, Horav Zev Weinberg, Shlita, suggests a practical explanation for Moshe's argument. First, he explains that Moshe's counter-response of va'ani aral sefasayim, "and I have sealed lips," is not to be viewed as the sibah, causative reason, for the Jews' lack of attention to Moshe, but rather, it is the mesovev, effect, consequence, of their not listening to his words.

Moshe was telling Hashem that he had become aral sefasayim, closed-mouthed, as a result of the Jews' ignoring him. A shliach's, agent's, ability does not extend further than that of the meshalei'ach, sender. If Moshe sought to present the Jewish case before Pharaoh, they first must believe in themselves, their ability to become free men, and to trust and have faith that Hashem will redeem them. If they lacked faith, then Moshe could not effectively present their case. He could have been the most prolific orator, with a mouth of gold that spewed forth diamonds, and it would have made no difference. If the people he was representing did not believe, then he was tongue-tied. The greatest shtadlan, intercessor, is as good as those who send him on the mission. They must believe in their own potential success or their agent will fail.

The story is told that Rabbi Akiva Eiger, zl, Rav of Posen and one of the most illustrious scholars of all time, refused to send an individual who himself did not have a beard, to represent the Jewish community before the gentile government to lobby to abolish their decree that all Jewish men be ordered to shave their beards and peyos. The Rav asserted his ruling, despite the man's amicable relationship with the powers that be and his own distinguished service to the crown. He cited the pasuk in Sefer Tehillim 146:3, Al tivtechu bi'nedivim b'ven adam she'ein lo seshuvah, "Do not rely on nobles, nor on any human being, for he holds no salvation." He interpreted the pasuk in the following manner: "If the messenger sees no success in his mission; if he does not feel certain of his success, then his words will have no efficacy." One must believe in what he is doing. This applies across the board to any endeavor he undertakes. He must believe in what he is doing; believe in the organization he represents; believe in the tzedakah, charity, for which he is collecting - or he will fail in his mission.

The Noam Elimelech applies a similar thought in his explanation of Hashem's statement to Moshe and Aharon describing the scenario in which Pharaoh asks them to present a miracle which demonstrates Hashem's supernatural powers: "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves'" (Ibid 7:9). The word lachem, "for yourselves," seems to be out of place. The miracle is to impress Pharaoh and his people - not Moshe and Aharon. Rebbe Elimelech explains that, indeed, Moshe and Aharon had to be impressed. They must see and appreciate the wonders, or they will not be able to imbue others with this belief. Tenu lachem, "provide for yourselves," it is important that you believe, or else Klal Yisrael- and certainly Pharaoh- will never believe.

This is a powerful statement. How often has a person attempted to convince someone to join in an endeavor, be it a spiritual venture, financial venture, or communal venture, only to fall flat on his face? It is because he is not certain of its success. His own belief in the endeavor is, at best, shaky. Such circumstances comprise a recipe for disaster.

These were the heads of their fathers' houses. The sons of Reuven... the sons of Shimon... these were the names of the sons of Levi. (6:14,15)

Is there some distinction to the names of Levi's sons? Apparently there must be, since, concerning Reuven and Shimon, the Torah merely says, "the sons of," without mentioning their actual names. Why does the Torah not emphasize the "names" of Reuven and Shimon's sons? The Shlah HaKadosh, zl, explains that Shevet Levi was unique among the brothers in that they were not enslaved together with the others. This troubled them, since they wanted to share in their brothers' pain and empathize with their plight. What did they do? They gave their sons names in a manner which brought the bitter exile to mind: Gershon, for they were strangers in a land which was not theirs; Kehas, because the Jews' teeth were blunted as a result of their slavery; Merari, to be reminded that the Jews' lives were embittered by the Egyptians. The Shlah concludes with the idea that we should derive from here that it is essential that every Jew empathize with and be sensitive to the affliction of his fellow. No Jew should be left to suffer alone.

Many stories highlight the attitude of our gedolim, Torah giants, to the plight of their fellow Jew. These stories address physical pain which affects a person and the empathy of others towards them. The following episode, however, presents us with a completely different ordeal, one in which the "sufferer" does not recognize his tribulation and probably does not even care. Yet, a Torah giant empathized with the situation in a telling manner, indicating his unusual sensitivity to the spiritual and physical status of all Jews.

Horav Menachem Tzvi Berlin, Shlita, related that he once visited Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl, following Shacharis. The Rosh Yeshivah had just returned home. The Rav was, thus, surprised that Rav Shach was not eating breakfast. He inquired of

his revered Rebbe why he was not eating breakfast. He added that he would wait to discuss his issue until after the Rosh Yeshivah had eaten.

Rav Shach said that he did not eat between 8:00 and 8:30am. He had accepted upon himself not to partake of food during these thirty minutes, because this is the time when hundreds of thousands of Jewish children begin school in Eretz Yisrael's secular institutions, starting their day without even reciting Krias Shema. He felt the pain of their neshamos.

Do we feel the pain experienced by the neshamos of our alienated brethren? Do we even think about it? I guess that is the hallmark of a gadol: perceiving the pain that no one else senses. Their perspective dwarfs the way we look at the world.

But I shall harden Pharaoh's heart. (7:3)

Anyone who peruses the text might think that Pharaoh was some kind of lunatic. He constantly changed his mind. One moment, he was entreating Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen to rid Egypt of its frogs. The next moment, he had reverted to his usual arrogance. The same scenario played itself out once again concerning makkas arov, pestilence. Every time that he was down, he begged forgiveness, appearing to be sincere. As soon as the plague disappeared, he reverted to his old self. This is behavior suited for an animal - not a rational human being. An animal cannot change its stripes. It is what it is. Born with natural proclivities, it has no control over its life. An animal has no seichel, mind. Cognition does not apply to an animal; only instinct does. Pharaoh was a human being - a vile human, but a human nonetheless. Why was he acting like an out-of-control animal?

Horav Arye Leib Bakst, zl, quotes the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah who explains that a person can sink to the nadir of sin, such that he ultimately loses his koach ha'bechirah, ability to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. At times, the sin has reached a level of depravity so deleterious that the option for repentance no longer exists. He literally has blown it, and he is relegated to die as an unrepentant sinner: no parole; no commutation; maximum sentence. Some transgressions are so heinous that they carry the ultimate punishment: no option of forgiveness. Thus, Hashem writes in the Torah, "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart," in order to demonstrate that Pharaoh's sin had gone too far. The chance for return was no longer an available option. He would die a sinner.

The Rosh Yeshivah expounds on this idea. Man thinks that he is always able to turn things around, to change his life, to achieve great things. It is all up to him, whenever he is in the "mood." He thinks that the reason that he is resistant to change is his own obstinacy, his own reluctance to live a moral, ethical life of spiritual obedience. Whenever he decides to become a practicing Jew, he will do so. The Torah is teaching him otherwise. It is possible that, through one's iniquitous actions, he can sink to such a base level that he is no longer able to return. Just like Pharaoh, he has blown his options. We attempt to convince ourselves that it is all in our hands. Whenever we decide to repent, we will. We have no guarantees. At a certain point, Hashem may remove the option, and we will be stuck in our spiritual low, relegated to a life of moral and spiritual bankruptcy. We will be forever floating in a maelstrom of evil, with no avenue for escape.

Since teshuvah is not coercive, but rather something which we desire, we ask Hashem to facilitate our quest to return to Him. We entreat Him, so that our sins not distance us from Him, preventing our ultimate return. Nothing should be taken for granted.

In conclusion, it is not what it seems or what we would like to convince ourselves. It is not that Hashem's "patience" wears thin; rather, it is our sinful behavior that exhibits such impudence that the appropriate punishment is a loss of favor and teshuvah is no longer an option. Sometimes, the door to the house is locked. We have reneged our right to return.

The frogs will depart... only in the river shall they remain. (8:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu's prayer to Hashem requesting that the frogs be removed and the plague come to a halt was effective. The frogs returned to the river where they belonged. In Parashas Chukas (Bamidbar 21:4), Moshe also prayed to Hashem that He remove the fiery snakes that were wreaking havoc in the Jewish camp. His prayer was not effective. It only worked after Hashem advised Moshe to make a fiery snake out of copper and place it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten by the fiery snake and looked at Moshe's snake was spared. Chazal ask, "Does a serpent cause death or life? Rather, when they looked upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven they were healed. If not, they died" (Rosh Hashanah 29a). The Chafetz Chaim, zl, wonders why Moshe's prayer had been effective in ridding Pharaoh of the frogs, yet he could not do the same for the Jews who were dying from the fiery snake bites. Surely, Moshe prayed as hard, if not more so, for his own brothers. He explains that everything has an antidote; every sin has a penance through which one can seek atonement - except for the sin of lashon hora, evil speech. The mekatreg, prosecuting agent, created by lashon hora is not easily removed. It stands and prosecutes, finding fault with the individual who has slandered his fellow. Similar to the sin which is executed by word of mouth, the

prosecuting angel cannot be silenced He continues with his condemnation of the slanderers. Since the sin which catalyzed the punishment of the fiery serpents was that the nation spoke contemptuously of Hashem and His chosen leader of the people, Moshe, our leader's prayer was ineffective in silencing him.

Likewise, one who goes to great lengths not to speak lashon hora will merit great reward. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates an incredible story which supports this idea. One evening, Rav Zilberstein visited his brother-in-law Horav Chaim Kanievesky, Shlita. During his visit, the Rebbetzin returned home from a chasunah. She was effusive in her excitement about this wedding. She maintained that this was a wedding that was clearly a testament to Hashem's miraculous intervention. It was a wedding that should not have been, but- due to a special merit- it had taken place.

Apparently, four years earlier, the kallah, at the time a teenager of fifteen years old, was in a terrible car accident which left her critically injured and comatose. She lay in her hospital bed, oblivious to her predicament, for two full weeks. Her parents approached Rav Kanievesky and his Rebbetzin, asking them to pray for their daughter. Hashem listened to her heartfelt pleas, and their daughter woke up. She immediately began to speak. Indeed, the first words she said were a question. "Imma, how long was I in a coma?"

It is not important," replied her mother. "For what reason must you know?" she asked. The teenager's response should frighten us all, "A number of months prior to the accident, I accepted upon myself to study two halachos, laws, from the Sefer Chafetz Chaim concerning the laws of lashon hora every day. I had never missed a day - until the accident. I must know how long I was out. It is essential that I study the halachos for each day that I was in a coma."

Imagine, this was the first question she asked her mother. This was primary on her mind. When the incident was related to Rav Kanievesky and his Rebbetzin, they both understandably responded with great emotion. At the time, Rebbetzin Kanievesky visited with the parents and promised them that she would dance with their daughter at the girl's wedding.

At the time, this assurance was far-fetched. While she had woken up from her comatose state, she had much to mend, with a number of surgeries already scheduled. Truthfully, even after she went through the surgeries and ensuing therapy sessions, her body would still be a mess. She would not be a prime "catch" for a shidduch, matrimonial arrangement. Who would want to marry a girl who had gone through so much? Wonder of wonders, the girl survived all of the surgeries and passed with flying colors. In fact, other than the fact that some people knew what she had gone through, most people would be hard-pressed to believe that this girl had been in such a horrific car accident and had not only survived, but thrived. She became engaged to a budding young Torah scholar from a wonderful home. Rebbetzin Kanievesky attended her wedding and kept her word as she danced with the kallah.

In conclusion, Rav Zilberstein attributes her miraculous recovery to her earlier kabbalah to study the laws of lashon hora daily. Who knows the incredible reward in store for one who controls his tongue!

l'zechar nishmas R' Yaakov Shimon ben Yisrael Tzvi z"l. by Mrs. Helen Pollack, Mrs. Patti Pollack, Rivki & Yossi Kornfeld, Mendy & Raizy Pollack, Yoni & Bumie Goldstein, Avi & Estee Pollack, Pnina & Stephen Glassman, Motti & Evy Pollack

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Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshat Va'era
Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

On the Shoulders of Giants

"They don't make them the way they used to."

We have all heard this comment with reference to all sorts of things, usually tools and utensils. Despite all the technological advances from which we benefit, we often are convinced that certain things were of superior quality in the old days. We believe that the old hammer Grandpa once used was stronger, and the snow shovel he wielded more effective, than the newfangled "throwaway" junk that they produce nowadays.

We even extend this belief of things being better back in the old days to human beings. Today's leaders cannot be compared to those of old, and today's athletes are cheap imitations of the Babe Ruths and Ty Cobbs of yesteryear.

In the Jewish tradition, there is a concept of "nitkatnu hadorot, the generations get progressively smaller". Talmudic sages are no match for biblical heroes, and the great rabbis of recent times cannot compare to the rabbinical leaders of centuries ago.

Like any other belief, this one requires a healthy dose of skepticism. Surely technological progress has provided us with tools that are superior to those we once used. And, whereas every generation has its outstanding heroes, not everyone in the past was a perfect person. Furthermore, there are plenty of people today who can stand up to the best of previous generations in their courage, in their erudition, or in their piety.

In this week's Torah portion, Va'era, we encounter what might be the first example in history of the comparison of a current personage with previous ones in which the former comes off poorly.

Rashi shares with us, and ultimately rejects, the Talmud's version of what the opening verses in our Parsha tell us. The Talmud understands these verses in the context of the concluding episodes of last week's Torah portion, where Moses challenged the Almighty and asked Him why He has "mistreated this people", thereby questioning his very mission. Indeed, somewhat earlier in last week's portion, he asked God, "What will I tell the people if they ask me for Your name?" With this background, the rabbis understand the opening verses of this week's Torah portion as follows: God compared Moses to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From this perspective, the patriarchs were much more trusting in God and demonstrated greater faith than Moses. They did not question God in spite of their frustrations. Moses did.

"A pity that they are gone and no longer to be found." This statement, which the rabbis attribute to the Lord, closely resembles the opening statement of this essay, "They don't make them like they used to."

Personally, I have come to appreciate the opinion of those other commentators who defend Moses and who point out that Moses challenged God, not out of faithlessness, but out of a profound and powerful empathy for the suffering of His people.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were individuals. At best, they were heads of families, whereas Moses held the role of a leader of a large nation. In his circumstances, blind faith would have been irresponsible.

When comparing later generations with earlier ones, we must take into account the changed circumstances of those later generations. We must judge them, not by the standards of those who came before them, but in their own contexts.

In the reading that I do about the Holocaust victims and survivors, I often ask myself whether I could possibly have struggled to remain alive in the conditions of torture and horror that they experienced, retaining their will to live. And I am certain that had I personally suffered the Holocaust experience, I would not have been able to emerge from it with the faith commitment of so many of the survivors who came to these shores with recreated families, practicing their faith punctiliously, and reconstructing vibrant religious institutions.

I believe that it is not that we are innately inferior to them. Rather, our circumstances have softened us, whereas their circumstances strengthened them. There is indeed a theme in our tradition that sees a generation as diminished in comparison with the previous one; the later generation in fact becoming "smaller". But our tradition also encourages us to realize that later generations have one great advantage over previous ones: We stand on their shoulders. We benefit from their precedent.

Moses had this advantage: He could learn from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and could model his faith and leadership capacities upon them.

From this view, Moses' confronting the Almighty in defense of his people was simply something he learned from Abraham, who similarly confronted God in defense of the people of Sodom.

It might be true of us that "they don't make them the way they used to", but that need not stop us from asking ourselves, as our sages did, "When will my deeds approach the deeds of my fathers?" For we have the deeds of our fathers to learn from as we build our own spiritual lives.

We stand on the shoulders of long generations of giants. Perhaps future generations will similarly look up to us.

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Lord Jonathan Sacks

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**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Freedom and Truth

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh, if not a lie, then less than the full truth? Here is the conversation between him and Pharaoh after the fourth plague, arov, "swarms of insects" (some say "wild animals") Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land." But Moses said, "That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as he commands us." (Ex. 8: 21-23)

Not just here but throughout, Moses makes it seem as if all he is asking is for permission for the people to undertake a three day journey, to offer sacrifices to God and (by implication) then to return. So, in their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron say:

"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'"

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

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

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

The impression remains to the very end. After the Israelites have left, we read:

The king of Egypt received news that the people were escaping. Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds regarding the people, and said, "What have we done? How could we have released Israel from doing our work?" (14: 5)

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

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

Abrabanel (Lisbon 1437 – Venice 1508) says that God told Moses deliberately to make a small request, to demonstrate Pharaoh's cruelty and indifference to his slaves. All they were asking was for a brief respite

from their labours to offer sacrifices to God. If he refused this, he was indeed a tyrant. Rav Elhanan Samet (Iyyunim be-Parshot Ha-Shevu'a, Exodus, 189) cites an unnamed commentator who says simply that this was war between Pharaoh and the Jewish people, and it war it is permitted, indeed sometimes necessary, to deceive.

Actually, however, the terms of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh are part of a wider pattern that we have already observed in the Torah. When Jacob leaves Laban we read: "Jacob decided to go behind the back of Laban the Aramean, and did not tell him that he was leaving" (Gen. 31: 20). Laban protests this behaviour: "How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war! Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing!" (31: 26-27).

Jacob again has to tell at best a half-truth when Esau suggests that they travel together: "You know that the children are weak, and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. If they are driven hard for even one day, all the sheep will die. Please go ahead of me, my lord" (33: 13-14). This, though not strictly a lie, is a diplomatic excuse.

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

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

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

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

No one should be forced to live a lie. In Judaism truth is the seal of God and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. But when your people is being enslaved, its male children murdered, you have to liberate them by whatever means are possible. Moses, who had already seen that his first encounter with Pharaoh made things worse for his people – they still had to make the same quota of bricks but now also had to gather their own straw (5: 6-8) – did not want to risk making them worse still.

The Torah here is not justifying deceit. To the contrary, it is condemning a system in which telling the truth may put your life at risk, as it still does in many tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. Judaism – a religion of dissent, questioning and "argument for the sake of heaven" – is a faith that values intellectual honesty and moral truthfulness above all things. The Psalmist says: "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24: 3-4). Malachi says of one who speaks in God's name: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips" (Mal. 2: 6). Every Amidah ends with the prayer, "My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech."

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

and not provoke further oppression is not the kind of society God wants us to make.

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
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A Model of Expressing Gratitude

During each of the first three makos, we are taught a critical lesson. Moshe was not permitted to perform the makos of blood and frogs which were brought upon the Nile River. Similarly, the dust of the earth which would turn into lice had to be hit by Aaron rather than Moshe. Chazal teach us that Moshe owed a debt of gratitude to the river and the earth because both had protected him. As a baby, he had been saved by the Nile. After killing the Egyptian who was beating the Jewish slave, Moshe used the dirt to cover the body lest he be discovered.

Notwithstanding the significance of expressing gratitude, this seems like a strange place to teach us this lesson. Why are the events of the makos and Yetzias Mitzraim chosen to impart to us the importance of gratitude? The significance of gratitude permeates the entire story of Yetzias Mitzraim. The introductory pasuk to the decree to enslave the Jewish People speaks about the new Pharaoh who did not know Yosef. Whether he literally was a new ruler who had never met Yosef or one who "forgot" Yosef, his actions were the ultimate expression of ingratitude to the one who had saved the Egyptian nation. By contrast, Moshe doesn't forget someone who helped him in his time of need. Before returning to Mitzraim to free the Jewish People, he requests permission from Yisro to leave. Yisro had taken Moshe into his home and Moshe never forgot the kindness that had been bestowed on him.

Showing gratitude to other people enables us to develop the trait in ourselves which we ultimately demonstrate towards Hashem. By following the model of Moshe and avoiding the example of Pharaoh we can approach our relationship with Hashem in a most proper way. The entire Torah is predicated on the first of the Aseres Hadibros - "I am Hashem Who took you out of Mitzraim." We are eternally grateful for that kindness and it is this gratitude that obligates us to perform His mitzvos. There is no more appropriate place for the Torah to emphasize the lesson of gratitude than at the beginning of the makos which initiated Yetzias Mitzraim. Moshe taught us to inculcate this character trait in ourselves by expressing gratitude even to inanimate objects such as the river and earth. We continue by being grateful to human beings and culminate by acting in the appropriate manner to Hashem. Our enslavement in Mitzraim and our ultimate deliverance teach us these fundamental lessons about the importance of gratitude in all facets of our lives.

One can only imagine the hypocrisy of Moshe going to take the Jewish People out of Mitzraim thereby instilling in them these feelings for Hashem, yet in the process being ungrateful to Yisro. Specifically at this time, Moshe had to be so careful to even not show ungratefulness to the river and earth. Yetzias Mitzraim had to become the focal point of our expression of gratitude for eternity.

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Rav Kook List
Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Va'eira: God's Name

Why do we find different names for God in the Torah?

Different names reflect different aspects by which God is revealed in the world. The Tetragrammaton, the special name composed of the four letters Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey, corresponds to a level of Divine revelation that was concealed before Moses' time.

"I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shad-dai [God Almighty]. But with My name Y-H-V-H, I was not known to them." (Ex. 6:3)

What is the significance of these two names of God? Why did only Moses' generation merit knowledge of the Tetragrammaton?

In the same prophetic communication to Moses, God contrasted the Patriarchs with their descendants in terms of their ties to the Land of Israel. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were only travelers and foreigners in the Land:

"I made My covenant with them, giving them the land of Canaan, the land of their wanderings, where they lived as foreigners." (6:4)

Their descendants, on the other hand, are destined to settle permanently in the Land: "I will give it to you as an inheritance"(6:8).

Is there some connection between the different names for God and residence in Eretz Yisrael?

A Higher Level of Providence

Dwelling in the Land of Israel means living with a higher level of Divine providence. It is "a land constantly under the scrutiny of the Eternal, your God; the eyes of the Eternal your God are on it at all times" (Deut. 11:12). God gave Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people as an eternal inheritance, so that this unparalleled level of Divine providence will always be associated with them. God's providence will never leave the people of Israel; their history is beyond the laws of nature.

This level of Divine guidance was only possible after they became a nation. Individuals, even the most righteous, may waver and stumble. Therefore, the Avot could only be sojourners in Eretz Yisrael. They could only merit the Land's preternatural providence in a temporary, sporadic fashion.

The name Shad-dai comes from the root shiddud, meaning 'intervention.' It implies occasional intervention in the natural realm. This was the level of Divine providence that the Avot experienced. They lived in a world of natural forces - with occasional miracles. They were but travelers in the Land of Israel. Thus God was revealed to them as El Shad-dai.

With the formation of the nation of Israel, however, the miraculous providence of the land of Israel became their permanent inheritance. The generation of Moses merited a higher revelation of God and His providence, as is reflected in the name Y-H-V-H. This Divine name comes from the root "to cause to exist." Their world was no longer a universe ruled by the forces of nature. They merited a constant, direct connection to the One Who continually creates and gives life to of all existence.

(Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 293-297)

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Weekly Halacha
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Women and Prayer: Obligations and Priorities

The Halachah obligates men to daven to Hashem three times every single day—Shacharis, Minchah and Ma'ariv. The degree to which women are obligated to daven, however, is a subject debated by the early poskim. There are halachic authorities who exempt women from formal davening altogether as long as they recite a simple supplication in the morning.¹ Other poskim maintain that women are obligated to daven twice² a day—Shacharis and Minchah—just like men.³ Although most poskim agree with the second view that women are obligated to daven,⁴ it was a rare woman who davened formally in the olden days. Running a household was an all-consuming task,⁵ and many women were illiterate to boot. Most women, therefore, dispensed with their obligation to daven by reciting a simple supplication.⁶

Nowadays, we are witnessing a remarkable turnabout in regard to women's formal prayer. Many women, especially single girls and older women have assumed the obligation of davening regularly, as the halachah dictates. Even busy mothers attempt to daven as often as they possibly can.

Nevertheless, women are still not as free to daven as men and the demands on their time may legitimately conflict with the halachic times for davening. We will therefore list, in order of importance, the parts of davening which take priority for a woman whose time is limited.⁷ Depending on how much time she has she should recite as many as she can, and recite them in the order in which they appear in the siddur:

1. Reciting a simple supplication is the very least a woman must do according to all the poskim. Any supplication that opens with praise of G-d (shevach) and ends with thanksgiving for His benevolence (hoda'ah), such as Birchos ha-shachar⁸ or Birkos ha-Torah⁹ is sufficient.¹⁰
2. Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharis and Minchah. This is the minimum requirement according to most poskim.¹¹
3. The first verse of Shema¹² and Baruch Shem.¹³ Although women are technically exempt from Shema since it is a time-based mitzvah, the poskim recommend that at the very least they recite the first verse, which is the declaration of accepting Hashem's sovereignty upon oneself.¹⁴
4. Birchos ha-Shachar,¹⁵ including Birchos ha-Torah.¹⁶ [If a woman has already davened Shemoneh Esrei, she may no longer recite the blessing of Al netilas yadayim, since that blessing can be said only before davening.¹⁷]
5. The blessing of Emes v'yatziv until Ga'al Yisrael,¹⁸ followed immediately, without any break, by Shemoneh Esrei, so that they fulfill the mitzvah of semichas geulah l'tefillah—the halachic requirement that no break take place between Shemoneh Esrei and the blessing that precedes it.
6. Pesukei d'Zimrah,¹⁹ with priority given to Boruch sh'amar, Ashrei (Nishmas on Shabbos) and Yistabach.
7. The entire Shema²⁰ prefaced by Kel melech ne'eman.²¹
8. The blessings of Yotzer ohr and Ahavah rabbah.²²
9. Korbanos, ²³ while giving priority to Parashas ha-Tamid.²⁴

As mentioned earlier, a woman who has the time to do so, should daven all of the parts of the davening that we have listed, in the right order and at the right time.

Additional notes:

* The correct time to recite Birchos Kerias Shema is until the end of zeman tefillah, which is a third of the day, or four halachic hours from sunrise. A woman may not recite Birchos Kerias Shema after that time under any circumstances.²⁵

* Shemoneh Esrei should also be completed before the end of zeman tefillah. If, however, a woman is unable to daven before then, she may daven Shemoneh Esrei until midday (chatzos).²⁶ After that time she may no longer daven Shacharis.²⁷

* Just as it is forbidden for men to eat before they fulfill their obligation of davening,²⁸ women, too, should not eat before davening. But many women eat after reciting Birchos ha-shachar, since as explained earlier, some poskim rule that they fulfill their minimum obligation of daily prayer by reciting any supplication. They may rely on this leniency even though they are planning to pray the entire Service later on.²⁹

* Women are exempt from Tachanun, Ashrei-U'va l'tziyon and the Shir shel yom.³⁰ It has become customary for them to recite Aleinu after Shemoneh Esrei.³¹

* Women are exempt from Hallel on Rosh Chodesh, Pesach,³² Succos and Shavous, because it is a time-based mitzvah.³³ Some poskim require women to recite Hallel on Chanukah,³⁴ while others exempt them.³⁵

* The poskim debate whether women are obligated to daven Mussaf or not.³⁶ It is customary that they do.³⁷

Note that all tefillos in which women may be exempt, such as the daily Ma'ariv, Hallel, Musaf, Ashrei and U'va l'tziyon, are still permitted to be davened by women. [Sephardic women should consult the rav as to which tefillos they are permitted to daven.³⁸]

1 Magen Avraham 106:1, based on the view of the Rambam.

2 Most authorities agree that women are not obligated to daven Ma'ariv, since Ma'ariv was initially established as a voluntary prayer even for men, and while eventually men accepted Ma'ariv as an obligation, women did not. A minority opinion holds that women should daven Ma'ariv as well, see Aruch ha-Shulchan 106:7 and Kaf ha-Chayim 299:62, and this is the custom of some women nowadays.

3 View of the Ramban (Sefer ha-Mitzvos 5).

4 Mishnah Berurah 106:4.

5 The Chafetz Chayim's son reported (Sichos Chafetz Chayim, pg. 13) that his mother rarely davened when her children were young. She said that the Chafetz Chayim exempted her from formal davening during that period in her life.

6 Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Ko Somar l'Beis Yaakov, pg. 29) once remarked that the fact that many women were illiterate and were not required by the rabbanim to learn how to read is proof that they relied on the poskim who did not require women to daven Shacharis and Minchah, although women certainly recited supplications. See below.

7 The list is formulated for Ashkenazic women only, since some Sephardic poskim (see Yechaveh Da'as 1:68; 3:3) rule that women are not allowed to daven certain parts of the davening from which they are exempt.

8 From asher nasan lasechvi vinah until gomeil chasadim Tovim l'amo Yisrael.

9 Machazeh Eliyahu 19:5-15.

10 See Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 106:1 and Halichos Shelomo 1:2-4 and Devar Halachah 5.

11 Mishnah Berurah 106:4. See also Mishnah Berurah 263:43.

12 Rama, O.C. 70:1

13 Levush, quoted by Peri Megadim and Kaf ha-Chayim 70:1.

14 Mishnah Berurah 70:4; 106:4. It is not, however, required that the Shema be said within the time frame allotted to men; Eishel Avraham (Butchach) 70:1. See also Aruch ha-Shulchan 70:2.

15 Mishnah Berurah 70:1; Aruch ha-Shulchan 70:1.

16 O.C. 47:14. See Beir Halachah, s.v. noshim, that women are exempt from Birchos ha-Torah according to the opinion of the Vilna Gaon. Accordingly, a woman who is short of time should give priority to the other blessings.

17 Mishnah Berurah 4:1.

18 This blessing is given priority in order to satisfy the view of some poskim who hold that women are obligated to fulfill the daily mitzvah of Zecher l'yetzias Mitzrayim (the daily mitzvah to remember the Exodus); Magen Avraham 70:1. Other poskim, however, recommend that women recite this blessing but do not require it; see Rigshei Lev 4:18 quoting Rav Y.S. Elyashiv.

19 The poskim disagree whether or not women are obligated to recite Pesukei d'Zimrah; see Mishnah Berurah 70:1 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 4; Aruch ha-Shulchan 47:25; 70:1; Yechaveh Da'as 3:3. [See The Daily Halachah Discussion on 10 Tammuz whether or not women who come late to shul should skip parts of Pesukei d'Zimrah in order to daven b'tzibbur.]

20 Although clearly exempt from reciting Kerias Shema, it has become customary for women to try to recite the entire Shema, so that they, too, accept Hashem's sovereignty and commandments upon themselves.

- 21 Minchas Elazar 2:28.
 22 Aruch ha-Shulchan 70:1.
 23 Although some poskim, including the Mishnah Berurah (Beur Halachah 47:14, s.v. noshim) require women to recite korbanos, it is not customary that women do so, and there are many poskim who exempt them altogether from korbanos; see Halichos Beisah 4:1 and Machazeh Eliyahu 14:4.
 24 See Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 47:10 and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv in Koveitz Teshuvos 1:14 and Peninei Tefillah, pg 136.
 25 Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Rigshei Lev 5:17; Halichos Beisah 5:5. See Yisrael v'Hazmanim 8:33. See, however, Peninei Tefillah, pg. 139.
 26 O.C. 89:1.
 27 Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Ko Somar l'Beis Yaakov, pg. 34); Machazeh Eliyahu 19:5-14.
 28 O.C. 89:3. See details in The Monthly Halachah Discussion, pgs. 164-169.
 29 Based on Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:104-4; Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 106:1; Minchas Yitzchak 4:28-3; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:2-4); Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Deror Yikra, pg. 363.
 30 See Machazeh Eliyahu 20, Halichos Beisah, pg. 51-52 and Halichos Bas Yisrael, pg. 44, who offer various reasons for this.
 31 Machazeh Eliyahu 20.
 32 Except for the Hallel said at the Seder, which they are obligated to recite.
 33 Beur Halachah 422:2, s.v. Hallel.
 34 Toras Refael, O.C. 75; Minchas Pitim 683; Moadim u'Zemanim 2:146. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:190.
 35 Halichos Shelomo 2:17-6; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Rigshei Lev 6:3).
 36 Both views are quoted in Mishnah Berurah 106:4 without a decision.
 37 Kaf ha-Chayim, O.C. 286:7. See also Rav Akiva Eiger, O.C. 106.
 38 See note 7.

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 By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The Significance of Tachanun By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Why is Tachanun such an important part of davening?

According to the Zohar, the level of kapparah (atonement) achieved through the sincere recital of Tachanun cannot be accomplished at any other time in this world. Other sources teach that a tearfully recited Tachanun can accomplish more than any other prayer (see Bava Metzia 59b).

Although the importance of the tefillah of Tachanun is underappreciated by many, it should not be; it is actually based on Moshe Rabbeinu's successful entreating of Hashem on Har Sinai to spare Klal Yisrael from punishment after their grievous sins: "Va'esnapel lifnai Hashem (Devarim 9:18, 25) - And I threw myself down in prayer before G-d," (Tur, Orach Chayim 131).

When do we recite Tachanun?

After completing Shemoneh Esrei, which is recited standing, the mitzvah of Tefillah is continued by reciting the Tachanun in a manner reminiscent of prostration (see Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 5:1,13). Thus Tachanun should be viewed and treated as a continuation of the Shemoneh Esrei (Levush).

The Rambam writes that the most important aspect of Tachanun is to make personal requests. He pointedly states that there is no limit to the number of personal requests one may say. Many follow this highly recommended practice.

Total submission

In earlier days, Tachanun was said with one's face pressed to the ground and one's body stretched out in total submission to Hashem (Megillah 22b; Rambam; Tur; see Bach). In the time of the Gemara, people bowed without prostrating themselves totally, or by prostrating themselves while tilting a bit on their side (Megillah 22b). This was done to avoid violating the prohibition against prostrating oneself on a stone surface, which is derived from the pasuk "You may not place a stone for bowing (even maskis) upon it in your land," (Vayikra 26:1). This prohibition is violated only by prostrating oneself on a stone with one's hands and legs completely stretched out.

The accepted custom today is that we do not prostrate ourselves except on Yom Kippur (and some people on Rosh Hashanah) and, when doing so, we place cloth or paper beneath ourselves to avoid any shaylah (see Shu't Rivash #412 and commentaries on Tur 131). We do not bow fully when reciting Tachanun. The Ashkenazic custom is to place our head on our arm as a reminiscence of bowing. This is called "falling Tachanun." The custom among Sefardim is to sit while reciting Tachanun but not to place the head down. I will soon explain the halachic reasons for both practices.

Interrupting between Shemoneh Esrei and Tachanun

Conversing between Shemoneh Esrei and Tachanun dilutes the effectiveness of the Tachanun (Bava Metzia 59b as explained by Shibbolei HaLeKet #30 and Beis Yosef; Levush). Therefore, the Shulchan Aruch rules that one should not converse between Tefillah and Tachanun. Some contend that only a lengthy conversation disturbs the efficacy of the Tachanun, but not a short interruption (Magen Avraham), whereas others rule that any interruption ruins the value of the Tachanun (Aruch HaShulchan; Kaf HaChayim, quoting Zohar and Ari).

The Magen Avraham also rules that one can recite Tachanun in a different place than where one davened Shemoneh Esrei and it is not considered an interruption.

Interrupting during Tachanun

One should not interrupt during the recital of Tachanun except to answer Barchu and the significant responses of Kedusha and Kaddish (Shaarei Teshuvah 131:1).

May Tachanun be said standing?

The early authorities dispute whether Tachanun may be said standing, some contending that it is preferable to recite Tachanun by bowing in a standing position. Others contend that it is better to sit for Tachanun because this completely avoids the problem of even maskis, since it is impossible to prostrate completely from a sitting position (Shu't Rivash #412). The accepted custom is to recite Tachanun while sitting (Beis Yosef 131, quoting the mekubalim). The Shulchan Aruch (131:2) rules that one should only recite Tachanun while sitting. Under extenuating circumstances, one may recite it while standing (Mishnah Berurah).

What about the chazzan?

Tachanun is the only part of davening where the chazzan does not stand. Since the entire purpose of the Tachanun is to recite a prayer while one is bowing, the chazzan also "falls Tachanun."

What prayer is recited for Tachanun?

Whereas Ashkenazim recite Chapter 6 of Tehillim while "falling Tachanun," Sefardim recite Chapter 25 of Tehillim as Tachanun and recite it in a regular sitting position.

Why do Ashkenazim (including "nusach Sefard") "fall Tachanun" whereas Sefardim (Edot HaMizrach) do not? And why do Ashkenazim and Sefardim recite different chapters of Tehillim for Tachanun?

In actuality, these differing practices are based on the same source. According to the Zohar, the sincere, dedicated recital of Chapter 25 accomplishes a tremendous level of atonement and repairs other spiritual shortcomings. However, reciting it insincerely and without proper intent can cause tremendous damage (Zohar, end of Parshas Bamidbar, quoted by Beis Yosef). To avoid such harm should someone not recite Tachanun properly, both Ashkenazim and Sefardim alter the Tachanun

described by the Zohar. Ashkenazim recite Chapter 6 of Tehillim rather than Chapter 25, while Sefardim recite Chapter 25 as stated in Zohar, but do not place their heads down in a bowing position (Magen Avraham 131:5). The Sefardic practice is to never do nefillas apayim when reciting Tachanun, due to many not having the proper kavanos (Ben Ish Chai, 1: Ki Sissa; Yalkut Yosef, Orach Chayim 131: 16).

On which side do we lean?

The early authorities dispute whether it is preferable to lean on the left side or the right during Tachanun. Some contend that it is better to lean on the left side because wealthy people used to lean on that side in earlier times. (Compare the mitzvah of mesubin, reclining, at the Pesach Seder.) By leaning on the left side, we demonstrate the subjugation of our “wealthier” side to Hashem (Shibbolei HaLeket #30, quoting Rav Hai Gaon).

A second reason cited is that the Shechinah is opposite one’s right side. Therefore when leaning on the left side, one faces the Shechinah which is opposite his right side (Shibbolei HaLeket, quoting his brother, R’ Binyamin).

Others contend that one should always lean on the right side because this is the side where the Shechinah resides and that we should fall Tachanun on the side of the Shechinah rather than the side facing it (Rakanati, quoted by Magen Avraham; Rama quoting yesh omrim).

The most common Ashkenazic practice is to lean on the left side when not wearing tefillin, and on the right side when wearing tefillin so as not to lean on the tefillin (Darchei Moshe and Rama comments on Shulchan Aruch). A left-handed person should always recite Tachanun while leaning on his left side (see Pri Megadim 131:Mishbetzos Zahav #2).

Why do we stand up in the middle of the pasuk “Va’anachnu lo neida”? The first three words of this pasuk are recited sitting and that we then stand up to complete the prayer. In addition, we say the first five words of this prayer aloud. Why do we follow these unusual practices?

This practice is observed in order to emphasize that we have attempted to pray in every way. We davened Shemoneh Esrei while standing, Tachanun while bowing, and other prayers while sitting down. Finally we exclaim, Va’anachnu lo neida, “We do not know!” We have tried every method of Tefillah that we can consider and we are unaware of any other (Shlah, quoted by Magen Avraham 131:4).

Tachanun recited with the community

Tachanun should preferably be said together with a minyan (Rambam; Tur). Therefore, someone in an Ashkenazi shul who finished Vehu Rachum before the tzibur should wait in order to begin Tachanun together with them (Be’er Heiteiv 134:1). Similarly, if davening with a mincha minyan that did not recite the full repetition of Shemoneh Esrei (heicha kedusha), one should wait to say Tachanun together with a minyan. (Please note that I am not advocating that a minyan daven this way. I am personally opposed to this practice except for very extenuating circumstances.)

Is it more important to say Tachanun sitting or to recite it together with the minyan?

This question manifests itself in two cases. (1) Someone is davening Shemoneh Esrei behind a person, making it halachically impossible for the second person to sit down for Tachanun. (It is forbidden to sit down in front of someone who is davening Shemoneh Esrei.) (2) Someone who completed the Shemoneh Esrei is required to wait for a few seconds (the time it takes to walk four amos) in his place. Therefore, someone who just finished the quiet Shemoneh Esrei when the tzibur is beginning to say Tachanun needs to wait a few seconds before he can “fall Tachanun.” What is the optimal means of reconciling this with the obligation to recite Tachanun with the tzibur?

The poskim dispute concerning what is the best way to deal with this predicament. Some contend that one should begin Tachanun immediately while still standing (Mishnah Berurah 131:10), while others

contend that it is better to wait and recite Tachanun while sitting (Magen Avraham 131:5).

Incidentally, the chazzan may immediately sit down and begin Tachanun without waiting for the regulation few seconds and walking back three steps. Instead, he should just leave the amud and sit down immediately for Tachanun (Mishnah Berurah 104:9).