

Weekly Parsha Vaeira

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's Torah reading contains the four famous words of redemption that signal the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. Much has been made over the centuries as to the meaning and implication of each of these four Hebrew verbs. The fact that there are four such words used in the narrative of redemption fits the pattern that we find in the Hagaddah of Pesach – four sons, four questions, four cups of wine.

None of this is naturally random chance. That is not the way of the Torah or of the tradition of Rabbinic commentary and understanding of the words of the Torah. Since there are 70 facets to all Torah words and thoughts, the use of these four verbs contains different messages, all of them valid and important, that can be experienced and understood by different generations of the Jewish people.

Every era has its own circumstances and its own necessities. The eternity of Torah is that it is able to address each and every one of these differing times and circumstances in a meaningful fashion. The Torah speaks to our generation in a way that could not necessarily have been so clearly understood by a past generation which experienced different circumstances than the ones that we face today.

It is one of the extraordinary features of Torah study that it is applicable to so many different times and situations. The Rabbis of the Talmud implied this in their statement that the words of Torah sometimes seem to be poor and without meaning in one place and time while they are rich and of enormous value in another.

The use of different verbs to indicate the advent of the promised deliverance from Egyptian bondage indicates a process of redemption – a series of events and understandings and the development of a relationship between the Jewish people and the God of Israel that will fulfill the promise of redemption made to Abraham.

I have always felt in reviewing the events of the past century in Jewish life that we were in the midst of a process engineered by Heaven and accomplished by humans to restore us to our homeland and to our independence and greatness. Anything that is a process takes time and very rarely has immediate general impact. People view events and circumstances as they occur, one by one, and with of the passage of time and constantly changing circumstances, rarely are able to discern the general process that is unfolding before their very eyes.

This process of redemption outlined for us in this week's Torah reading, a process which was not instantaneous in its result, but most gradual in its unfolding, is a harbinger of much of what is happening today in the Jewish world. The Jewish State in the Land of Israel is flourishing against all odds and Torah and Jewish life are strengthened daily within its borders. Even though the Jewish situation in the diaspora is of a very mixed quality, the strength of Torah and its resilient quality is being proven once more in front of our gaze. We are still in the middle of the process but I think there is little doubt regarding the actuality of the process itself.

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Weighing of the Heart (Vaera 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

In this week's parsha, before even the first plague has struck Egypt, God tells Moses: "I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt." (Exodus 7:3)

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is referred to no less than twenty times in the course of the story of the Exodus. Sometimes it is Pharaoh who is said to harden his heart. At other times, God is said to have done so. The Torah uses three different verbs in this context: ch-z-k, to strengthen, k-sh-h, to harden, and k-b-d, to make heavy.

Throughout the ages, the commentators have been concerned with one problem. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, how could he have been to blame for not letting the Israelites go? He had no choice in the matter. It

was God's doing, not his. That he and his people should be punished seems to flout the fundamental principle of justice, that we are guilty only for what we have freely chosen to do.

However, the commentators noted that for the first five plagues, Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart. The obstinacy, the refusal, the intransigence are his. Only with the sixth plague is God said to have done so. This led to several explanations.

Rashi says that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the last five plagues was a punishment for the first five, when it was Pharaoh's own obstinacy that led him to refuse to let the people go.[1] Maimonides interprets God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart as meaning that "repentance was withheld from him, and the liberty to turn from his wickedness was not accorded to him." [2] Albo and Sforno offer the opposite interpretation. God hardened Pharaoh's heart precisely to restore his free will. After the succession of plagues that had devastated the land, Pharaoh was under overwhelming pressure to let the Israelites go. Had he done so, it would not have been out of free choice, but rather under force majeure. God therefore strengthened Pharaoh's heart so that even after the first five plagues he was genuinely free to say Yes or No.[3]

It may be that all three are right and are simply responding to the different verbs. K-sh-h, "hardening," supports Rashi's reading. Pharaoh was hard on the Israelites, so God was hard on him. K-b-d, "making heavy," supports Maimonides. Pharaoh lacked the energy, the strength, to repent. Ch-z-k, "to strengthen," supports Albo and Sforno. The text allows for all three possibilities.

However, part of the truth may lie in a completely different direction.[4] The Egyptians – Pharaohs especially – were preoccupied by death. Their funerary practices were astonishingly elaborate and were meant to prepare the person for life after death. The tombs of the Pharaohs were among their most lavish creations. Tutankhamun's, discovered in 1922, is a dazzling example. One of the greatest literary works of ancient Egypt was The Book of the Dead.

The Torah notes the attention the Egyptians gave to death. At the end of Bereishit, we read of how the Egyptians accompanied Joseph and his family in the funeral procession to bury Jacob. The Canaanites witnessed this and said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." They named the place, Abel Mizraim (Gen. 50:11). Note: they called it "the place of Egyptian mourning," not Israelite mourning, despite the fact that it was for Jacob, a non-Egyptian. Then we read of how Joseph himself was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. In the Torah, only Joseph, and Jacob at Joseph's request, are embalmed. So we have already been forewarned about the significance of death to the Egyptian mind.

However, there is one specific aspect of Egyptian belief that opens up an entirely new perspective on the references to Pharaoh's heart. According to Egyptian myth, the deceased underwent a trial to establish their worthiness or otherwise to enjoy life after death in Aaru, the Field of Reeds, where souls live on in pleasure for eternity. They believed that the soul resides in the heart, and the trial consisted of the ceremony of The Weighing of the Heart. Other organs were removed after death, but the heart was left because it was needed for the trial.

On one side of the scales was a feather. On the other, was placed the heart. If the heart was as light as the feather, the dead could continue to Aaru, but if it was heavier, it was devoured by the goddess Ammit (a combination of lion, hippopotamus and crocodile), and its owner was condemned to live in Duat, the underworld. An illustration, on papyrus, in The Book of the Dead shows the ceremony, undertaken in the Hall of Two Truths, overseen by Anubis, the Egyptian God of the dead.

It follows that the root k-v-d, "to make heavy," would have had a highly specific meaning for the Egyptians of that time. It would imply that Pharaoh's heart had become heavier than a feather. He would fail the heart weighing ceremony and therefore be denied what was most important to him – the prospect of joining the gods in the afterlife.

No one would have been in any doubt as to why this was so. The feather represented Ma'at, the central Egyptian value that included the concepts of truth, balance, order, harmony, justice, morality, and law. Not only was this fundamental to Egyptian culture. It was the task of the Pharaoh to ensure that it prevailed. This had been an Egyptian principle since a thousand years before the Exodus, found in Pyramid texts dating from the third millennium BCE. Ma'at meant cosmic order. Its absence invited chaos. A Pharaoh whose heart had become heavier than the Ma'at feather was not only endangering his own afterlife, but threatening the entire people over whom he ruled with turmoil and disarray.

One of the things the deceased were supposed to do as part of the trial was to make a series of negative confessions, 42 in all, declaring themselves innocent of the kind of sin that would exclude them from paradise. These are some of them:

I have not done injury to men.

I have not oppressed those beneath me.

I have not murdered.

I have not commanded murder.

I have not caused suffering to men.[5]

If the "heavying" of Pharaoh's heart is an allusion to the Weighing of the Heart ceremony, it allows us to read the story in a completely new way.

First, it suggests that it is directed to Egyptians as well as Israelites; to humanity as a whole. The Torah tells us three times that the purpose of the signs and wonders was "so that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 7:5; 14:4; 14:18). This is the core of monotheism. It is not that the Israelites have their God, and the Egyptians their pantheon, but rather that there is one sovereign power in the universe.

That is the point of at least three of the plagues: the first, directed against Hapfi, the god of the Nile; the second, frogs, directed against Heqet, the Egyptian goddess of fertility and childbirth, represented in the form of a frog; and the ninth, the plague of darkness, directed against Ra, the sun god. The message of these plagues would have been clear to the Egyptians: there is a power greater than those they have worshipped until now. The God of Israel is the God of the world and of all humanity. The religion of Israel is not intended to be the religion of all humanity. Nowhere in the narrative does God imply that He wants the Egyptians to adopt Israelite religious practices. The point is quite different. Religion is particular. Morality is universal. If the story of the "heavying" of Pharaoh's heart does allude to the Book of the Dead, then the story of the Exodus is not simply a partisan account from an Israelite point of view. It is telling us that certain things are wrong, whoever does them and whoever they are done against. They are wrong by Egyptian standards too. That was true of Pharaoh's decision to kill all male Israelite children. That was an unforgivable sin against Ma'at.

Justice is universal. That is the point made plainly by the Torah's three stories of Moses' early life. He sees an Egyptian hitting an Israelite and intervenes. He sees Israelites hitting one another and intervenes. He sees Gentile shepherds behaving roughly to Jethro's daughters and intervenes. The first was a case of non-Israelite against Israelite, the second was Israelite against Israelite, the third was non-Israelite against non-Israelite. This is the simplest way of telling us that Moses' sense of justice was impartial and universal.

Finally, and most deeply, the Torah is hinting at a self-contradiction at the heart of the Egyptian concept of Ma'at. The most generous interpretation of Pharaoh's refusal to let the people go is that he was charged with maintaining order in the Empire. A successful minority like the Israelites could be seen as a threat to such order. If they stayed and thrived, they might take over the country as the Hyksos had done several centuries earlier. If they were allowed to leave, other enslaved groups might be tempted to do likewise. Emigration is a bad sign when the place people are trying to leave is a superpower. That is why, for many years, the Soviet Union forbade Jews to leave the country.

Pharaoh, in his repeated refusal to let the people go, doubtless justified his decision in each case on the grounds that he was securing Ma'at, order. Meanwhile however, with each plague the country was reduced to

ever greater chaos. That is because oppressing people, which is what Pharaoh was doing, was a fundamental offence against Ma'at.

On this reading, the whole issue of Pharaoh hardening his heart was not so much psychological as political. In his position as semi-divine head of state of an empire that practised forced labour on a massive scale, Pharaoh could not let the Israelites go free without creating the risk that other groups would also challenge the Corvée, the unpaid, conscripted semi-slave labour that was part of Egyptian society from the building of the pyramids and abolished only in 1882.

For the first five plagues, Pharaoh could tell himself that he was enduring minor inconvenience to protect a major principle. But as the plagues became more serious, reducing Egypt to chaos, Pharaoh's room for manoeuvre grew ever less. Having five times said "No" to the Israelites, he could not now back down without making himself look ridiculous, forfeiting his authority and damaging his standing. Pharaoh was a prisoner of his own system, held captive by his own decisions.

Seeking to protect order, he created chaos. That is because the order he was seeking to protect was built on a foundation of injustice: the enslavement of the many for the benefit of the few. The more he tried to defend it, the heavier his heart grew.

I believe that justice is universal. The Exodus story of how the supreme Power entered history to liberate the supremely powerless, is not just for Jews. It is the world's greatest metanarrative of hope.

Shabbat Shalom

[1] Rashi to Exodus 7:3.

[2] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 6:3

[3] Albo, Ikkarim, 4:25; Sforno to Exodus 7:3.

[4] My thanks to Rabbi Dr Rafi Zarum for suggesting this line of thought.

[5] Negative confessions are rare in Judaism, but one exists: Vidui Bikkurim, the confession to be made over first-fruits: "I have not turned aside from Your commands nor have I forgotten any of them ...I have obeyed the Lord my God; I have done everything You commanded me" (Deut. 26:13-14).

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vaera (Exodus 6:2 – 9:35)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – What makes Moses Moses? He is certainly the consummate prophet, the man of G-d whose vision of ethical monotheism was expressed in a moral code of law which commands to this very day, more than 4000 years later. He is certainly the consummate leader who took a bedraggled slave-people into freedom and nationhood. But I believe that the central characteristic of Moses is his love of the Jewish people, his "brotherly" love. When he witnesses the slaying of a Hebrew by an Egyptian, he takes action and kills the Egyptian, but he suffers a tremendous loss. All of Egypt sees him as a Prince and, like a Prince of Egypt, he might have concluded his career with his own pyramid one day. Yet Moses risks all because one of his "brothers" has been slain.

Ordinarily, revolutionary careers begin with selfless acts and it would be logical to assume that a fugitive from the law who has put his life on the line for the Hebrews should become a hero at home, among his own people. Moses experiences the exact opposite. On the following day, when he chances upon two Israelites fighting, he wants to stop their wickedness, to defend his brother the underdog, but their response is cynical and arrogant. "Who made you our judge? Do you want to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" (Ex. 2:14)

In an instant Moses realizes the difficulty in attempting to work with his "brothers" as well as the fact that his prior deed is public knowledge and so Pharaoh's palace is no longer open to him. Moses becomes a refugee, escaping into the desert with only a shirt on his back.

There, with his new wife and child, earning a living from his flock of sheep, he can live out his years as one more person who tried to make a difference, failed, and left the stage of human history. Let others tackle the problem. But G-d still has His eye on Moses.

The text then tells us that G-d appears to Moses from within the flame of a burning bush, urging him to become the Redeemer of his people. Moses demurs, fearing that as a stutterer, a man whose words trip over his tongue, he will never manage to convince Pharaoh. It is precisely because he loves the Jewish people so much that he wants the best

candidate to present their case. Only when G-d informs Moses that his brother Aaron will become his mouthpiece does his resistance cease...for the moment.

The next stage of the redemptive process begins when Moses presents his credentials and G-d's instructions to Pharaoh. But the result is utter failure. Instead of relenting, Pharaoh tightens the screws, and now the Israelite slaves must gather their own straw for the bricks they bake in the hot sun.

Our portion for the week, Vaera, opens with the verse, "G-d spoke to Moses, and said to him, I am the Lord..." (Exodus 6:2). The Chatam Sofer writes in his work *Torat Moshe* that we should note an interesting use of language in this verse. It relates directly to three verses earlier when Moses' response to Pharaoh's increased tyranny was a pointed rebuttal to G-d. "Lord, why do you do evil to this people?" (5:22) Instead of being angered by such strong language, G-d is pleased with Moses' willingness to confront Him. Better to speak tough with G-d than to speak out against the Jewish people.

The English translation of the opening verse of Vaera does not completely capture the significance the Chatam Sofer alerts us to. The first use of G-d is rendered *Elokim*, signifying the powerful or judging aspect of G-d, while the next use of G-d's name, translated *LORD*, is in fact the four letter name of G-d. This name signifies the merciful, compassionate nature of G-d. Similarly, the first "speak" uses the word "vayedaber," which is a harsher form of speaking, while the second "speak" uses the word "vayomer," a softer, gentler form of speaking.

According to the Chatam Sofer, G-d greatly values the extent to which Moses defends the Jewish people, and once Moses calls G-d to task, so to speak, G-d replaces his initial, judgmental name *E-lohim* for the compassionate *Y-HVH*, and his original harsher form of *Va'yedaber* for the gentler *Va'Yomer*.

Even after Moses was rejected by his own "brothers" and forced to live in Midian, Moses nevertheless forgives the Jewish people. Moses is the leader G-d wants for this new nation because he is ready for anything the Jewish people may throw at him. He has no illusions about the people he will lead. He has experienced their ingratitude and sensed their independence. He can sympathize with Ben-Gurion's comment to Truman: "You may be President of 140 million citizens but I am the Prime Minister of 600,000 Prime Ministers."

Rabbi Yitzchak Levi of Berditchev, the great chassidic master, was banished from two rabbinic posts because of his chassidic sympathies. His students wondered what he would do next and he answered that he would seek a third position. But why? they asked. For the honor, he answered. They waited for the wink of his eye, but Rabbi Yitzchak Levi was not being ironic – he was very serious. He explained that leading a Jewish town was always an honor for the rabbi, even if the people didn't honor you in return. Apparently he learned this from Moses.

Moses' outreach towards his hapless and enslaved brothers and his willingness to assume a leadership role only if it is together with his brother as his "front" man, makes him the archetypal brother, the towering figure of the Book of Exodus who is cured of the "brotherly hatred" of the Book of Genesis. It is not easy to love one's brothers, but a true leader is someone who can feel connected to every other Jew, whether from a far away tribe or a DNA related brother. Often parents work out their own problems and short-comings through their children, but siblings have the potential to love each other unconditionally, even when the love is repaid with a curse. This was Moses' greatest gift and his most impressive legacy.

Shabbat Shalom!

Va'eira: Order in Miracles

Rav Kook Torah

Presenting his 'credentials' before Pharaoh, Moses threw down his staff before the Egyptian king, and it transformed into a viper. When the magicians of Egypt did the same with their magic, "the staff of Aaron swallowed up their staffs" (Ex. 7:12).

The Sages in Shabbat 97a noted that the Torah does not say that Aaron's snake swallowed up the magicians' staffs. It says Aaron's staff did the

swallowing. A double miracle, a "miracle within a miracle" occurred. The viper became a staff once again, and only then - as a staff - did it swallow up the other staffs. What is the significance of this double miracle?

Levels of Miracles

Just as there is an underlying order in the world of nature, so too there is order and structure in the realm of miracles. We may distinguish between two types of laws of the natural world: those of a fundamental nature, and those that have a detailed and specific function. The extent to which a miracle defies natural law depends on the purpose of that divine intervention.

Sometimes it is sufficient to have a minor disruption, and still remain within the overall system of natural law. For example, when the prophet Elisha advised the widow in debt how to miraculously produce oil (II Kings 4:1-7), the oil was not created *ex nihilo*. Rather, the miracle was based on an existing jar of oil. There occurred no blatant abrogation of the laws of nature; they were merely 'extended,' as the small cruse of oil sufficed to fill up many large pots. But the basic framework of natural law was left undisturbed.

The purpose of Elisha's miracle was to help out a poor woman in need. The goal of Moses' miraculous signs in Egypt, on the other hand, was far more grandiose. These wonders were meant to demonstrate the power and greatness of the Creator, "so that you will know that I am God here on earth" (Ex. 8:18).

In Egypt, God willed to demonstrate His ability to overrule any law and limitation of the natural world. Therefore, it was necessary to have a "miracle within a miracle." This exhibited independence and autonomy at all levels of natural law, both specific and fundamental. The miracle of the staff occurred not only as a minor disruption of nature - a level at which the Egyptian magicians could also function - but also at the level of total disregard for the most basic laws of nature, so that one staff could "swallow up" other staffs.

Insights Parshas Va'eira - Tevet 5780

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yitzchak Ben Moshe.

"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Group Therapy

And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, and gave them a charge to Bnei Yisroel... (6:13)

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashana 3:5) derives from this possuk a fascinating teaching: R' Shmuel son of R' Yitzchak asked, "With what did he charge Bnei Yisroel? He charged with the mitzvah of *shiluach avadim* (freeing one's slaves)." Remarkably, according to the Talmud Yerushalmi, the very first mitzvah that Hashem asked Moshe to command the Jewish people was to free their slaves.

At a glance, this can be difficult to comprehend: Why would the mitzvah of freeing one's slaves have the importance of being the first mitzvah given to the nation as a whole? One would expect that perhaps the mitzvah of Shabbos or keeping kosher or family purity laws would take precedence.

Furthermore, none of the Jews had any slaves at this point nor could the law even be observed until they settled in their homeland of Eretz Yisroel! Why charge them with a mitzvah that cannot be fulfilled at that time and why give it the importance of being the first mitzvah they are commanded to do?

Psychological studies show that those who were abused as children have a tendency to become abusers themselves. Obviously, not everyone abused as a child becomes an abuser; but studies show that there is a threefold higher risk for abused children to become abusers later in life. Psychologists have offered a few possible reasons for this link. One of the prevailing theories is that children rationalize this abuse by thinking that abuse is normal behavior. So as they mature they don't fully understand that abusive behavior is wrong, and therefore don't have the same barriers in place to prevent such behavior.

This is problematic for a few reasons: 1) if someone experienced something difficult or painful he should be more sensitive to it, and thereby take extraordinary measure to ensure that he does not cause the same pain to another, particularly a child and 2) this reasoning doesn't explain why they would have a stronger tendency toward deviant behavior. At some point in their lives they would certainly learn that society considers such abuse wrong. Why shouldn't that be enough to stop them?

A much more compelling theory is that an adult who has unresolved issues from being abused as a child acts out as a way of coping with the feelings of helplessness experienced as a child. In other words, those abused become abusers to prove to themselves that they are no longer helpless victims. By becoming abusers, they psychologically reinforce within themselves that they are no longer the ones abused.

We see this in many other instances as well. Smokers who are finally able to quit for good often become crusaders and feel compelled to lecture others to quit smoking; overweight individuals who manage to lose weight are suddenly weight loss experts and have no problem sharing their opinions about how much you should weigh; religious leaders struggling with their own demons become virulent anti-smut and lascivious behavior crusaders, yet nobody is surprised when scandals about them emerge. These "crusades" are merely a coping mechanism for their unresolved issues.

This is exactly what Hashem is telling Bnei Yisroel. He is saying, you have been slaves now in Egypt for close to two hundred years. You need to emotionally deal with the fact that you are now truly free and no longer slaves. One of the ways to emotionally get past one's own slavery would be to have and hold on to slaves of your own. But this is why you must observe the mitzvah of freeing slaves. The ability to no longer need slaves of your own is the ultimate proof that you have internalized your freedom and are in a healthy emotional place. At that point you will be truly free.

It's All About Me

These are the heads of their fathers' houses; The sons of Reuven the firstborn of Yisroel; Hanoach, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuven... (6:14)

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the Torah suddenly finds it necessary to record the genealogy of Yaakov's family right in the middle of the story of the Exodus. Rashi goes on to explain that the Torah wanted to record the yichus (lineage) of Moshe and Aharon; and once it mentioned Moshe and Aharon, it begins from the firstborn of the family - Reuven.

This is unusual for a few reasons. Generally, when the Torah records the lineage of an individual, the Torah begins with the individual and works its way backwards (e.g. Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen). So why did the Torah begin with Yaakov? Moreover, why does the Torah mention the families of Reuven and Shimon at all?

Sometimes during the speeches at a simcha, the attendees are subjected to a detailed recollection and description of all the prominent antecedents in the family. While it is true that a family's yichus does add, at least somewhat, to that individual and family's prominence - as the possuk says, "the glory of children are their fathers" (Mishlei 17:6) - most people tend to forget the beginning of that very same possuk: "the crown of grandfathers are their grandchildren."

In other words, the crowning achievement of one's family isn't in the past, it's in the future. We have to develop ourselves into people that our bearers would be proud of and become their crowning achievement. That means that all they did in their lives, their sacrifices, their own accomplishments etc. all become for naught if we fail to fulfill our own mission in life. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah - Toldos) says that the only reason Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace was because he would have a grandson named Yaakov. In essence, we can and must justify the lives of our ancestors.

This is an awesome responsibility to fulfill. While all of us are descended from a glorious past - that of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov - our personal obligation is to fulfill their mission. If we, G-d forbid, fail to live up to that responsibility then all is for naught. As great as our forefathers (and all our bearers throughout history) were, they

need us in order for the world to come to its final culmination and fulfill the destiny of why all of us were created.

That is what the Torah is telling us here. Moshe was supposed to lead Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt and into Eretz Yisroel to the final purpose of why the world was created. Therefore, this is the story of Yaakov's family. That is why the lineage begins with him. Continuing with his first born Reuven and then Shimon, great as they were, they didn't succeed in fulfilling the family's mission. But Levi, through Moshe and Aharon, justified the entire family and their purpose in fulfilling Avraham's vision of bringing Hashem down to this world, and on to the final redemption.

Did You Know...

- In last week's parsha, Hashem shows Moshe what he can do with his staff - when he turns it into a snake and then back - as a proof to others that Hashem spoke to Moshe. We also find that some of the ten makos were performed with this staff. So what makes this staff special? This was no ordinary staff. Adam gave this staff to Chanoch, who gave it to Metushelah; he in turn passed it on to Noach. Noach bequeathed it to his son Shem, who transmitted it to Avraham. From Avraham to Yitzchak, and then to Yaakov, who took it with him to Egypt. Yaakov gave it to Yosef; upon Yosef's death all his possessions were removed to Pharaoh's place. Yisro, one of Pharaoh's advisors, wanted it so he stole it and stuck it in the ground in his garden in Midian. From then on no one could pull out the staff until Moshe came. He read the Hebrew letters on the staff, and pulled it out (Pirke D'Rebbe Eliezer 40).
- Where did Adam get it? It was one of the ten things Hashem created at twilight of the first Shabbos (Pirkei Avos 5:6), which he then gave to Adam.
- Why was no one else able to lift it? Well, the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 8:3) says that it was the weight of 40 se'ah, which the Me'em Lo'ez (Torah Anthology Shemos 1 Chapter 4) explains to be equivalent to 672 pounds!
- Similar to the luchos, the Me'em Lo'ez says the staff was made out of sapphire.
- Also, since we know that Moshe was 10 amos tall (around 20 feet) from the Gemara (Berachos 54a), his staff must have been pretty big as well.
- The staff was engraved with the forty-two letter name of Hashem, the names of our patriarchs, our matriarchs, Yaakov's sons, and the abbreviation of the ten plagues: Detzach Adash Be'achav (Shemos Rabbah 8:3).
- The Zohar adds that the forty-two letter name was in a variety of different colors (Zohar Soncino edition, Bereishis, section one, page 9a).

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vaera

For the week ending 25 January 2020 / 28 Tevet 5780

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Parsha Insights

Take It To Your Heart

“Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20)

Translation is a risky business.

When you translate a concept into another language, you put it into a set of cultural assumptions that may well be inimical to the concept itself.

A case in point is the Hebrew concept of Yirat Hashem. Literally translated, Yirat Hashem means “fear of G-d”. Within the cultural framework of the English language, the adjective “G-d-fearing” conjures up visions of the Pilgrim Fathers, characters with names like Jebedyah

and Obadyah; Amish picket fences and Shaker furniture. “G-d-fearing” is not an adjective that sits well in the mouth of the modern English-speaker. It is our culture’s assumption that we should be free from fear. In the view of Judaism, however, Yirat Hashem, fearing G-d is the beginning of wisdom.

But what does G-d-fearing really mean? Does it mean having the haunted look of a severe paranoid, or that getting out of bed in the morning becomes an existential challenge?

This week’s Torah portion reveals the essence of Yirat Hashem.

In the seventh plague, the Torah describes the Egyptian reaction to the news that G-d would cause lethal hail to fall on the land. “Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20)

Ostensibly, the opposite of “feared the word of Hashem” in the first sentence should be “And whoever did not fear the word of G-d.” Why then is the opposite of fearing Hashem called “not taking the word of G-d to heart”?

The essence of Yirat Hashem is paying attention.

Try this experiment.

How many times a day do you glance at your wristwatch? Let’s say you look at the time twice an hour, maybe three times. Let’s assume that you get up at seven and go to bed at midnight. So, on average, you look at your watch some 50 times a day — 50 times a day, seven days a week. Let’s say your watch is two years old. So you’ve looked at your watch approximately 35,000 times.

Now, without looking, can you tell me what’s written on the face of your watch? Chances are that you left something out, or got something wrong.

You can look at the same thing, day in, day out, but if you don’t pay attention, you’ll never really see it.

It’s the same with Yirat Hashem. You can know there’s a G-d, believe the Torah’s true, even do all the mitzvahs, but never achieve an awareness of G-d.

You can think that being an angry person is a very bad thing, but unless you internalize this awareness, until it becomes instinctive, you will carry on being Mr. Angry for the rest of your life.

Every day we say in the prayer called Aleinu, “... and you should know this day and take to your heart that Hashem is the only G-d – in heaven above and on the earth below – there is none other.”

The essence of fearing G-d is not just “to know this day,” but also “to take it to your heart.”

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Drasha - Parshas Vaera

Raise the Baton!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

In this week’s portion, once again, Hashem sent Moshe and Ahron to Pharaoh in a second effort to sway his heart and have him change his mind to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. Unlike the unembellished appeal in last week’s portion, this time they were equipped with more than pleas – this time they came with miracles. Standing in front of the ruler, Ahron threw his stick down and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed. He countered with a little magic of his own. His sorcerers matched the miraculous stick-to-snake act by having his spooks throw down their sticks and by transforming them into snakes.

Ahron one-upped the Egyptian magicians as his stick swallowed all of their sticks. But that obviously was not enough. Pharaoh’s heart was once again hardened and he refused to let the Jews leave Egypt. And so, Hashem decided that the benign miracles would not be effective with the stubborn king. It was time for the heavy artillery — the ten plagues.

Hashem commands Moshe: “Go to Pharaoh in the morning — behold! He goes out to the water — and you shall stand opposite him at the river’s bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand” (Exodus 7:15). A simple question bothers me. Moshe had

only one special stick. There are various Midrashic explanations as to its origin, but everyone agrees it was a unique one. It was a special one with special powers. Moshe may have been a leader of many hats, but he only carried one stick. Why did Hashem need to define the stick as the one that turned into a snake? He could have simply asked Moshe to come with his stick. Moshe would surely have known exactly which stick Hashem wanted him to take.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson is better known to us as Lewis Carroll, author of the 1865 children’s fantasy story, Alice in Wonderland. What most of us do not know about him was that he was also a brilliant mathematician spending more than twenty-five years teaching at Oxford University.

An apocryphal story relates that Queen Victoria was so delighted after reading his fantasy-laced novel, Alice in Wonderland that she asked him to send her any other works penned by the same quill. Dodgson responded immediately, but the Queen was somewhat taken aback when she received two of his other works, Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry and An Elementary Treatise on Determinants.

We tend to look at the world and forget that routine natural events are also replete with awe-inspiring miracles and supernatural properties. We become acclimated to the mundane miracles of life so that we also shrug when Hashem turns proverbial sticks into proverbial snakes. We feel we can do that too!

Therefore, before orchestrating the largest insubordination of natural law in world history, by turning the flowing Nile into a virtual blood bath, Moshe is told to bring with him the stick that Pharaoh only considered to be capable of performing minor miracles. Moshe is told that the same stick that was not able to impress Pharaoh has the ability to shatter the Egyptian economy and with it the haughty attitude that kept the Hebrew nation enslaved.

Sometimes our marvel of G-d’s wonders is dulled by the scoffing of the naysayers. They lead us to forget that the same power behind the minor miracles of life are the generators of great miracles that we can hardly fathom and surely not anticipate! Even the incomprehensible miracle of life itself is blunted by its ongoing regularity. Our emotions become bored and our intellect spoiled with the majestic events that are considered trite by their regular reoccurrence. And when we fail to see the greatness of genius in the wonderland in which we live, we expect G-d to send us a more prominent message. But we must never forget that even the most awe-inspiring message comes from the same Hand and Stick that bring us the simplest benign worms!

Dedicated in memory of David Kramer by Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Kramer and family

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The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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The Beginnings of Freedom – Parashat Va’era

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Last week, we began the book of Exodus with the story of the Jewish nation’s enslavement in Egypt, and with the description of Moses’ development from a boy growing up in the Egyptian King’s palace to a shepherd called upon by G-d to lead his nation and liberate it. This week, in Va’era, we begin to read about the exodus from Egypt. Most of the story is taken up with the “ten plagues” – the ten supernatural phenomena that afflicted Egypt and which ultimately caused the Egyptian nation and Pharaoh, their king, to liberate the enslaved nation.

This story of the ten plagues raises a simple but obvious question: Why were they necessary? If G-d had wanted to, He could have liberated the Jewish nation from Egypt without all the plagues. We understand that the central reason for the plagues was to punish the Egyptians for cruelly enslaving the Jewish people for many long years. But even for that purpose, wouldn’t one immense plague have been enough to crush Egyptian hubris? Why, then, were ten plagues necessary?

It seems that the ten plagues led to an internal process of development within the Jewish nation. The nation had been for centuries living in a strange and idolatrous culture, experiencing mental and physical slavery,

losing hope. They needed a process that would rebuild them, heal their wounds, and set up a spiritual foundation to become an independent nation with an eternal purpose.

This can be illustrated by the first three plagues. These plagues were brought about by Aaron, Moses' brother, who was a religious priest even in Egypt. He was challenged by the Egyptian religious priests and sorcerers who tried using magic tricks to show that Aaron's deeds, performed as an emissary of the Jewish G-d, were non other than large-scale, familiar magical techniques. In the first plague, blood, the sorcerers managed to turn water to blood. In the second plague, frogs, they were able to bring on frogs but were unable to get rid of them. In the third plague, lice, they were not able to mimic Aaron and were forced to admit: "It is the finger of G-d" (Exodus 8, 15). The battle between G-d and the Egyptian idols was won.

This victory was meant for the Jewish nation. During its long years of exile, the Jewish nation was swept away by Egyptian idolatry and was unable to disconnect from it. Ezekiel the prophet describes it like this, about a thousand years after the Exodus from Egypt:

"So says the Lord G-d...On that day I lifted up My hand to them to bring them out of the land of Egypt...And I said to them: 'Every man cast away the despicable idols from before his eyes, and pollute not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your G-d.' But they rebelled against Me and would not consent to hearken to Me; they did not cast away, every man, the despicable idols from before their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt..."

If we ask why G-d chose the Jewish people and liberated them from Egypt, the answer is written where we read the story of the Exodus – in the Torah:

"I am the Lord, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d"

(Numbers 15, 41)

The Jewish nation was slated to fulfill a spiritual purpose that began back in the Bronze Age and continues to this day. But the nation submerged in mental, spiritual, and physical slavery needed to be released from idolatrous conceptions, from making a human into a god, from the Egyptian hubris that was expressed in its social and religious customs. The famous Egyptian pyramids are a perfect example of ancient Egypt's power and spiritual decay. The large pyramid is built of about three million bricks that were all hand-made. Researchers estimate that it took ten thousand slaves twenty years to build it – all for the tomb of an Egyptian king!

The beginning of the liberation was spiritual. The nation learned to recognize the futility of the Egyptian idols' power; they learned to scorn the ideology and moral distortions that lead a person to trample others. Only then were they worthy of being liberated and heading toward their purpose of being "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation", a beacon to the entire world of faith and morality.

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The Cup of Hope

Rabbi Daniel Stein

According to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1), the four cups of wine that we drink at the Pesach seder, correspond to the four expressions of redemption including, "I will take you out", "I will deliver you", "I will redeem you", and "I will acquire you" (Shemos 6:6-7). This is to extenuate that our redemption from Mitzrayim took place in phases and entailed four distinct aspects, namely, our geographical removal from the land of Mitzrayim, our physical freedom from the bonds of slavery, our emergence as an emotionally liberated nation, and our spiritual designation as the chosen people. However, some rishonim cite an alternative version of the Gemara (Pesachim 118a) which records the existence of a fifth cup of wine. The Raavad in his commentary to the Rif (Pesachim 26b) as well as the Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei Ha'Tosfos (Shemos 12:8) claim that this additional cup reflects a fifth manifestation of the redemption, "and I will bring you into the land"

(Shemos 6:8), referring to our development as a sovereign state in the Land of Israel.

Since the rishonim debate the legitimacy of this text of the Gemara, and the existence of a fifth cup altogether, as well as the permissibility of drinking extraneous amounts of wine at the end of the Pesach seder, the fifth cup is traditionally only poured but not imbibed. The Vilna Gaon asserts that this compromise is the basis for our practice regarding the cup of Eliyahu, which is ceremoniously filled towards the conclusion of the seder, but is left untouched, for it is Eliyahu who will resolve all Talmudic disputes including the validity or necessity of a fifth cup of wine. However, perhaps the fifth cup is ascribed to Eliyahu, not only because he alone will resolve its halachically controversial status, but also because it is associated with the culmination of our ultimate redemption and the resettlement of the Land of Israel in the times of Moshiach which will be heralded and preceded by the return of Eliyahu hanavi.

Indeed, Rabbi Meir Horowitz of Dzikov (Imrei Noam) notes that the numerical value of the fifth term of deliverance, "and I will bring you" - "ve'heveisi" - is four hundred and twenty four, and equal to that of "Moshiach ben David", which further underscores that this expression is connected with the coming of Moshiach and the future redemption. For this reason, the fifth cup is prepared but not consumed, because despite our confidence in the final geulah, we can only rejoice and toast its arrival after it has materialized. This is supported by Rav Chaim Soloveitchik's (quoted in Emek Bracha) interpretation of the pasuk, "But I have trusted in Your mercy, my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation, I will sing to the Lord for He has dealt bountifully with me" (Tehillim 13:6), where he explains that while we can preemptively "rejoice in God's salvation" since it is inevitable, it is only appropriate to celebrate externally and sing to the Lord, or raise our glasses in triumph, after the geulah has actually occurred.

Nevertheless, even though the fifth cup of wine cannot presently be enjoyed, it must be prepared, in order to demonstrate our persistent yearning for the advent of Moshiach. The fifth cup serves as a symbol of our eternal hope and constant anticipation of the final geulah, which enables us to withstand what can appear to be an interminable galus. Yaakov Avinu summoned his children at the end of his life and attempted to disclose to them the precise date of the end of days. His plan was thwarted by Hashem, but his intentions were clear, as the ensuing pasuk states, "For your salvation I hope Hashem" (Breishis 49:18). Yaakov understood that in order to persevere throughout the long journey of galus Mitzrayim, Klal Yisrael would need to be able to hope and foresee a brighter future for themselves. In fact, the Kozhnutzer Maggid (Avodas Yisrael) notes that from the start of Parshas Mikeitz until this pasuk in Parshas Vayechi the name of Havaya - which reflects the merciful aspect of Hashem's providence - is entirely absent. This is because Parshas Mikeitz marked the beginning of a prolonged period of galus, which ostensibly eclipsed any trace of mercy or compassion. However, through the penetrating power of hope it is possible to pierce through even heaviest veil of darkness, and to begin to discern the infinite mercy of Hashem.

It seems that galus is only manageable when there is at least a glimmer of hope for redemption. For this reason, none of the cities of refuge, where an accidental murderer could be exiled and protected, were operational prior to the final conquest of Eretz Yisrael. The Meshech Chochmah (Masei) explains that this is because the detention of the accidental murder can only be alleviated and dismissed by the death of the Kohen Gadol, and Hashem had already pledged that Ahron's successor, Eliezer Hakohen, would live to oversee the entire process of conquering and dividing Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, during this transitional stage of Jewish history, any accidental murderer sentenced to galus would have had no potential path towards parole or liberation. This kind of bleak existence is so harsh and excruciating that it could not be justified as a punishment for any crime committed inadvertently.

For this reason, at the very same moment that Hashem informed Avraham that, "your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years"

(Breishis 14:13), Hashem also foretold that, "the nation that they will serve, I will judge, and afterwards they will go forth with great possessions" (Breishis 14:14). Why was it necessary to foreshadow to the manner of their emancipation before the period of slavery had even begun? Rav Yerucham Levovitz (Daas Torah) suggests that this relationship underscores that our ability to endure the difficulties of galus is directly dependent on the prospect and promise of salvation. Therefore, the Rambam in his commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 10:1) demands that we not only believe in the coming of Moshiach, but that we also resolve to "wait for him every day." It is this kind of optimistic mindset, our hope for deliverance and rescue, that will propel us to the time of our true redemption when we can rejoice fully and enjoy all five cups of wine at the seder, with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash be'meirehah be'yameinu!
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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vaeira

פרשת ואירא תשפ

וישליך אהרן את מטתו לפני פרעה ולפני עבדיו ויהי לתנין

Aharon threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a snake. (7:10)

The *Talmud* (*Menachos* 85A) relates the dialogue that ensued between Pharaoh's magicians and Moshe *Rabbeinu* following his staff/snake miracle. The Egyptian magicians chided Moshe, "Are you seeking to bring cement to a place filled with cement?" Moshe replied, "I am bringing vegetables to a vegetable market." At best, the exchange between Moshe and the magicians is unbelievable. The Egyptians' question lacks meaning, and Moshe's response appears equally perplexing. The *Shittah Mekubetztes* explains that, actually, theirs was a profound exchange, during which Moshe enlightened the Egyptians, showing them that their assumption concerning what he was doing was inaccurate.

As far as the Egyptians were concerned, they viewed Moshe's actions as nothing more than his version of witchcraft and magic (no different than what they were doing). They reasoned that his staff turned into a snake because that is what staffs do. Thus, they told Moshe that bringing magic to Egypt is tantamount to "bringing coal to New Castle": "There is no point in attempting to impress us with your magic. We wrote the book on magic. This country is filled with individuals, such as ourselves, who are quite adept at witchcraft. Take your 'toys' elsewhere. Egypt is way ahead of you."

Thus, Moshe's rebuttal was riveting. "I am not performing magic. This is not some type of show. This is reality. My staff has become a real snake." Likewise, when the Egyptians replicated the plague of blood, they could not produce real blood. Fish were able to continue breathing in the Egyptian-generated blood-filled waters, because it was not real blood.

Thus, Moshe was intimating to the Egyptians that actually the most propitious venue for performing magic was Egypt, because, here in the country that spouted their (fake) magic, they could appreciate the reality. They were able to discern between the charlatan and the authentic. "I am bringing vegetables to the vegetable market": Unlike cement, which is uniform, vegetables vary in quality and species. Any discerning connoisseur will vouch for this distinction. The magicians whose lives revolved around sham, for whom it was all about exhibition and show, not about authenticity and reality, refused to accept Moshe's message; thus, they were relegated to suffer through the Ten Plagues until they finally "got it right."

The mentality of refusing to strive for the real and authentic continues to plague us to this very day. *Horav Tzvi Kushlevsky, Shlita*, observes how we tend to waste our precious time on frivolity and pastimes that, deep in our hearts, we know are a total waste of time and energy. The allure of the disingenious is powerful, because it is enjoyable and not demanding. The fact that it is not productive does not seem to matter, because, after all, we are enjoying ourselves. Does enjoyment trump productivity? The *yetzer hora* makes us believe that it does, by creating ambiguity. When one is enjoying himself, it is difficult to accept that he might actually be wasting time. How could enjoyment be a waste of time? The flip side is that, deep in our hearts, we know that real satisfaction is derived only from those activities which are meaningful. The Egyptian

magicians were obstinate, refusing to see beyond their myopic perception of reality.

One who has not observed Judaism through the prism of *halacha* has not been exposed to authentic *Torah m'Sinai* Judaism. *Halacha* observance is not arbitrary. One does not make a personal autonomous decision to observe the Torah. It is an obligation for every Jew and Jewess to observe *mitzvos* and a responsibility to learn about all aspects of their observance. When Hashem gave us the Torah, He took us as His People. We accepted with a declaration of, *Naase v'nishma*: "We will do and we will listen." The rest is history. Those who have rejected *Torah m'Sinai* claim, among other things, that Judaism is no longer relevant; its canons are archaic and uninspiring. Obviously, they have never observed or experienced the peace and sanctity of a *Shabbos*, or delved over a *blatt Gemora*; never felt the embrace of a warm, committed Torah community; never danced a *Simchas Torah*; and never participated in a *Pesach seder*. Simply, they have never had a taste of real, authentic, unvarnished, unembellished Judaism.

These people have only experienced Judaism without the Torah, very much like the poor Jewish man in Chicago who, after passing a fancy restaurant, craved what the wealthy diners who were feasting on delicious cheese blintzes were having. When he saw the mouth-watering cheese dripping down onto their plates, the succulent dough wraps that held the sweet cheese together, he asked his wife to prepare blintzes for him. An industrious woman, who was willing to try anything to please her husband, she agreed. Perusing through her cookbook, she found the entry for blintzes. "Oh, oh," she said, "It says here that we need cream cheese. I do not have cream cheese, because we cannot afford it."

"So skip the cream cheese," her husband said. "It is not the end of the world if the (cheese) blintzes are cheeseless." "It also says here that we must mix in walnuts, raisins and honey. We have not had those ingredients in years," she said sadly. "Do it without them," her husband consoled her. "Should I also ignore the brown sugar, cinnamon and graham crackers?" she asked. "It is not an absolute necessity. Just start baking, I am starved. After seeing those rich people savoring those blintzes, that is all I have been thinking about."

The man's resourceful wife turned on the oven, placed the baking sheet with the flour and water rolled into blintz shapes, and waited for her "innovative" blintzes to bake. She then placed them on a plate and made a big ceremony of bringing them to the table to serve her dear husband. She stood there and proudly *kvelled*, watching her husband eat blintzes, just like the wealthy folk at the fancy restaurant. After a few seconds, she could no longer contain herself, "Nu, what do you think? Do you like it?" The man stopped chewing for a moment and looked up at his wife and said, "You know, I have no idea what those rich people see in blintzes. They do not taste that special to me."

Without the cream cheese, brown sugar, honey, walnuts, raisins and graham crackers, all one has is flour and water, which comprise a poor imitation of blintzes. Likewise, Judaism without Torah is just not Judaism.

והפכו כל המים אשר בנחל לדם ... ולא יכלו מצרים לשתות מים מן הניחור
And all the water in the river turned to blood ... and Egypt was unable to drink water from the river. (7:20,21)

It is an accepted verity that every miracle connected with the Exodus breached the laws of nature as we know them. This fact, in and of itself, is the essence of the redemption. *Klal Yisrael* was not beholden to nature or any order. We were totally under the reign of Hashem. While this is true all the time, it was publicly apparent for all the world – then and now – to see. *Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl*, posits that the plague of blood, the first of the *makkos* to devastate the Egyptians, is a clear example of this axiom. The Egyptians drank blood; the Jews drank water. Throughout the country, every body of water was blood for the Egyptians, yet perfectly clear, healthy drinking water for the Jews.

Now, the question is raised: What was it really? Was it water that turned to blood, or was it blood that turned to water? Did blood change to water when the Jew raised his cup to drink? Or did water suddenly become blood when it was the Egyptian who was drinking?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that one who asks this question does not begin to understand the miracle of the blood plague. It was water for the Jew and blood for the Egyptian. Yes, the very same liquid/beverage was blood for one and water for another. Ordinarily, a thing is specifically what it is – either one thing or another – not both. Change is always possible, but then it is not what it originally was. Thus, in the present example of blood/water, a change must have taken place when it was transferred to the

hands of an Egyptian. To accept this indicates that one does not understand the depth of the miracle.

To suggest that something changes from one matter to another, regardless how it occurs, is still within the realm of reason, because something specific cannot be two different sets of matter. It must change. That a thing is not one specific thing, however, but two separate, totally different sets of matter -- that for one person it is water, and for another person this same thing is blood -- is of another realm entirely.

This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is what characterizes the miracle of the plague of blood. It was not a trick, whereby it was blood to one person and then transformed into water when it was in the hands of another person; rather, it was inherently blood to one and water to another. The miracle created two things out of one, a phenomenon that is beyond our cognitive ability to comprehend.

We must not perceive existence to be limited, i.e. it is either blood or water. As long as we perceive limitations, we have not yet left *galus Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian exile. *Mitzrayim* is related to *meitzar*, boundaries, limitations. If we are to leave Egypt, we must escape this restricting or, in contemporary vernacular, “think outside of the box.” We are able to cognitively/naturally accept that an entity with one form of existence can change and become a totally different entity. For a given entity to be one thing for one person and another thing for another person, however, is beyond our level of perception. It is either/or – not both. Hashem can create anything. Thus, He created blood/water – one entity that was two: blood for the Egyptians, water for the Jews. The meaning of miracle is existence without boundaries.

הירא את דבר ד' מעבדי פרעה הניס את עבדיו ואת מקנהו אל הבתים ואשר לא שם לבו אל דבר ד' ויעזוב את עבדיו ואת מקנהו בשדה

Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and livestock into the houses. And whoever did not take the word of Hashem to heart - he left his servants and livestock in the field. (9:20, 21)

The commentators ask the obvious question: What kind of people would see that every word which Moshe *Rabbeinu* uttered in Hashem's Name came true exactly as he stated it would, and still continue along their merry way as if nothing had happened? Certainly, they were not imbeciles who did not care at all for their material possessions or for the lives of their slaves. Yet, Moshe spoke and they ignored his warning. Apparently, two groups of Egyptians existed: the *yarei es davar* Hashem, the ones who feared G-d's word; the *lo sam libo el dvar* Hashem, those who did not take the word of Hashem to heart. Let us attempt to understand the difference between the two. They both seemed to fear Hashem. The difference between the two is that one took the word of G-d to heart, while the other did not. Let us see how this plays itself out.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, observes a textual difference in the outcome (or lack thereof) for those who left their animals and slaves outside. The Torah writes that one group (the “G-d-fearing” Egyptians) made their slaves and animals come into shelter, while the other group did not. The Torah should have immediately added that those who listened saved their possessions from destruction, while those who ignored Moshe's warning lost everything. The Torah, however, does not state that the results differed. The only distinction between the two groups that the Torah acknowledged was prior to the plague, not afterwards. Why?

Rav Sholom explains that everyone – both groups – believed Moshe's warning. They all believed in Hashem's “ability” to destroy the country through the agency of hail. The *yarei dvar* Hashem feared G-d to the point that when they heard the hail was coming, they did not wait. They immediately called in their slaves and gathered their livestock. Indeed, *Ibn Ezra* writes, *b'oso hayom*, on that very same day, when news of the forthcoming plague became public, they took in their possessions.

The other group of Egyptians, whom we refer to as “non-G-d-fearing,” did not live in the fast lane. They did not run. They took their sweet time responding to the warning. While his counterpart acted with haste, this fellow waited for the very last minute, because he did not take the warning to heart. One who is anxious wastes no time. One who takes his time is not anxious.

The individual who falls under the purview of *asher lo sam libo*, does not live by the clock, but rather, he lives by the clock but procrastinates and waits until the very last possible moment. For example, when *zman krias shema* is at ten o'clock he looks at his watch and says, “I have until 9:59.”

This is why the Torah does not write that those who did not take Moshe's warning to heart left their possessions in the field. It does not write that their possessions were destroyed, just that they left them outside. What happened to their slaves and livestock? If they made it in at the last second, they were spared. If they did not, their possessions were destroyed. They had been granted a chance at survival, but did not take it to heart. They were now destined to suffer the consequences of their decision.

The concept of *lo sam libo* plays itself out in other areas of endeavor. One who ignores/rationalizes/justifies a situation / responsibility by not taking to heart the ramifications of his actions -- or non-actions -- not only hurts himself, but also hurts those for whom he is responsible. Having said this, I take liberty of paraphrasing from a lecture rendered by the *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent leader of his generation, *Horav Elozar M. Shach, zl*, to a large gathering of *mechanchim*, Torah educators. *Rav Shach* was not only a brilliant *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who was fluent in all areas of Torah erudition, but he was also a pedagogue par excellence, whose devotion to Torah study and its dissemination knew no bounds. One of his primary areas of concern was timeliness. He felt that being a *rebbe* was not merely a vocation, it was *avodas hakodesh*, a holy endeavor, which thus placed an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of a *rebbe*. A *rebbe* who was derelict in executing his duties not only undermined and demeaned his *avodas hakodesh*, but he also hurt his students immeasurably via the flawed impression concerning the primacy of Torah study which he inadvertently imparted.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* was scheduled to address a large group of *mechanchim*. The venue was Yerushalayim; the designated time, 7:00 p.m. Anyone who is acquainted with Bnei Brak/Yerushalayim traffic knows that to arrive in Yerushalayim by 7:00 p.m. one must leave Bnei Brak no later than 5:00 p.m. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was not a young man, and sitting in a car for two hours taxed his health. Nonetheless, he felt that inspiring the teachers of *Klal Yisrael's* future leaders took precedence over his personal well-being. One can imagine the *Rosh Yeshivah's* incredulity and then chagrin when, upon arrival at the hall, he saw that only half of the designated group felt it prudent to arrive on time. He proceeded to the *Kosel Hamaaravi* to *daven*. When he returned, the hall was finally filled, with everyone waiting to hear his address.

“I came on time,” he began. “Apparently, timeliness is not a great concern of yours. Perhaps you allow yourselves to arrive ten, fifteen minutes late to class. I am certain that your justification for your tardiness is in your need to *daven* with a *minyan*.” (Waking up earlier to attend an early *minyan* probably does not enter into the equation.)

“Does anyone have an idea concerning the negative influence which such behavior imparts on the minds of your students? My brothers, let us together resolve this issue. (The *Rosh Yeshivah* included himself among the educators). I am aware that every educator has set hours in which he is obligated to teach. I am speaking with you in my present position as *Rosh Yeshivah* of Ponovez, where I am obligated to serve the students twenty-four hours a day. (He considered himself to be on call 24/7.) Arriving late for class is not simply *gezel*, theft, of something which can be evaluated in monetary terms. A loss of Torah - study time cannot be properly assessed in material currency in any way, since a loss of Torah - study time is tantamount to a loss of life! A *rebbe* who is lax concerning his students' time steals from their lives. This loss can affect future generations! Five tardy minutes for a class of thirty students is not simply 150 minutes of lost time. It is setting a negative example that is not easily expunged... We have no idea of the effect on future generations that the negative example of this behavior can create!”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* then continued speaking on a more positive note concerning the extraordinary *siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance, that a Torah disseminator has. Our greatest leaders throughout the ages – such as *Rashi* and *Rambam*; as well as contemporary leaders, such as the *Chafetz Chaim*, whose treatises were accepted throughout the world and studied and studied over and over – were successful only because they merited unusual *siyata diShmaya*. One can study pedagogy and expend much time and effort to excel as a Torah mentor but, unless he has *siyata diShmaya*, he will not succeed to the point that his words will be appreciated, remembered, cherished and reviewed. It is all the result of *siyata diShmaya*, so that one who is lax in timeliness is hurting his chances of receiving this special Divine assistance.

Horav Eliyahu Mishkovsky, zl, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Kfar Chassidim, delivered the eulogy at the funeral of a student who had suffered an untimely

passing. At the conclusion of his words, he declared, "The Torah obliges a *shomer*, watchman, who does not return the object that was given to him, to make two oaths: *She'lo pashati*, 'I was not negligent'; *she'lo shalachtu bo ad*, 'I did not make personal use of it.' When parents send their sons to *yeshivah*, they are placing/entrusting them in the care of the *Rosh Yeshivah* (who is sort of a *shomer*). I was unable to return the *pikadon*, deposit (the student) entrusted to me (in the condition that I received him), but I can unequivocally make the two *shevuos*, oaths: that I neither was negligent in his care, nor did I make personal use of him. Since I am also a father to my students, however, a father is not required to make the oaths." With these words, he concluded his eulogy and broke down in bitter weeping.

On a happier note, *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, reminisces that one morning, when he was a young student in *Yeshivas Eitz Chaim*, just in time for the opening class, one of the senior *rebbeim* pulled up to the building in a special *monit* (taxi). This was a *rebbe* who walked to school daily and was never, ever late for class. Children will be children, and they immediately surrounded the *rebbe* (during recess) and asked him, "*Mah nishtanah?* 'Why is this day different from all other days?'" The *rebbe* explained that for some reason he had been overwhelmed with household obligations, to the point that if he would have walked to *yeshivah*, he would have arrived a few minutes late. Therefore, he broke the bank and splurged on a special taxi in order to arrive on time at the *yeshivah*. That day, during afternoon recess, the boys calculated that the money expended for the *monit* equaled a sizable portion of the *rebbe's* weekly salary!

Va'ani Tefillah

כי קל שומע תפילות ותחנונים אתה

Ki Keil shomea tefillos v'sachanunim atah.

We have reiterated time and again that prayer without sincerity is flawed, lacks meaning, and is not really prayer. Does this mean that if someone prays with sincerity, he has the "winning ticket" and can be assured of a positive response? No. Even when a person prays with sincerity, he has no guarantee that Hashem will grant him his wish: One thing, however, is assured: No heartfelt prayer is in vain. It will be used for someone, sometime. It is well - known that when the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Beth Medrash Gavoha was suffering from the illness to which he ultimately succumbed, a group of his students and admirers journeyed to Bnei Brak to implore the *Steipler Gaon, zl*, to intensify his prayers on behalf of their *Rosh Yeshivah*. They added that thousands of Jews throughout the world were storming the Heavens, pleading for their revered *Rebbe's refuah sheleimah*, which was still not materializing.

The *Steipler* assured them that no sincere prayer goes unanswered. A heartfelt prayer must be answered. One day Hashem will use that prayer to help someone. It may not even be a member of your family, or someone you know, but someone will benefit from your prayer. This is for certain.

לזכר נשמת

ר' משה יהודה ליב בן אשר אלתר חיים ז"ל

נפטר כ"ד טבת תשס"ט

ת.צ.ב.ה.

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

All the water in Egypt turned to blood. We also use water as part of the process in removing blood from meat, and, therefore, this week we will discuss:

The Crisis of Unwashed Meat

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Devorah calls me: "During our summer vacation, I entered a butcher shop that has reliable supervision and noticed a sign on the wall, 'We sell washed and unwashed meat.' This seemed very strange: Would anyone eat unwashed meat? Besides, isn't all meat washed as part of the koshering process? What did the sign mean?"

Michael asked me: "Someone asked me if I have any problem with the kashrus of frozen meat. What can possibly be wrong with frozen meat?"

Answer: We should be aware that, although today we usually have a steady supply of kosher meat with all possible hiddurim, sometimes circumstances are more difficult. This is where "washed meat" and "frozen meat" may enter the picture, both terms referring to specific cases whose kashrus is subject to halachic dispute.

Knowing that Devorah enjoys stories, I told her an anecdote that illustrates what can happen when kosher choices are slim.

I was once rabbi in a community that has memorable winters. Our city was often covered with snow by Sukkos and, in some years, it was still snowing in May. There were several times that we could not use the sukkah without clearing snow off the schach, something my Yerushalmi neighbors find hard to comprehend.

One short erev Shabbos, the weather was unusually inclement, even for our region of the country; the major interstate highway and all secondary "state routes" were closed because of a blizzard. The locals called this weather "whiteout" -- referring not to a fluid for correcting errors, but to the zero visibility created by the combination of wind and snow.

Fortunately, I lived around the corner from shul and was able to navigate my way back and forth by foot. Our house, too, was - baruch Hashem - sufficiently stocked to get through Shabbos.

About a half-hour before Shabbos, in the midst of our last minute preparations, the telephone rang:

"Is this Rabbi Kaganoff?" inquired an unfamiliar female voice. I responded affirmatively, though somewhat apprehensive. People do not call with shaylos late Friday afternoon, unless it is an emergency. What new crisis would this call introduce? Perhaps I was lucky and this was simply a damsel in distress inquiring about the kashrus of her cholent, or one who had just learned that her crock pot may fail to meet proper Shabbos standards. Hoping that the emergency was no more severe, I listened attentively.

"Rabbi Kaganoff, I was given your phone number in case of emergency." I felt the first knots in my stomach. What emergency was this when I hoped to momentarily head out to greet the Shabbos queen? Was someone, G-d forbid, caught in the storm? I was certainly unprepared for the continuing conversation.

"I am a dispatcher for the All-American Transport Company," she continued. "We have a load of kosher meat held up by the storm that needs to be washed by 11 p.m. Saturday." My caller, located somewhere in the Nebraska Corn Belt, was clearly more familiar with halachos of kosher meat than she was with the ramifications of calling a frum household minutes before candle lighting. Although I was very curious how All-American had located me, a potential Lone Washer in the Wilderness, the hour of the week required expedition, not curiosity. Realizing that, under stress, one's tone of voice can create a kiddush Hashem or, G-d forbid, the opposite, I politely asked if she could call me back in about 25 hours, which would still be several hours before the meat's deadline. I guess that she assumed that it would take me that long to dig my car out.

Later, I determined the meat's ultimate destination, a place we will call Faroutof Town, information that ultimately proved highly important.

Why was a Nebraska truck dispatcher calling to arrange the washing of kosher meat? Before returning to our meat stalled at the side of the highway, I need to provide some halachic background.

EXORCISING THE BLOOD

In several places, the Torah commands that we may not eat blood, but only meat. Of course, blood is the efficient transporter of nutrients to the muscles and permeates the animal's flesh while it is still alive. If so, how do we extract the prohibited blood from the permitted meat?

Chazal gave us two methods of removing blood from meat. One is by soaking and salting the meat, and the other is by broiling it. In practical terms, the first approach, usually referred to simply as "kashering meat," involves soaking the meat for thirty minutes, shaking off the water, salting the meat thoroughly on all sides, and then allowing the blood to drain freely for an hour. At the end of this process, the meat is rinsed thoroughly to wash away all the blood and salt. Indeed, Devorah is correct that the salting of all meat involves several washings. She was correct in assuming that the sign she saw in the butcher's shop did not refer to these washings, but to a different washing that I will soon explain.

BROILING MEAT

An alternative method of extracting blood from meat is by broiling it. This is the only halachically accepted method of removing blood from liver. In this approach, the liver is sliced or slit to allow its blood to run out, the surface blood is rinsed off and the liver is placed under or over a flame to broil in a way that allows the blood to drain freely. Accepted practice is that we sprinkle a small amount of salt on the liver immediately prior to broiling it (Rema, Yoreh Deah 73:5).

Halachically, it is perfectly acceptable to broil any meat, rather than soak and salt it. However, on a commercial level, customers want to purchase raw meat and, therefore, the usual method used for kosher cuisine is soaking and salting. For most of mankind's history, kashering meat was performed at

home, but contemporaneously, the properly supervised butcher or other commercial facility almost universally performs it.

Although this explains why one must kasher meat before serving it, we still do not know why Ms. Nebraska was so concerned that her meat be washed en route.

SEVENTY-TWO HOURS OR BUST

The Geonim enacted that meat must be salted within seventy-two hours of its shechitah. They contended that, after three days, blood inside the meat hardens and is no longer extractable through soaking and salting. Should meat not be soaked and salted within 72 hours, they ruled that only broiling successfully removes the blood. Of course, if one does not want to eat broiled meat, this last suggestion will not satisfy one's culinary preferences.

Is there any way to extend the 72 hours?

The authorities discuss this question extensively. Most contend that one may extend the time if the meat is soaked thoroughly for a while during the 72 hours (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 69:13, see Taz ad loc.), although some permit this only under extenuating circumstances (Toras Chatos, quoted by Shach 69:53). On the other hand, some authorities rule that even a minor rinsing extends the 72 hours (Shu"t Masas Binyamin #108). It became standard to refer to meat that was washed to extend its time by the Yiddish expression, gegosena fleisch, hence the literal English translation, washed meat.

Also, bear in mind that this soaking helps only when the meat was soaked within 72 hours of its slaughter. Once 72 hours have passed without a proper soaking, only broiling will remove the blood. If the meat was soaked thoroughly, those who accept this heter allow a delay to kasher the meat for another 72 hours. If one is unable to kasher it by then, one can re-soak it again to further extend its 72 hours.

WASHING OR SOAKING?

At this point in my monologue, Devorah interrupted with a question:

"You mentioned soaking the meat and extending its time for three more days. But the sign called it 'washed meat,' not soaked meat. There is a big difference between washing something and soaking it."

"Yes, you are raising a significant issue. Although most early authorities only mention 'soaking' meat, it became common practice to wash the meat instead, a practice that many authorities disputed (Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 69:28; Darkei Teshuvah 69:231- 237). There are also many different standards of what is called 'washing' the meat. Some hechsherim permit meat that was not salted within seventy-two hours of its shechitah by having the meat hosed down before this time elapsed. Some spray a light mist over the meat and assume that the meat is 'washed,' or simply take a wet rag and wipe down the outside of the meat."

"Why would anyone do that?" inquired Devorah.

"In general, people like to save work and water, and soaking properly a whole side of beef is difficult and uses a lot of water. In addition, if one hoses meat while it is on a truck, the water may damage the truck, whereas it is even more work to remove the meat from the truck. But if one does not hose the meat properly, most authorities prohibit it."

At this point, we can understand why Ms. Nebraska was concerned about the washing of the meat. She knew that if the meat went 72 hours without being hosed, the rabbis would reject the delivery as non-kosher. During my brief conversation, I asked her if she knew the last time the meat was washed. "It was last washed 11 p.m. Wednesday and needs re-washing by 11 p.m. Saturday," she dutifully notified me.

At this point, I noted to Devorah that we now had enough information to address her question. "The sign in the butcher shop stating that they sell washed meat means that they sell meat that was not kashered within 72 hours of slaughter, but was washed sometime before the 72 hours ran out. It does not tell us how they washed the meat, but it is safe to assume that they did not submerge it in water. If they were following a higher standard, they hosed the meat on all sides until it was soaking wet. If they followed a different standard, hopefully, they still did whatever their rav ruled. Since you told me that it was a reliable hechsher, presumably they hosed the meat thoroughly."

I then asked Devorah if she wanted to hear the rest of the blizzard story. As I suspected, she did – and so I return to our snowed-in town.

MOTZA'EI SHABBOS

By Motza'ei Shabbos the entire region was in the grip of a record-breaking blizzard. Walking the half block home from shul had been highly treacherous. There was no way in the world I was going anywhere that night, nor anyone else I could imagine.

At the very moment I had told the dispatcher I could be reached, the telephone rang. A different, unfamiliar voice identified itself as the driver of the stuck truck. His vehicle was exactly where it had been Friday afternoon, stranded not far from the main highway.

The driver told me the already-familiar story about his load of kosher meat, and his instructions to have the meat washed before 11 p.m., if his trip was delayed.

There was little I could do for either the driver or the meat, a fact I found frustrating. Out of desperation, I called my most trusted mashgiach, Yaakov, who lived a little closer to the scene of the non-action. Yaakov was an excellent employee, always eager to work whenever there was a job opportunity. I explained the situation to him.

"Rabbi," responded Yaakov, "I was just out in this storm. Not this time. Sorry."

I was disappointed. Not that I blamed Yaakov in the slightest. It was sheer insanity to go anywhere in this storm. In fact, I was a bit surprised at myself for taking the matter so seriously. After all, it was only a load of meat.

With no good news to tell the trucker, I was not exactly enthusiastic about calling him back. I hate to be the bearer of bad tidings. So I procrastinated, rather than tell the trucker he should sit back and wait for his kosher meat to expire.

An hour later, the phone rang again, with Mr. Trucker on the line. "Rabbi," he told me, with obvious excitement in his voice, "I've solved the problem."

I was highly curious to find out where he located an Orthodox Jew in the middle of a blizzard in the middle of nowhere. For a fleeting moment, I envisioned a frum Jew stranded nearby and shuddered at the type of Shabbos he must have experienced.

The trucker's continuing conversation brought me back to the reality of the unwashed meat.

"Well, Rabbi," he exclaimed with the exhilaration Columbus's lookout must have felt upon spotting land, "I discovered that I was stranded a few thousand feet from a fire station. And now, all the meat has been properly hosed. Listen to this letter." The trucker proceeded to read me the documentation of his successful find:

"On Saturday evening, the 22nd of January, at exactly 9:25 pm, I personally oversaw the successful washing of a kosher load of meat loaded on trailer 186CX and tractor 2008PR. To this declaration, I do solemnly lend my signature and seal,

"James P. O'Donald, Fire Chief, Lincoln Fire Station #2."

Probably noticing my momentary hesitation, the trucker continues, "Rabbi, do I need to have this letter notarized?"

"No, I am sure that won't be necessary," I replied. I was not about to tell the driver that halachah requires that a Torah observant Jew supervise the washing of the meat. On the contrary, I complimented him on his diligence and his tremendous sense of responsibility.

At this point, I had a bit of halachic responsibility on my hands. Since I knew the meat's ultimate destination, I needed to inform the rav in Faroutof Town of the situation.

I was able to reach the Faroutofer Rav, Rabbi Oncelearned. "I just want to notify you that your city will shortly receive a load of meat that was washed under the supervision of the 'Fire Station K.'" Rabbi Oncelearned had never heard of the "Fire Station K" supervision and asked if I was familiar with this hechsher. I told him the whole story and we had a good laugh. I felt good that I had supplied Rabbi Oncelearned with accurate information and prepared him for the meat's arrival. After all, it would be his learned decision that would rule once the meat arrived in town.

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

Of course, Rabbi Oncelearned now had his own predicament: Would he have to reject the town's entire order of kosher meat, incurring the wrath of hungry customers and undersupplied butchers? Or could he figure out a legitimate way to permit the meat?

There was, indeed, a halachic basis to permit the meat under the extenuating circumstances because of a different heter, but not because of the Lincoln fire station hose.

FROZEN MEAT

It is common that meat is slaughtered quite a distance from where it is consumed – such as slaughtering it in South America and shipping it frozen to Israel. Today, all mehadrin supervisions arrange that meat shipped this way is kosher butchered (called traberling) and kashered before it is frozen and shipped. This is a tremendous boon to proper kashrus, but it is a relatively recent innovation. Initially, these meats were shipped frozen and,

upon reaching their destination several weeks later, they were thawed, trabered and kashered. Thus, the question developed whether this meat was fit to eat, since it arrived weeks after its slaughter.

In truth, earlier halachic authorities had already debated whether meat frozen for 72 hours can still be kashered by salting, some contending that this meat can only be broiled (Minchas Yaakov, Responsum #14 at end, quoted by Be'er Heiteiv 69:8; Pri Megadim, Sifsei Daas 69:60), whereas others ruled that deep freezing prevents the blood from hardening (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 69:79; Yad Yehudah 69:59; Shu"t Yabia Omer 2:YD:4 and Shu"t Yechaveh Daas 6:46). Some frowned on making such arrangements lechatchilah, but ruled that kashering frozen meat is acceptable under extenuating circumstances (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:27; 2:21).

earned consulted with a posek who reasoned that since the truck had been stuck in a major blizzard, unquestionably the meat had been frozen solid, and that they could rely on this to kasher the meat after it thawed out. Thus, the firemen's hose was used for naught, but I never told them. Please help me keep it a secret.

Someone meticulous about kashrus plans trips in advance to know what hechsherim and kashrus situations he may encounter. When in doubt what to do, one's rav is available for guidance how to handle the situation.

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Rav Aviner to President Putin:

Don't Be Insulted, But You are Not a King

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

Question: The President of Russia, Vladimir Putin is arriving in Israel. If someone sees him should he recite the blessing of "Baruch...She-Natan Michvodo Le-Vasar Ve-Dam - Blessed are You...who has given of His glory to flesh and blood"? (In the Gemara in Berachot 58a, our Rabbis teach that one who sees a non-Jewish king recites the blessing. It is recorded in the Rambam, Hilchot Berachot 10:11 and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 224:8. The Chatam Sofer, Orach Chaim #159, rules that even if one sees the king outside of his area of "rule," one must still recite the appropriate blessing).

Answer: No, the President of the Russia is not a king.

Halachic authorities mention four criteria in order to be considered a king for this purpose:

1. One must be the absolute ruler of his kingdom or country (Orchot Chaim in name of Sefer Ha-Eshkol, Hilchot Berachot #49, Shut Ha-Radvaz vol. 1 #296). The President of the Russia, but he does not have absolute authority. The Kremlin also has some power.

2. The king must have the ability to administer capital punishment (Shut Chatam Sofer ibid.). The President of Russia does not possess this power. While he does have the power to grant life by issuing a pardon, he does not possess the power of death (Shut Be'er Moshe of Rav Moshe Stern vol. 2, # 9). If he frees Na'ama Yissachar from a Russia prison, we can discuss this further...

3. The king must have royal clothing. President Putin wears a suit like everyone else (Shut Yehaveh Da'at, vol. 2, #28 and Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot vol. 2, #139).

4. The king must have an entourage (see Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot ibid. Rav Sternbuch writes there that he heard that Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld, the great Rav of Yerushalayim before the establishment of the State, once had a private meeting in a tent with the King of Jordan and he recited this blessing even though he was without his entourage). While President Putin is traveling with 400 people, most of them are for his protection.

The President of Russia is one of the most powerful countries of the world is visiting the tiny State of Israel, as well as many world leaders, and some people say that this is not "Atchalta De-Geulah – the beginning of the Redemption."

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in Shut Minchat Shlomo (the last responsum in vol. 1) writes that one is obligated to recite four blessings when the Messiah arrives: 1. "Baruch...Chacham Ha-Razim – Blessed are You...Knowers of secrets" which is recited when seeing 600,000 Jews together and certainly at least this many Jews will go out to greet the Messiah. 2. "Baruch...She-Chalak Mechomato Lirei'av - Blessed are You...who has appointed of His knowledge to those who fear him" which is recited when seeing an outstanding Torah scholar and the Messiah will certainly fit this criteria. 3. "Baruch...She-Chalak Michvodo Lirei'av - Blessed are You...who has appointed of His glory to those who fear him" which is recited when seeing a Jewish king. 4. "Shechechianu" – Blessing Hashem for having arrived at this moment. We still are waiting for this time to arrive, but we are continuing to advance. After all, the President of Russia and many world leaders are visiting the State of Israel.

Therefore, instead of reciting a blessing over President Putin, I recommend reciting two prayers for the Nation of Israel which we recite every day before the Shema with extra proper intention: "Blessed are You, Hashem, who chooses His Nation Israel with Love" and "Blessed are You, Hashem, who love His Nation Israel."

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

Additional item - CS

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Jan 23, 2020, 5:44 PM

subject: Rav Frand - They Didn't Listen Because of "Shortness of Spirit"
A Revolutionary Interpretation of the Ralbag on the Words "M'Kotzer Ruach"

In the opening pesukim of this week's parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu is given his mission, which includes "the famous four expressions of redemption: "Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: I am Hashem, and I shall take you out (V'Hotzaisee) from under the burdens of Egypt. I shall rescue you (V'Heetzalti) from their service. I shall redeem you (V'Ga'altee) with an out-stretched arm and with great judgments. I shall take you (V'Lakachtee) to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you. And you shall know that I am Hashem your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt." [Shemos 6:6-7]

Moshe Rabbeinu delivers this Divine message to Klal Yisrael. However, "they did not listen to Moshe, because of shortness of wind and hard work." [Shemos 6:9]. They were so tired out from working that they were literally short of breath. They were so exhausted from their labors that they simply did not have peace of mind to listen to what Moshe had to tell them. "Leave us alone! We are not interested in what you have to tell us!" This is the simple reading of this Scriptural narration (P'shuto shel Mikra.)

It is somewhat strange that in Parshas Shemos, the previous parsha, the pasuk says that Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon came to the people, they showed the people the "Signs" provided by Hashem, and the reaction was quite different: "And the people believed, and they heard that Hashem had remembered the Children of Israel and that He saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and they prostrated themselves." [Shemos 4:31]

What transpired between the end of Chapter 4 in Parshas Shemos and the beginning of Chapter 6 in Parshas Va'Era? How, in this relatively short span of time, did they go from belief and prostration to impatience, and even disinterest?

The simple reason is that between the end of Chapter 4 and the beginning of Chapter 6, the amount of work imposed on Bnei Yisrael was greatly increased. They now had to find their own straw, while still maintaining the same brick quotas. Perhaps the situation deteriorated to the extent that even though they listened the first time, by the second time they were simply too exhausted to listen anymore. That would be the superficial interpretation.

The Ralbag says a mind-boggling idea. He interprets that the words "v'lo sham-oo el Moshe m'kotzer ruach..." are not referring to "shortness of breath" (one interpretation of the words kotzer ruach) and the words kotzer ruach are not even referring to the people! The Ralbag interprets that the words kotzer ruach are referring to Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe was "knocked for a loop" – he was somewhat dispirited by recent events, which lead to his kotzer ruach.

At the very end of Parshas Shemos, Moshe complains to the Ribono shel Olam: "My L-rd, why have You harmed this people. Why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he harmed this people, but You did not rescue Your people!" [Shemos 5:23] Moshe apparently expected that he would come to Pharaoh with the Divine message, Pharaoh would listen to him, and the people would be out! That is not how it happened.

Instead, the situation deteriorated. Moshe Rabbeinu, the leader of the Jewish people, the leader who feels the pain and frustration of the people, was broken and depressed by this outcome. His spirit was broken. That is precisely the interpretation of the words "m'kotzer ruach"—from shortness of spirit.

The first time Moshe came and addressed the people with the message of Divine Promise of redemption, he spoke with spirit, with conviction, and with optimism. The people believed him, because he believed in himself. The second time, Moshe still believed what Hashem told him, but it was not with the same conviction. He was not able to deliver the message to the people as powerfully as he had in Parshas Shemos. He

could now only deliver it "with shortness of spirit". Therefore, the people did not listen to him.

We have mentioned a similar thought in past years. The question has been asked: Noach was building the Teiva (Ark) for 120 years. Yet in all those 120 years, he was not successful in bringing back a single sinner to the proper moral path. In Parshas Lech Lecha, we learn about the Patriarch Avraham and "the souls he made in Haran." He introduced a revolutionary belief of monotheism in the world to a great mass of people. Why is it that Noach was not a successful influencer and Avraham was?

One of the answers offered is that Chazal say that Noach himself was "m'ktanei amanna"—he was from those who have only a modicum of belief. In other words, he believed, and he did not believe. Chazal tell us on the pasuk "Noach ... entered the Teiva because of the flood waters" [Bereshis 7:7] that he figuratively had to be forced into the Teiva. In other words, he did not fully believe that the destruction was going to happen until he saw it happening before his very eyes. Even though the Torah gives him accolades that he was a "perfect righteous person", Chazal insist that his faith was somewhat deficient.

If someone is at all deficient in his own faith, he cannot have a positive effect on other people. Avraham was found to be "faithful before You" [Nechemia 26:8]. His faith was unshakeable. Therefore, he could influence others. Noach, on the other hand, could not have the same effect. If someone does not believe it 100%, he cannot have an effect on other people.

The Ralbag is not suggesting that there was any doubt on the part of Moshe Rebeinu in the eventual geula. However, now Moshe's message was delivered me'kotzer ruach. It was not with the same oomph as previously because he felt he failed in his mission to Pharaoh. The Egyptian king did not listen to him. On the contrary, matters became worse since he began his mission. This deflated Moshe's spirit and therefore his second message, which was delivered out of "shortness of spirit" (kotzer ruach), was not at all effective.

Meshech Chochma's Amazing Interpretation Regarding the Tribes of Reuvain, Shimon and Levi

The pasuk says, "Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." [Shemos 6:13]. What does it mean "commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt?" Rashi says "Regarding the Children of Israel" – He commanded Moshe and Aharon to lead them calmly, and to be patient with them; "Regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt" – He commanded them to accord honor to him with their words. Following this, the Torah launches into a very strange parsha. The Torah presents a genealogy, which we know already, beginning, "These are the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuvain the firstborn of Israel..." [Shemos 6:14]. Following that are a list of Shimon's sons, and following that are a list of Levi's sons. Finally, in pasuk 20, the pasuk says, "Amram took Yocheved his aunt as a wife, and she bore him Aharon and Moshe.

What is the purpose of all this? We already know who the descendants of Reuvain and Shimon were from Parshas Vayigash. The Torah repeats it again in the beginning of Parshas Shemos. Why is it necessary to hear again a repetition of the Yichus of Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi in the middle of this edge-of-your-seat-narrative, until finally we get to the Yichus of Moshe and Aharon?

Rashi says that the Torah wants to inform us who Moshe Rabbeinu is, so it traces his genealogy back to Levi. Once we start with Levi, the Torah wants to start at the "top of the family," and first traces the uncles and cousins back to Reuvain and Shimon. That is why this is in here. Rashi teaches the simple reading of these pesukim (P'shuto shel Mikra).

The Meshech Chochma (Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk's commentary on Chumash) says an incredible thing. He suggests that there were Jews in Egypt – the prominent, the affluent – who were themselves slave owners. Who did they own? They owned Jewish slaves. How did they acquire these Jewish slaves? There was a slave trade. He allows for the possibility that wealthy Jewish noblemen bought Jewish slaves from the

Egyptians. He goes a step further: Who were these noblemen – the Jews who owned the Jewish slaves? He suggests that perhaps they were members of the three tribes: Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi!

From where does Rav Meir Simcha get this wild interpretation? He cites a Medrash in Parsahs Nasso, which mentions this very idea! The Medrash suggests that a few tribes did in fact conduct themselves in an aristocratic fashion (hinheegu serara) in Egypt, and it was in fact these three tribes! They were the noblemen and the elite within Jewish society.

Rav Meir Simcha says this knowledge sheds a whole new light on the pasuk: “Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt...” Rav Meir Simcha in fact quotes an interpretation from the Talmud Yerushalmi (The Jerusalem Talmud) on this very pasuk: Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt – about sending free their slaves!” The command was nothing other than the first Emancipation Proclamation to free all the slaves!

We understand why Pharaoh has to hear the Emancipation Proclamation, but what do the Children of Israel have to do with it? The answer, says Rav Meir Simcha, is that some of them owned slaves as well! Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi were slave owners! They were the elite of Jewish society. They were the noblemen. That is why they are mentioned here – because this command affects them, and all the families enumerated in these pesukim spelling out their family trees. This amazing interpretation would mean that these three tribes were not part of the Egyptian enslavement. If you are a slave-owner, you clearly are not a slave. Why was this the case? We know from other sources that Levi was exempt. This was the family of the priesthood, and there was a long-standing law in Egyptian society that gave special status to priestly families (clergy exemptions). But why were Reuvain and Shimon exempt?

The Meshech Chochma suggests a reason why specifically these three tribes demonstrated aristocratic practices in Egypt. The Medrash states that the Jewish people did not assimilate or intermingle in Egypt and, in fact, even Tribes did not intermarry with one another. The reason for this was that they had a tradition from the Patriarch Yaakov that they would return to the Land of Canaan, and that each tribe would receive their own geographic portion in Eretz Yisrael. The Tribes felt, “We may not have a present, but we have a future!” My present may be horrible, but if I have a future I am not going to give up and throw in the towel. However, Rav Mayer Simcha says that the Patriarch Yaakov did not bless Reuvain, Shimon and Levi. Their father cursed them. Reuvain, in fact, did not receive a portion in Eretz Yisrael. He wound up taking his portion in Ever Hayarden (Trans-Jordan). Regarding Shimon and Levi, Yaakov said, “Accursed is their rage for it is mighty, and their wrath for it is harsh; I will divide them in Jacob, and I will disperse them in Israel” [Bereshis 49:7]. Neither tribe received a contiguous portion in the Land of Israel.

If I have no present and I have no future, I might as well throw in the towel. What am I waiting for? Rav Mayer Simcha says that the Almighty did them a great favor. He said, “You are not going to be slaves. You are going to be free men. You are even going to own your own slaves.” That gave them something on which to hang. They may have thought they would not have a future, but by owning slaves, they could think, “At least I am somebody!”

The rest of Klal Yisrael had the pot at the end of the rainbow waiting for them. They had what to hold on to that made it worth remaining Jewish and not giving up their identities as Children of Israel. However, if the three eldest tribes had a bleak future (in addition to a bleak present) they would be very vulnerable, psychologically, to totally giving up their Jewish identities.

Rav Meir Simcha says that if they had been enslaved like all their brethren, they would have intermingled with the Egyptians, feeling that their destiny was not amongst the Children of Israel. Therefore, Divine Providence saw to it that they themselves not become enslaved with

backbreaking labor with bricks and mortar – which might very well have been the psychological straw to break the camel’s back!

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

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