

THE INSCRUTABLE FUTURE

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog BO

As the narrative of the Torah regarding the exodus of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery reaches its climax in this week's reading, I feel that it is important for us to concentrate on the verb that the Lord uses so to speak in telling Moshe to once again appear before the Egyptian Pharaoh.

The word "bo" in Hebrew means not only to come but it's more nuanced understanding is to enter, to penetrate deeply into a place or person. It is the verb that is used for physical intimacy throughout biblical and rabbinic writings. The Lord here tells Moshe to enter into the state of mind and the state of heart of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Not merely to appear before him in a superficial manner but rather to attempt to understand why he is so stubborn and what the true issue involved here is in the freeing of the Jewish slaves from Egypt.

The Lord is in effect informing Moshe that it is not only the stubborn will of Pharaoh that is involved in refusing to free the Jews, it is also the fact that the Lord has hardened his heart and given him the courage of his convictions. So, no matter how painful the blows being rained on Egypt, he will not give in.

It is a further example to Moshe that the exodus from Egypt is an eternal lesson for the Jewish people and the world as well, and that only by the miracles that the Lord will perform will Pharaoh agree to free the Jewish slaves. It is the irrationality of Pharaoh in continuing to resist that indicates to Moshe and through him to the Jewish people, that this is a supernatural and illogical event and that it is the prime example of God's right of the Jewish people throughout all of human history.

There is much to be said for understanding the point of the view of one's enemy. Only then can one take the correct defensive measures to protect oneself from irrational onslaught and cruelty. By entering into the mindset of those who oppose and hate us, we gain an understanding as to how to counteract these diseased and cursed thoughts.

As long as we ascribe to our enemies rational and logical reasons, as long as we keep on looking within ourselves for faults that may have been the reason for their enmity, then eventually we are defenseless against their aggression. If we realize that the Lord has hardened their hearts and removes rationality from their thinking, we would be much better prepared to counter their pressures and assaults.

We have to enter into their mindset and not merely appear before them to debate issues in a diplomatic and logical manner. The greatness of God is illustrated through the hard heart and stubborn will of the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Moshe should not be disappointed that he was unable to convince the Pharaoh to release the Jewish people to freedom through persuasion and logic. By entering into the Pharaoh's mind he will recognize the irrationality of hate and the greatness of the God of Israel.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

This article is for the occasion of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's
yahrzeit, on the 27th of Teiveis.

Chumash and the Fall of the Ghetto, part II
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Last week, I presented the first part of this article, which was an introduction to the commentaries on Chumash of the Malbim, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Hakesav Vehakabalah, by Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg. We continue our review of Rav Hirsch's commentary from where I left off.

Rav Hirsch's commentary has a component that the other two do not. The focus of his commentary was not only to prove the accuracy or authenticity of Chazal's understanding of Torah, but, also, to demonstrate how Torah provides for man's growth in spirituality, the development of his personality, and his worldview. Thus, he rarely comments simply for the sake of explaining a difficult verse.

Ta'amei hamikra

Rav Hirsch emphasized that his commentary is based on a careful reading of the words of Chumash. Included in this was his study of the ta'amei hamikra, which are meant to teach how to break a pasuk into smaller units for proper understanding. As an example, his interpretation of the pasuk in shiras Ha'azinu, shicheis lo lo, banav mumam, reflects the accentuation implied by the ta'amei hamikra, whereby this is one sentence with only a small break (a tipcha) after the second word lo (with an alef). Thus, disagreeing with all the previous commentaries that I have seen, he translates the sentence as: Their moral frailty has corrupted it to become non-children.

Grammar -- Dikduk and shoresh

Rav Hirsch developed an understanding of Torah ideas upon the principle of shorashim where there are phonetic cognates. This idea, which has sources in Chazal and the rishonim,[i] is that different consonants that are articulated by using the same part of the mouth are related to each other.[ii] Thus, there is a relationship among the guttural consonants (א ה ח ע) that can be used to explain the meaning of related roots in which they appear. The same is true for the palatals (ג י כ ק), the dentals (ד ט ל נ ת),[iii] the sibilants (ש ז ס צ ר ש), and the labials (ב ו מ פ).[iv] Based on similar roots, Rav Hirsch develops a philosophic underpinning of the comparative roots, and then creates an associative meaning for each root. For example, the roots ברא (to create, which means to bring into reality that which previously existed only in one's mind), ברה, to escape, פרא, to be undisciplined, פרה, to flower and פרה, to reproduce, seem to be unrelated verbs. However, the first letter of the root in each instance is a labial, the second is ר, and the third is a guttural. There is an underlying idea in all of these roots – getting out of a state of being constrained.

Often included within this system is a relationship pattern between similar consonants. For example, the tzadi often reflects a more intensive version of the other similar sounds, such as the sin. Thus, there is a conceptual relationship between יצר, which means to limit something for a specific purpose, and יטר, which educates, shapes and disciplines the spirit. In literally hundreds of applications of these ideas, Rav Hirsch demonstrates an entire world of educational themes.

In Rav Hirsch's view, the shorash of a word can often provide educational and religious lessons. For example, in describing Avraham Avinu's travels in Eretz Canaan, the Torah uses the unusual word ויעתק, which Rav Hirsch translates as He gave orders to move on.[v] Rav Hirsch notes that the common thread of the usage of this root in Tanach is that someone or something is moved unexpectedly or forcibly to another setting. Rav Hirsch thereby explains that Avraham realized that in order to succeed in educating his followers, they needed to be isolated from the society around them, but he needed to overcome their resistance in doing so. Thus, the root of the word used teaches us about Avraham's pedagogic approach.

Controversial Aspects

Probably the most controversial aspect of Rav Hirsch's commentary on Chumash is his view that even our greatest leaders are not beyond reproach, and that a late Torah commentary can include lessons for us to learn from their shortcomings and errors. Indeed, the Ramban,

#210], and apologized, satyng that if he had known that there are those who follow it, he would have included it in the Mishnah Berurah! Only those who are the most particular, however, follow this ruling).

Parshat Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel — “And it came to pass at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all of God’s multitudes went forth from the Land of Egypt” [Ex. 12:41].

In a great tragedy of history, the success of far too many revolutions against tyranny have turned into disasters, with the revolutionaries acting as cruelly and high-handedly in power as the despots whom they overthrew. Consider the French “reign of terror” that followed the 1789 revolution, and the policy of systematic oppression by Stalin in the decades following 1917’s Bolshevik revolution, to cite but two examples that have unfortunate parallels in more recent times.

With that context, we would have expected to read of vengeful behavior by the freed Israelites toward an Egyptian oppressor that had de-humanized and enslaved them for generations. They certainly had plenty of scores to settle. Yet the rebellion by the Israelite slaves does not take this parochial – if understandable – detour.

Rather, the Divinely-orchestrated Israelite revolution actually has an unambiguous, universal message that repudiates the Egyptian worldview: Every human being is a child of God, born with the inalienable right of freedom.

This forward-looking guiding principle for humanity reverberates to the present day. Sadly, since oppression and rebellion persist in this world, we see that the lesson has not yet taken root everywhere, so it is imperative that we learn from the Exodus, the quintessential moral revolution against human oppression of fellow humans.

The series of events that enabled the Israelites to finally flee from Egypt were, of course, the Ten Plagues. The order and content of the plagues are not coincidental; embedded in its structure is the key lesson about the Exodus for all future generations. Appropriately enough, it is the Passover Haggadah that unlocks this message, where Rabbi Judah breaks down these plagues into three categories, consisting of three, three and four plagues, respectively.

Based on this teaching, Rabbi Judah Loew (16th Century Prague, better known as “Maharal”) and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th Century Germany) offer a deep insight into the plagues, citing the prophecy from the “Covenant Between the Pieces”, in which God informs Abraham that “your descendants will be strangers in a land not theirs; they shall be enslaved; and they shall be afflicted” [Gen. 15:13], after which they will inherit the Promised Land of Israel.

This prophecy delineates the three characteristics perpetrated by every persecutor toward its victim: alienation, enslavement, and affliction. The Israelites in Egypt were first de-legitimized as aliens or strangers in a foreign country to which they did not belong [Ex. 1:9-10]; were enslaved and forced to build the storehouses of Pitom and Ramses [ibid., v. 11-14]; and were mercilessly afflicted through the mass murder of their male babies and back-breaking labor under inhumane working conditions [ibid., v. 15-22].

Maharal and Rabbi Hirsch ingeniously suggest that God punished the Egyptians measure for measure by means of the plagues.

The first plague in each of the three categories – blood (#1 of 10), wild animals (#4) and hail (#7) – would make the Egyptians feel like aliens in an Egypt taken over by some strange force totally foreign to their experience until this point: the familiar life-giving Nile turned to blood, wild animals running rampant and seemingly controlling

human movement, and hail uncharacteristically raining – and reigning – down on a defenseless Egyptian populace.

The second plague in each of the categories – frogs (#2), animal illnesses (#5) and locusts (#8) – would make the Egyptians feel enslaved, devoid of ownership of any property, which is the chief characteristic of a slave. Frogs took over their homes, animal illnesses destroyed their livestock, and locusts completely consumed their agricultural crop.

And the third plague of each of the categories – vermin (#3), boils (#6) and darkness (#9) – afflicted every Egyptian with severe personal discomfort, making it impossible to continue living, working and socializing in any humanly endurable fashion. The Egyptians became subjected to the very alienation, enslavement and affliction to which they had subjected the Israelites!

The most important point of all this, however, is that it is not the Israelites who return the favor to the Egyptians; rather, it is the Almighty Who teaches the world the lesson of the necessity of universal freedom under the God of all humanity.

Thus, the Israelites have no right to feel like invincible conquerors after their successful Exodus; if anything, they can only feel beholden to the God of their redemption, before Whom every human is creature and not creator, servant and not master. The creator-hood and parenthood of God ultimately make possible the creature-hood and sibling-hood of humanity, and in such a world, no human has the right to enslave another human.

God freed us from Pharaoh’s enslavement in order that we be able to serve God, the only and ultimate Redeemer. Therefore, God teaches us and the world that we must “love the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt” [Deut. 10:19], and gave us the Sabbath (“a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt”) a day on which our gentile servants, too, “may rest like you” – for everyone must be free under God. This is the ultimate message and legacy of the great Israelite revolution in Egypt.

Shabbat Shalom

Bo: Training for Greatness
Rav Kook Torah

Before the Jewish people left Egypt, God had a request: “Please speak to the people, and let each man request from his neighbor gold and silver articles. Let every woman make the same request of her neighbors.” (Exod. 11:2)

The language in the verse is surprisingly gentle. God usually commands the Israelites. Why the solicitous request, “Please speak”?

The Sages noted the unusual wording. According to Rabbi Yanai, God was asking the Jewish people for a favor: Please request gold and silver from your Egyptian neighbors, so that Abraham will not be able to claim that I failed to keep My promise to him that his children will leave Egypt with great wealth (Berachot 9a-b). But if God wanted the Israelites to leave Egypt with riches, surely He could have arranged it without any effort on their part. Why did God want them to borrow from the Egyptians in order to fulfill His promise to Abraham?

In addition, requesting handouts from their Egyptians neighbors was uncomfortable and even embarrassing. Why put the Jewish people through this ordeal?

Bontsha the Silent

I. L. Peretz tells the story of Bontsha the Silent, a simple Jew who accepted all of life’s humiliations - and he suffered far more than his fair share - with quiet resignation. His life and death went unnoticed in this world. But in Paradise, the arrival of Bontsha the Silent was a major event. Trumpets blew, important angels rushed to greet him, and he was crowned with a golden crown.

Bontsha reacted to all this commotion exactly as he would in this world: with silence. His silence was due to his great trepidation. He

was certain that a terrible mistake had been made. However, when Bontsha's trial began, and the defending angel related the long tale of misfortune and mistreatment that had been Bontsha's daily lot, he slowly began to take heart. It is me they are taking about!

"Despite everything," the defending angel concluded, "Bontsha never complained. He never protested, not against his fellow man, and not against God."

In an unusual move, the prosecuting angel conceded the case. "Just as Bontsha has always been silent, so, too, I will be silent."

The heavenly Judge turned to Bontsha. "Your reward is not just one little portion of Paradise, but everything! Whatever you want!"

All turned to Bontsha, eager to hear what great reward he would request.

Hesitantly, Bontsha finally spoke. "What I would like, Your Honor," he stammered, "is to be served every morning a warm roll with fresh butter."

A shocked silence descended on the courtroom. The angels bent their heads in shame, and the prosecutor laughed a bitter laugh.

Emancipation of the Spirit

Slavery is not just a legal status; it is also a state of mind. It is not enough to emancipate the slaves. They must be trained for independence, for courage and greatness. A lifetime of oppression can create a poverty of spirit, where the greatest good imaginable is a warm roll with fresh butter. The Torah relates that the enslaved Israelites were incapable of accepting Moses' message of hope due to "smallness of spirit" (Exod. 6:9). Even in the desert, the former slaves would remember Egypt nostalgically, fondly recalling "sitting by the pot of meat" as they ate fish, onions, and melons (Exod. 16:3; Num. 11:5).

Asking the Hebrew slaves to borrow gold, silver, and fine clothes from their neighbors was an educational exercise. God wanted to raise their ambitions above fish and onions, to help them acquire a love for beauty and aesthetic living. Of course, gold is not the true goal. Therefore, the Israelites were only entreated, not commanded to borrow these items. Only for spiritual goals and mitzvot does God command us.

It was not easy for the Hebrew slaves to borrow from their former masters. The Midrash tells us they would have happily foregone the Egyptian gold and leave Egypt right away. But they would require courage and greatness of spirit for the difficult journey ahead. Maimonides noted in the Guide for the Perplexed that those forty years of hardship in the wilderness instilled in the former slaves the traits of independence and courage that a free people must possess.

God desires humility - but the true humility of Abraham and Moses, great men willing to argue against Him - not the passive meekness of a Bontsha.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 44)

See also: Memories of the Soul

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Bo

Break No Bones About It

One of the initial mitzvot of the Torah, the Korban Pesach, was given to the Jewish nation as a preface to redemption. It is filled with myriad details, surely a distinct departure from other introductory exercises that leave the participants with simple initiatory protocol.

What is truly amazing is the place where the Torah put the specific mitzvah that prohibits the breaking of the meat bones of the sacrifice, to get to the food.

At first, in the early part of the parsha, the Torah details the way the lamb is roasted and how it is eaten. "But if the household is too small for a lamb or kid, then he and his neighbor who is near his house shall take according to the number of people; everyone according to what he eats shall be counted for the lamb or kid.: They shall eat the flesh on that night — roasted over the fire — and matzos; with bitter herbs shall they eat it.: "You shall not eat it partially roasted or cooked in water; only roasted over fire — its head, its legs, with its innards: You shall not leave any of it until morning; any of it that is left until morning you shall burn in the fire: "So shall you eat it — your loins

girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; you shall eat it in haste — it is a Pesach-offering to Hashem" (Exodus 12:4-7).

It makes no mention of the command to eat it without breaking a bone. Only, some thirty verses later, later when the Torah discusses the fundamentals of the offering, does it add that law, as a seemingly misplaced detail among serious edicts: such as who is permitted to eat it; and that the korban is a mitzvah which is incumbent on every Jew.

"Hashem said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the chok (decree) of the Pesach-offering — no alienated person may eat from it. Every slave of a man, who was bought for money, you shall circumcise him; then he may eat of it. A sojourner and a hired laborer may not eat it.

Then it adds, "In one house shall it be eaten; you shall not remove any of the meat from the house to the outside, and you shall not break a bone in it. The entire assembly of Israel shall perform it: "When a proselyte sojourns among you he shall make the Pesach-offering for Hashem; each of his males shall be circumcised, and then he may draw near to perform it and he shall be like the native of the land; no uncircumcised male may eat of it. One law shall there be for the native and the proselyte who lives among you.": (ibid 43-49).

The question is: why insert the issue of broken bones, a seemingly minor detail, together with the fundamentals of this most important ritual?

When the Satmar Rav came to this country after World War II he had a handful of Hungarian immigrants, most of them Holocaust survivors, as his Chasidim. As the custom is with Chasidic rebbes, they would come for a blessing and leave a few dollars for the rebbe to give to charity on their behalf. The poor immigrants, would come in for blessings, some leaving a dollar, others some coins and on occasion a wealthier chasid would leave a five, a ten, or even a twenty-dollar bill. The rebbe would not look at the offerings; rather he would open the old drawers of his desk and stuff them in, ready, and available for them to be put to charitable use.

Of course, givers were not the only one who visited the rebbe. Those who were in need came as well. Each of them bearing their tale of sorrow, asking for a donation.

Once a man came desperately in need of a few hundred dollars, which the rebbe gladly agreed to give.

The rebbe opened his drawer, and began pulling out bills. Out came singles and fives, a few tens and even a twenty. Then the rebbe called in his Gabbai (sexton), "Here," he said, please help me with this."

The Rebbe began straightening out the bills one by one. Together, they took each bill, flattened it and pressed it until it looked as good as new. The rebbe took 100 one dollar bills and piled it into a neat stack. Then he took out a handful of five-dollar bills and put them into another pile. Then he took about five wrinkled ten dollar bills, pressed them flat, and piled them as well. Finally, he slowly banded each pile with a rubber band, and then bound them all together. He handed it to the gabbai and asked him to present it to the supplicant. "Rebbe," asked the sexton, "why all the fuss? A wrinkled dollar works just as well as a crisp one!"

The rebbe explained. "One thing you must understand. When you do a mitzvah. It must be done with grace, and class. The way you give tzedoka, is almost as important as the tzedoka itself. Mitzvos must be done regally. We will not hand out crumpled bills to those who are in need."

The prohibition against breaking bones is not just a culinary exercise. The Sefer HaChinuch explains it is a fundamental ordinance that defines the very attitude toward that Jews should have toward mitzvot. Though we eat in haste, we must eat with class. We don't break bones, and we don't chomp at the meat; especially mitzvah meat. That fact is as fundamental as the others it is placed with. A person's actions while performing a Mitzvah is inherently reflective of his attitude toward the Mitzvah itself. The Torah, in placing this seemingly insignificant, command about the way things are eaten together with the laws of who is to eat it tells us that both the mitzvah and the attitude are equally important with no bones about it.

Dedicated in memory of R' Yisrael Zisha ben Reb Hirsch Mordechai — Reb Yisroel Zisha Tanzer by Mr. and Mrs. Gedaliah Cohen and Family

The Story We Tell
Bo 5778
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

It remains one of the most counterintuitive passages in all of religious literature. Moses is addressing the Israelites just days before their release. They have been exiles for 210 years. After an initial period of affluence and ease, they have been oppressed, enslaved, and their male children killed in an act of slow genocide. Now, after signs and wonders and a series of plagues that have brought the greatest empire of the ancient world to its knees, they are about to go free.

Yet Moses does not talk about freedom, or the land flowing with milk and honey, or the journey they will have to undertake through the desert. Instead, three times, he turns to the distant future, when the journey is complete and the people – free at last – are in their own land. And what he talks about is not the land itself, or the society they will have to build or even the demands and responsibilities of freedom.[1]

Instead, he talks about education, specifically about the duty of parents to their children. He speaks about the questions children may ask when the epic events that are about to happen are, at best, a distant memory. He tells the Israelites to do what Jews have done from then to now. Tell your children the story. Do it in the maximally effective way. Re-enact the drama of exile and exodus, slavery and freedom. Get your children to ask questions. Make sure that you tell the story as your own, not as some dry account of history. Say that the way you live and the ceremonies you observe are “because of what God did for me” – not my ancestors but me. Make it vivid, make it personal, and make it live.

He says this not once but three times:

“It shall be that when you come to the land which God will give you as He said, and you observe this ceremony, and your children say to you, ‘What does this service mean to you?’ you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and spared our homes.’” (Ex. 12:25-27).

“On that day you shall tell your child, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Ex. 13:8).

“In the future, when your child asks you, ‘What is this?’ you shall tell him, ‘With a mighty hand, the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the land of slavery.’” (Ex. 13:14).

Why was this the most important thing he could do in this intense moment of redemption? Because freedom is the work of a nation, nations need identity, identity needs memory, and memory is encoded in the stories we tell. Without narrative, there is no memory, and without memory, we have no identity. The most powerful link between the generations is the tale of those who came before us – a tale that becomes ours, and that we hand on as a sacred heritage to those who will come after us. We are the story we tell ourselves about ourselves, and identity begins in the story parents tell their children.

That narrative provides the answer to the three fundamental questions every reflective individual must ask at some stage in their lives: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live? There are many answers to these questions, but the Jewish ones are: I am a member of the people whom God rescued from slavery to freedom. I am here to build a society that honours the freedom of others, not just my own. And I must live in conscious knowledge that freedom is the gift of God, honoured by keeping His covenant of law and love.

Twice in the history of the West this fact was forgotten, or ignored, or rebelled against. In the 17th and 18th century, there was a determined effort to create a world without identities. This was the project called the Enlightenment. It was a noble dream. To it we owe many developments whose value is beyond question and that we must strive

to preserve. However, one aspect of it failed and was bound to fail: the attempt to live without identity.

The argument went like this. Identity throughout the Middle Ages was based on religion. But religion had for centuries led to war between Christians and Muslims. Then, following the Reformation, it led to war between Christian and Christian, Protestant and Catholic. Therefore, to abolish war one had to move beyond identity. Identities are particular. Therefore, let us worship only the things that are universal: reason and observation, philosophy and science. Let us have systems, not stories. Then we will become one humanity, like the world before Babel. As Schiller put it and Beethoven set to music in the last movement of the Ninth Symphony: *Alle Menschen werden Brüder*, “All men will be brothers.”

It cannot be done, at least as humanity is presently constituted. The reaction, when it came, was fierce and disastrous. The nineteenth century saw the return of the repressed. Identity came back with a vengeance, this time based not on religion but on one of three substitutes for it: the nation state, the (Aryan) race, and the (working) class. In the 20th century, the nation state led to two world wars. Race led to the Holocaust. The class struggle led to Stalin, the Gulag and the KGB. A hundred million people were killed in the name of three false gods.

For the past fifty years the West has been embarked on a second attempt to abolish identity, this time in the opposite direction. What the secular West now worships is not the universal but the individual: the self, the “Me,” the “I.” Morality – the thick code of shared values binding society together for the sake of the common good – has been dissolved into the right of each individual to do or be anything he or she chooses, so long as they do not directly harm others.

Identities have become mere masks we wear temporarily and without commitment. For large sections of society, marriage is an anachronism, parenthood delayed or declined, and community a faceless crowd. We still have stories, from Harry Potter to Lord of the Rings to Star Wars, but they are films, fictions, fantasies – a mode not of engagement but of escapism. Such a world is supremely tolerant, until it meets views not to its liking, when it quickly becomes brutishly intolerant, and eventually degenerates into the politics of the mob. This is populism, the prelude to tyranny.

Today’s hyper-individualism will not last. We are social animals. We cannot live without identities, families, communities and collective responsibility. Which means we cannot live without the stories that connect us to a past, a future and a larger group whose history and destiny we share. The biblical insight still stands. To create and sustain a free society, you have to teach your children the story of how we achieved freedom and what its absence tastes like: the unleavened bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of slavery. Lose the story and eventually you lose your freedom. That is what happens when you forget who you are and why.

The greatest gift we can give our children is not money or possessions but a story – a real story, not a fantasy, one that connects them to us and to a rich heritage of high ideals. We are not particles of dust blown this way or that by the passing winds of fad and fashion. We are heirs to a story that inspired a hundred generations of our ancestors and eventually transformed the Western world. What you forget, you lose. The West is forgetting its story. We must never forget ours.

With the hindsight of thirty-three centuries we can see how right Moses was. A story told across the generations is the gift of an identity, and when you know who you are and why, you can navigate the wilderness of time with courage and confidence. That is a life-changing idea.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Parshas Bo contains the last three of the Ten Plagues. Finally, Pharaoh says “enough!” and he lets the Jews go. The commentaries ask a very simple question. (Perhaps this question has come up at your Seder table on the first night of Pesach): Why did it take Ten Plagues for Pharaoh to say “enough!”? Hashem certainly had the power to give one strong plague at the outset that would have immediately brought Pharaoh to his knees and forced him to order the Jewish people immediately out of the country. And yet, there were the Ten Plagues. Why were they all necessary?

More to the point, we learn about the Exodus from Egypt in these parshiyos at the beginning of Sefer Shemos, but there was also another exodus in the history of the Jewish people called the Babylonian exodus. Klal Yisrael were exiled from their Land and dwelled in Bavel for seventy years. After seventy years, that exile also ended. How did that happen?

The Navi says that this happened because King Koresh [Cyrus] of Persia was inspired by the Almighty to suddenly grant the Jewish people permission to go back to Eretz Yisrael and rebuild the Beis HaMikdash. It says in Divrei HaYamim, “Hashem aroused the spirit of King Koresh of Persia, and he issued a proclamation throughout his kingdom – and in writing as well – saying: ‘Thus said Koresh king of Persia: Hashem, G-d of Heaven, has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has commanded me to build Him a Temple in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whomever there is among you of His entire people – may Hashem his G-d be with him, and let him go up!’” [Divrei HaYamim II 36:22-23]. Koresh felt that the Almighty had given him a mission to release the Jews, and have them rebuild the Beis HaMikdash (for which he in fact paid a large percentage of the expenses).

This could have happened in Egypt as well. Without any plagues, Pharaoh could have woken up one morning and said, “You know what? This is not right. I want to emancipate the slaves.” He could have emancipated the Jewish slaves, and instead of having a Lincoln Memorial, as there exists in Washington, D.C., we could have had a Pharaoh Memorial in Jerusalem. Why didn’t the Ribono shel Olam do it that way?

Rav Shlomo Kluger, in his sefer on Chumash, explains that the Almighty wanted it to occur the way it did. He wanted that Pharaoh should be obstinate rather than to be inspired to emancipate the Jews. Hashem wanted Pharaoh to be defeated in a prolonged battle of wills. He wanted Pharaoh to be “broken.” The Almighty did not entertain the possibility of releasing the Jews from bondage with anything less than ten plagues.

The Ribono shel Olam wanted Klal Yisrael to realize that “I am Hashem your G-d who took you out from the Land of Egypt to be for you a G-d. I am Hashem your G-d.” [Bamidbar 15:41]. Hashem wanted it to be clear that it was not anybody else’s doing. Such an “Exodus” cemented the relationship between Hashem and His People. Had Pharaoh given up after one plague, or had he been inspired, like Koresh, to let the people go, then we would not have this same relationship with the Ribono shel Olam, because we could say, “Listen, Pharaoh turned a new leaf.”

We say at our Seder, “And if the Holy One Blessed be He would not have taken us out of Egypt, we and our children and our children’s children would be enslaved (me’shubadim) to Pharaoh in Egypt.” Everyone asks the obvious question: “What does it mean we would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt? The Pharaohs are all dead. They no longer rule in Egypt! Empires come and go. It would be a historic anomaly of great proportions to think that after three thousand years, we would still be slaves to Pharaoh. The answer is that the word “me’shubadim” does not mean we would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. It means we would be indebted to Pharaoh.

Come and see all the celebrations that were held at the Lincoln Memorial during the inauguration of America’s first Black president. The Black people in this country still feel a strong kinship and hakaras haTov to Abraham Lincoln. Why is that? He freed the slaves. He wrote the Emancipation Proclamation. He is recorded by history as the person who freed the slaves in this country. If our exodus from Egypt would have come about from the good will of Pharaoh, we would be me’shubad – indebted to the historical image of that Pharaoh!

Hashem did not want that to be the case. As we read in last week’s parsha, “...and you shall know that I am Hashem your G-d, who took

you out from under the burdens of Egypt.” [Shemos 7:7]. You are me’shubad [indebted] to me, and to nobody else. This event formed the relationship between Klal Yisrael and the Ribono shel Olam.

The end of Galus Bavel was a pale comparison to the end of Galus Mitzrayim. Yes, they went out of Bavel. But how many Jews left Bavel and came back to Eretz Yisrael? Only 43,000. Even when they arrived back in Eretz Yisrael, they were still not a sovereign state. They were still under the dominion of others. The Beis HaMikdash that was rebuilt was a pale comparison to the First Beis HaMikdash. In fact, the book of Ezra says that the older people who remembered the first Beis HaMikdash cried at the inauguration of the Second Beis HaMikdash, because it was such a pale comparison [Ezra 3:12].

Hashem allowed such a “Geulah” [redemption] to be inspired by Koresh because it was not such a “big deal.” However, Mitzrayim’s Exodus was the paradigm of our relationship with Him. This was the marriage of the Jewish People with the Ribono shel Olam. This had to be a “big deal” such that it was implemented with the philosophy of “I and not a Malach; I and not a Saraf” – nobody else.

The commentaries say that Geulas Mitzrayim is the paradigm for the future Geulah. If we want to know what it is going to look like, what it is going to feel like, what is going to happen “in the End of Days,” – the exodus from Egypt is our paradigm.

Rav Pam writes, “Why is it that the Nations of the World hate us so much? Why is Sinas Yisrael so apparent?”

Rav Pam explains that we are now replicating the paradigm of Yetzias Mitzrayim. When the future redemption will arrive, it will not be because the nations of the world will be good to us. Just as back then, the nations of the world hated us and wanted to see us destroyed, we see the same exact thing today among almost all of the present nations of the world.

Hashem wants us to clearly understand that our redemption will not come from the righteous amongst the nations. We should not deceive ourselves into believing that this is “from whence our help will come” [Tehillim 121:1]. The subliminal message we should be hearing from the Almighty is that “I am going to take you out of this Galus, and nobody else is going to help.”

Rav Pam asked, “What is the purpose of the United Nations?” Other than being a forum to bash Israel, what has it accomplished?” He cites the Talmud in Avodah Zarah [2b]: In the future time when the Moshiach is going to come, the nations will come and say, “We were so good to the Jews. Many bridges did we build; many roads did we pave; we built many cities. We did all this for Israel. We did this for the Jews so that they could occupy themselves with Torah. Now we are here to claim our reward.”

The Almighty will “give it to them.” He will call them out on all their lies and falsehoods.

Rav Pam says that this is the purpose of the United Nations. Every debate is recorded. Every vote against Israel is recorded. Every vote against the Jews is recorded. In the future world, when the representatives of the nations will come and claim, “All we have done is for the welfare of Israel,” the Almighty will take out the United Nations roll call votes, and prove to them that they are liars and fakers when they make such claims. “Liars! You did not act on behalf of My People. You hated My People!” Now is payback time. This is what will happen in the future world – just like it happened in Egypt. Not through a Malach and not through a Saraf – but only through the Holy One Blessed be He, in all His Glory.

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org
Rav Frand © 2017 by Torah.org.*

The Times of Israel

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Bo: Self-inflicted Escalating Punishments

Every guilty person is his own hangman. — Seneca the Elder

God pours his wrath over the people of Egypt. Plagues of blood, frogs, lice, wild animals, boils, hail, locust and more devastate the mightiest

empire on the planet for refusing to let the People of Israel go. Pharaoh stands firm against this onslaught, consistently denying the Hebrew nation its freedom. He insists on keeping them enslaved, not allowing them their requested three-day journey to worship God.

In the end, it is Pharaoh's stubbornness (which at some point may have been augmented by God) that dooms Egypt. Had he let the Jews go at the first request, he and his country would have been spared from all the pain, death and destruction.

Rabbeinu Bechaye on Exodus 12:33 (Bo) explains that Pharaoh's thick-headedness, his denial of God and his refusal to send the Jews as requested were reciprocated in the harshest terms in a way that he would irrefutably acknowledge God, by being on the receiving end of the plagues, and he would ultimately be forced to send the Jews out of Egypt.

Rabbeinu Bechaye gives an example of a minister who asked his servant to buy him some fish; the servant went and bought him a putrid piece of fish. The minister, as punishment, gives the servant three options: "eat the fish yourself, get one hundred lashes, or pay one hundred pieces." The servant says: "I'll eat the fish," but halfway through it he says, "I can't eat anymore, I'd rather get the lashes." They lash him, but halfway through he says, "I can't handle it, I'd rather pay the one hundred pieces." The servant ended up inflicting on himself all three punishments.

So too it was with Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They were lashed with all the plagues, they sent the Jews out, and they also sent them with gold and riches.

May today's stubborn enemies of Israel receive their comeuppance speedily and in our days.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To Judge Mchaim Lieberman on his 50th birthday. May he continue to mete out justice when he can.

© 2017 The Times of Israel

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - פרשת בא

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

ויהי חשך אפלה בכל ארץ מצרים שלשת ימים

And there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt for a three-day period. (10:22)

Egypt was plunged into three days of overwhelming darkness, a blackness so heavy that the Egyptians were unable to move. If the purpose of the darkness was to impede the Egyptians' ability to see, Hashem could have struck them with blindness. It happened in Sodom, when the townspeople were about to attack the Angels who had come to save Lot. Hashem could simply have blinded the Egyptians without creating such a heavy darkness. The *Chasam Sofer*, זל, explains that it is well-known that when a person loses the power of one of his senses, the other senses become more acute. This is due to the fact that the neurons that flow to the now impeded sense will flow instead to the other senses. Thus, if one's sight becomes impaired, his other senses will be more perceptive. On the other hand, if someone sits in a darkened room with his eyes open, his eyesight working at full strength, he continues to see, to employ the power of all of his senses – he is just unable to penetrate the darkness that envelops him. In such an instance, explains the *Chasam Sofer*, the individual who is unable to see due to the darkness does not benefit from his other senses to the same extent as one who suffers from blindness. Hashem was not about to benefit the Egyptians – even by default.

We might suggest that Hashem did not want simply to impair their sight; He wanted to impede their movement. A blind man has the ability to move; thus, he can sit with a friend, talk, commiserate, thereby maintaining a sense of kinship. When a person is enveloped by a heavy darkness in which his ability to move is impeded, however, he is all alone. He might be sitting a few feet from someone, but is unable to benefit from the nearness. Hashem wanted each Egyptian to feel the loneliness, the inability to reach out to his fellow for comfort, encouragement and hope. The plague of darkness was about helplessness, so that the Egyptians would have some idea of the suffering and pain that they had impacted upon their Jewish slaves.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, quotes *Horav Shaul Brody*, זל, primary student of the venerable *Maharam Schick*, זל, who related a frightening story about his *Rebbe*. In his later years, the *Maharam Schick's* eyesight waned, and he became blind. The sage

lamented his blindness because he was not able to learn from *sefarim*, Torah volumes. Nonetheless, he did take solace in the fact that, in his youth, he constantly reviewed his studies to the point that they became committed to memory. He extolled the great benefit of constant *chazarah*, review, since, if one would ever reach such a dire predicament in which he could not see or *sefarim* from which to learn were inaccessible, he would still be able to learn Torah.

Rav Zilberstein has an addendum to the story which indicates the incredible diligence and *hasmaddah* that the *Maharam Schick* applied to his learning. Once, during the latter stages of his life, his *shamash*, aide, found his *Rebbe* crying. He asked, "*Rebbe*, what is it? Can I do anything to help?" The *Maharam Schick* replied, "Had I known that I would end up like this (unable to read), I would have learned much more." "But *Rebbe*," the *shamash* asked, "if the *Rebbe* would have known this, would he have studied 25 hours a day?" (In other words, the *Rebbe* was such an extraordinary *masmid* that he never wasted even a moment.)

The *Maharam Schick* was pleased with his *shamash's* response. It was evident that his *shamash's* response had put him at ease. The *Maharam Schick* continued, "From the time that I had some *seichal*, a modicum of intelligence, I never wasted a moment. Nonetheless, if I would have known what would happen with me later in life, I would have minimized the breadth of my learning and spent much more time reviewing what I had previously learned."

ושמרתם את המצות... ושמרתם את היום הזה לדורותיכם חקת עולם
You shall safeguard the matzos... you shall observe this day for your generations as an eternal decree. (12:17)

Procrastination is a major hindrance when it comes to getting something done. Certainly, no one will hire a worker to complete a job knowing that this worker has a reputation as a procrastinator. On the other hand, one would find himself hard-pressed to call a procrastinator evil. Unreliable perhaps, but evil? Certainly not. *Horav Shlomo Wolbe*, זל, teaches us that, with regard to *mitzvah* performance, procrastination, delay of any sort, is characteristic of the pull of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, over us, and, thus, sufficient reason to refer to it as an evil trait.

The Torah admonishes *U'shemartam es ha'matzos*, "You shall safeguard the matzos." One must take great caution to see to it that the dough that he is preparing for *matzah* does not become leaven. Laxity in guarding the dough can cause it to ferment, leaving him with bread – not *matzah*. This is still not evil. Laxity will not get the job done, but it is not evil. *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* who teach, "Do not read the word as *matzos*, but rather as *mitzvos*. (Different word – same spelling and letter structure.) Just as one must be diligent while baking *matzos* lest the dough become *chametz*, leaven, we must also be diligent in *mitzvos*, lest they spoil." We must grab the opportunity to fulfill every *mitzvah* which presents itself.

Zerizus means alacrity, immediacy in performing a *mitzvah*. *Zerizus* is not limited to baking *matzos*; it is a critical component in all *mitzvah* performance. Otherwise, the *mitzvah* is subject to *chimutz*, the leavening effect, spoiling it. Alacrity shows that a person: cares; values the *mitzvah*; respects for Whom it is being performed; demonstrates how much it all means to him. Some individuals are perennially late for everything. Is this a character deficiency or an indication of their true feelings towards the subject to which they were to attend? This might be true, but it is inexcusable with regard to *mitzvos*. Hashem is waiting.

Rav Wolbe suggests a deeper aspect to the *chimutz* failing. He cites the *Mesillas Yesharim* who teaches that one who does not perform a *mitzvah* at its earliest possible opportunity empowers the *yetzer hora* to prevent him from carrying it out properly. When we procrastinate, we are inviting the *yetzer hora's* participation in our *mitzvah* performance. Furthermore, the interim time between the opportunity and actual performance is in and of itself the creation of the *ra*, evil, which exists in the cosmic world. Therefore, the *mitzvah* can actually be the result of a negative force.

To further explain this concept, *Rav Wolbe* quotes *Chazal* who teach that, prior to Adam *HaRishon's* sin of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, no delay existed between conception and birth – the child was born immediately upon conception, with no gestation period necessary. Likewise, *Chazal* teach that in *yemos*, the days, of *Moshiach*, ready-made fabrics and fully-baked cakes will grow on trees. There will be no interim period for food or clothing preparation. This idea is an extension of the above concept, which posits that delay is in and of itself the consequence of sin. Thus, when sin is absent, so is delay. It all happens – immediately!

When an opportunity to perform a *mitzvah* or to carry out an act of *chesed*, kindness, to help another Jew presents itself, we must realize that what is presented and when it is presented is Hashem's doing. Imagine, Hashem asking anyone of us to do something for Him, we would fall over ourselves to execute His wish with utmost haste. Why do we delay in other instances, when we should live our

lives with the knowledge that “situations,” “opportunities,” “needs,” that present themselves to us are Heaven-sent for us to carry out – not to push off on someone else.

We rationalize, look for excuses, so that we can continue maintaining the status quo. Obviously, if Hashem has presented us with an opportunity, He is indicating to us that He wants us to resist the status quo and do something. Practicing *zerizus* is our way of subordinating ourselves to the will of Hashem. The *Talmud Sotah* 40a relates that Rabbi Abahu had an interpreter who explained his lectures in lay language to the general public. The interpreter’s wife once boasted to Rabbi Abahu’s wife, “My husband is every bit as learned and original as your husband, and he humbles himself to function as an interpreter out of his great sense of humility.” Rabbi Abahu’s wife related this woman’s *chutzpah*, audacity, to her husband. Rabbi Abahu countered, “What difference does it make who is more brilliant? The end result is that between the two of us, the Divine teachings are conveyed to the general populace. That is all that matters.”

In the early days before the city of Bnei Brak became the bustling Torah center that it is, the area was mostly fields for grazing, where shepherds would bring their flocks to graze. *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, Ponevezer Rosh Yeshivah*, would often walk through these fields accompanied by students who drank up every word of Torah that emanated from him. Along his “route” sat an elderly shepherd, enjoying the calm, the air, the peacefulness of the moment. The *Rosh Yeshivah* would greet the shepherd warmly each time he passed by him.

One day, he took his walk and was surprised to discover that no shepherd was present. Upon inquiring of the other shepherds, he was informed that the elderly shepherd had passed away during the night. *Rav Shach* was upset and immediately asked about the funeral arrangements. No one was really sure of the arrangements or whether he even had a family. *Rav Shach* felt that this was a *meis mitzvah*, a person who dies and has no one to attend to his burial – and he immediately set himself to making arrangements and informing people to attend the funeral of a *meis mitzvah*. Who would not heed the call of the *Ponevezer Rosh Yeshivah*? Within a few short hours, people from all over joined the *Rosh Yeshivah* in paying the *kavod acharon*, last respects, to this elderly Jew. *Rav Shach* understood that Hashem had presented him with an opportunity. He could easily have dispatched a number of students to address all of the details, but Hashem had “spoken” to him – not to others. This is what is meant by *zerizus*.

שבעת ימים שאר לא ימצא בבתיכם

For seven days, leaven may not be found in your houses. (12:19)

Preparing for *Pesach* is a daunting task – one made increasingly more difficult with the stipulation that not even the smallest crumb of leaven may be in one’s possession. It goes without saying that this measure is prohibited for human consumption. At first glance, this law is strange. Indeed, the laws concerning *chametz* are unique in comparison with other *maachalos asuros*, prohibited foods. The *halachah* of *mashehu*, whereby even the slightest measure of *chametz* is prohibited, and, if it mingles with other food, the entire unit is prohibited, is different from other prohibited foods in which *bitul*, nullification, applies. Even *chazir*, pork, is *bateil b’shishim*, nullified in sixty times its volume, but *chametz* is never nullified. One must eradicate every single trace of *chametz*. Why? Why is such great significance placed on destroying the tiniest bit of *chametz*?

Horav Nissim Yagen, zl, explains that *stam maachalos asuros*, the average forbidden food, is *baateil b’shishim*, since in the proportion of sixty times itself, its taste is no longer detectable. Nonetheless, even if a forbidden food can no longer be detected – it is still there. While this does not bother us concerning pork, or whatever (since it is all about the taste), it does bother us concerning *chametz*. *Chametz* symbolizes the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination. (Yeast makes the dough rise, just as the *yetzer hora* arrogates a person, with arrogance being the root of most sinful behavior). When it comes to the *yetzer hora* there is no room for compromise. Thus, as we cannot make any compromises with the *yetzer hora*, we can neither allow a trace of *chametz* in our possession, nor may we ingest it, regardless of how many times it has been nullified.

One tiny germ left unchecked can destroy an entire city. The *yetzer hora* can – and has – destroyed individuals who have achieved acclaim and distinction. One trace of self-delusion leads to self-seduction, and goes on from there to complete capitulation and downfall. Once the *yetzer hora* grabs a hold of a person he is in a free-fall to infamy, unaware that it is occurring.

The *yetzer hora* does not begin by attempting to convince a person to commit an *aveirah*, sin. It starts with a *mitzvah* – perform the *mitzvah*, but take something out of it for yourself: a little attention, a little *kavod*, honor, a little pleasure; anything that defrays from the actual *mitzvah* its values, its purpose. Once the *yetzer hora* succeeds in diminishing the *mitzvah*, it moves on to *aveiros*. The individual is now

trapped. It is much more difficult to extricate oneself once the *aveiros* have begun.

Veritably, the term *evil* inclination is pejorative. Despite the translation of its name, the *yetzer hora* is not an impulse to do evil, to do harm. The *yetzer* inclination is an inner drive, which, if used properly, is necessary – even vital – for human life. *Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah* 9) teach, “If not for the *yetzer hora*, no one would build a house, marry, beget children, nor engage in commerce.” The struggle begins when we attempt to apply these impulses which, for the most part, arise from our lower base selves to accommodate our higher selves, to address our spiritual mission. The *yetzer hora* will do everything within its power to impugn and subvert our efforts, so that we do not succeed. In other words, the impulse is not evil; rather, it is difficult to control its use for our higher, loftier mission in life.

The *Alter, zl, m’Novoradok* posits that the *yetzer hora* finds or creates an opening, usually based on *frumkeit*, righteousness. He then exploits that and, slowly, before we know it, we have committed a sin. This is what happened with Kayin, who became jealous when his brother, Hevel, offered a sacrifice. When Kayin saw that Hashem accepted Hevel’s sacrifice, he, too, wanted his sacrifice to be accepted. It began with religious envy (I want to be as great a scholar as my neighbor), but, after all is said and done, it was pure jealousy. The *yetzer hora* kicked in, transferring the religious envy into murderous envy and, finally murder.

One should never underestimate this adversary. This is why even a *mashehu*, the smallest amount of *chametz*, is unacceptable on *Pesach*.

We think that the illustrious Torah giants have it easy. After all, they seem to have conquered their impulse. The *talmidim*, students, of the *Gaon, zl, m’Vilna*, once said to him, “*Rebbe*, if only we could have your *yetzer hora*.” The *Gaon* quickly replied, “That is the last thing that you want. The *yetzer hora* grows as the person progresses spiritually. Commensurate with his spiritual ascendancy will be the power of his *yetzer hora*.”

Horav Pinchas Koritzer, zl, entered the *bais hamedrash* and noticed his students conversing with one another. As he came over, they immediately concluded the conversation. He asked them what they had been talking about. They said, “We are afraid that the *yetzer hora* is bearing down on us. We are discussing ways to escape his pursuit.” The *Rebbe* responded, “You have no need to worry. You are not on such an elevated spiritual level that the *yetzer hora* chases after you. You are still pursuing him!”

The *yetzer hora* takes his function very seriously. *Horav Nosson Breslover, zl*, once commented, “The evil inclination cares less about the sin which man commits than about the *atzvus*, depression, that results from it.” The *yetzer hora* can now further ensnare the person and cause him to perform more and greater sins. We, thus, become our own biggest enemy. When one’s heart is in pain, he cannot properly serve Hashem. This is what the *yetzer hora* wants. As long as we are doing a poor job of serving Hashem, encouraging us to sin is not necessary. Only one thing is worse than committing a sin: compounding one’s infraction by not repenting. This is where the depression does the most damage, by convincing the sinner that he cannot correct the spiritual detriment that he created. The sinner figures, since I cannot change what I have done, I might as well continue along the road to infamy. This is the *yetzer hora* speaking to us.

He attempts to seal the deal by convincing us that, once he has sinned, he cannot extricate himself. He is on a trajectory towards ignominy. Why fight it if winning is not a viable option? Under such circumstances, one might as well join the opposition. If one pauses long enough to gather his senses and think what is happening, he realizes his foolishness. All of this is orchestrated by the *yetzer hora*, who does nothing but allow us to make poor choices, and then encourages us to adhere to our decision because, after all, it is all over for us anyway. The *yetzer hora* is not evil. We are evil. We make the wrong choices. The *yetzer hora* simply sees to it that we stick with those decisions.

היה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם מה העבדה הזאת לכם

And it shall be that when your children say to you, “What is this service to you?” (12:26)

The Torah addresses four “sons” – each one different from the other. One is wise; one is (called) wicked; one is simple; the last one is uninitiated, unable to ask. They all have one common denominator: they are sons. One deals differently with a son. One does not attempt to “best” a son; one seeks to teach a son, to enlighten, to help him understand, to inspire him. Thus, regardless of who the son is, how he acts, or how he presents his questions – remember, he is still your son. We do not seek to prevail, to triumph, over a son.

There are four categories/types of “sons.” *Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shliia*, explains that there are four – and no more. Everyone falls into one of these categories. We must listen to the question that is presented to us, because the question defines the questioner. The reply that we give should coincide with the answer given in the *Haggadah*. The right answer will be accepted. The wrong answer will not.

Veritably, not everyone asks a question. The *she'eino yodea lishol* has nothing to ask. The *ben rasha*, wicked son, does not really ask; he makes a statement, because he has all of the answers. Furthermore, are we really attempting to “blunt the teeth” of the *ben rasha*? The added comment, “Had he (*rasha*) been there (in Egypt), he would have not been liberated,” will certainly not facilitate a loving relationship. Is this the way in which we are supposed to speak to our children?

Rav Ezrachi explains that the father (which applies to us all) must walk a fine line. On the one hand, he is responding to his son, a son who, despite his deficient behavior, still maintains a special place in his father’s heart. On the other hand, he cannot ignore his son’s religious infraction, his reneging the Torah values that were taught to him at home, which are such a vital part of his father’s life. To come down too hard will destroy his son and the father’s relationship with him; to ignore his nefarious attitude and behavior undermines the very principles which support everything his father has taught him. Thus, the father painfully expresses his rebuke, “Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.” These words are not expressed with disdain; derision does not creep in as he speaks these words. They are conveyed amidst pain, filled with fear, yet generating hope that perhaps, one day, his son will return. After all, he is his son. This is something of which he never loses sight.

We must remember that every Jew, regardless of how alienated from religion he has become, possesses an intrinsic and inextricable bond with Hashem and with His Torah. *Mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice for Hashem, is an inherent component of the Jewish DNA. Furthermore, every single OTD, off the *derech*, estranged, or disinterested Jewish child, if he were to wake up one day to the realization that he was the only Jew in the world -- the one upon whom *Klal Yisrael* depended – he would most certainly rise to the occasion. This is who we are. Nothing can, or will, change our essential nature.

Having said this, we wonder why this feeling of, “It is all up to me,” prevails only when it is all up to him. Why does the essential Jew manifest his true nature only under circumstances of duress, when faced with extinction? Why is the Jewish spark so dormant? The reason is that he thinks he is unimportant. He is one of many. No one really cares if he remains religious or not. Judaism will survive without him – so why bother?

The success in *chinuch*, educating a child, is often contingent upon our ability to convey to the child the notion that he counts; he matters; he makes a difference. Perhaps this is why the *Baal Haggadah* divides the family of sons into four categories. Each one is different; each one is an only child. Each child requires his father to respond to him on his level of understanding and acceptance.

Some children require an explanation that is accompanied with a smile; others might require it to be repeated. Others might “hear” the answer, but, only after a few years of trial and error in life, do they begin to see the truth and accept it. We all must ask ourselves: “What can I do to inspire my child, to help him understand, to reveal his connection with Hashem? How do I nurture his spiritual growth?” Life is fraught with challenge. Not all can navigate through the ambiguity by themselves. Some need help; others need support. That is what parents are for. The *ben rasha* did not become like that overnight. At one time, he was probably one of the other sons. Something happened along the way. While we cannot always prevent what happens – we must be there to help and guide our child toward the solution. Otherwise, we might only have three sons at the table.

Va’ani Tefillah

תקע בשופר גדול להרותנו – *Teka b'Shofar Gadol l'cheirusainu*. Sound the great Shofar for our freedom.

Teka b'Shofar is the tenth blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrai*. The specific designation of the number ten with regard to the ingathering of the exiles is not lost. *Kibbutz galuyos*, ingathering of the exiles, and returning to the Holy Land have been our national dream since the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple, which was provoked in part by the infighting among the people – *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred. The return must be one embraced and personified by unity. Divisive quarreling among Jews is the sad result of arrogance and envy. One who is humble does not envy, since he does not feel that he is more worthy than his brother. Humility is the cornerstone and anchor of unity. The *yud*, tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is the smallest letter and consists of a single component. Thus, the tiny *yud* symbolizes humility, the essential component of natural unity.

Furthermore, ten symbolizes *kedushah*, holiness – as in return to our Holy Land. Ten is synonymous with *kedushah*, because it is considered a whole unit. It is the “one” which consists of components. Ten males make up a quorum in whose presence *Kedushah* and *Kaddish* may be recited. The dimensions of the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*, Holy of Holies, was 10 cubits by 10 cubits. Therein were housed the *Aron HaKodesh* and the *Luchos*. We recite the tenth blessing which signifies holiness, and supplicate Hashem to return us to the Holy Land.

Sponsored in loving memory of Vivian Stone - זיה לאה בת שמעון עה - נפטרה ז' שבט תשס"ט
- *By her children, Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family*
Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved
prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה