

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Bo 5767

Mazal Tov to Rabbi Raphael and Pessi Butler along with the entire Butler family on the engagement of Menachem to Debbie Ciner

**FINDING A PARKING SPACE :: Rabbi Berel Wein
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One of the major drawbacks to driving one's own car to various destinations here in Jerusalem is that once having arrived there - through the always treacherous traffic, there is absolutely no place to park one's car. Our holy city has a surplus of many wonderful things but parking spaces or parking lots are not on that list. Recently, I walked six blocks in a driving rainstorm to keep a speaking engagement of mine as there was just no closer place that I could find and fit my car into.

With the continuing increase in the numbers of cars on the streets of Jerusalem, there is very little hope for an immediate improvement in the situation. The fact that large - really large - garbage bins are also placed on the curbs of many streets, occupying a considerable number of potential parking spaces, also complicates matters and frustrates the hapless driver searching for a place to put his car. Who can deny the logic that garbage trumps parking spaces for cars?

Parking illegally is an art but it is also a considerable risk to one's pocket and emotional stability. Nevertheless, there are many Jerusalemites that I have observed who do so with abandon. I always wonder if they know something that I am not aware of. But my determination to remain a law-abiding citizen prevents me from pursuing this possible avenue as a solution to my continual parking problems.

In my opinion, there is a great Jewish moral lesson involved in this quandary over where to park the car. The Mishna in Avot asks us to consider "From whence have you come and to where are you going." It also points out that when we get to where we are going, we will be obligated "to park our car" - to give a reckoning and accounting of our deeds and actions. The parking space will have to explain how we got to where we were going, so to speak. What if we do not find a proper parking space? I don't think that any illegal parking will be allowed no matter how daring, carefree and intrepid a driver we are. We may even be forced to park far away from our intended and hoped for destination.

I often reconnoiter the place I will be driving to in advance of my actual trip in order to determine the parking possibilities. Well, that is true in life as well - certainly in Jewish life. All of life has to be lived with the specific goal of where one will park one's car, so to speak. It is part of the defensive driving mode that Judaism demands of us. It is the logical conclusion to a long journey of curves and vicissitudes, in the company of other dangerous and often reckless drivers. Where to park is a paramount question in Jewish thought.

There is an additional, terrible frustration to the regular problem of parking one's car. You may be fortunate enough to find a parking space but then you somehow have to fit your car into that space. I have been faced with that problem here in Israel where smaller cars are the norm and my car is a lumbering American "giant." Short of dropping the car in from the air I am unable to maneuver it so that it will fit into the treasured parking space that I so laboriously discovered. I think of that in moral terms as well. Even if I find my eventual parking space - my accounting and reckoning of my life - will I fit into the space assigned to me?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto makes this point abundantly clear in his masterpiece work, *Messilat Yesharim*. He states that even in the World To Come, one may feel deprived of what one believed to be proper recognition and honor and even have a feeling of envy as to the parking places assigned to others. Aside from all of the altruistic and idealistic reasons that may motivate one to find the ultimate parking space, there are also basic human drives and needs that dictate this desire and goal.

One should never lose sight of this for often this is truly the main reason that drives behavior and eternal aspirations. No one wishes to feel shamed or embarrassed in eternity. A great Talmudic sage asked not to be buried in

the white clothing of the truly pious or in black shrouds of the less pious either, as he did not want to be out of place in the World-To-Come. The parking space has to somehow fit the car. Otherwise, it cannot be used correctly and neatly. So I hope that I have given you some ideas to ponder upon the next time you are looking for a parking space in which to deposit your automobile.
Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: Bo :: Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha contains within it the story of the Jewish people, not just as it relates to the exodus from Egypt 3319 years ago but the story of the Jewish people as it unfolds throughout all of history as well. It is a story that is replete with both triumph and tragedy. There is much to rejoice about in the parsha. Finally after centuries of enslavement and torture the Jewish people as a nation emerge to freedom and responsibility. But there is also a great deal of tragedy.

A large number of Jews, having survived most of the worst of Egyptian slavery, die before the final exodus can liberate them. The reasons for this tragedy are discussed in Midrash but the ultimate reason, like all other seemingly inexplicable events in our history, lie with Heaven and not within the ken of our understanding. But that is not the issue that I wish to discuss here. Rather, it is the matter of the strange but almost constant juxtaposition of individual human tragedy with moments of national triumph, victory and joy.

The tragedies of thousands of families whose sons and husbands were killed or maimed in the Six Day War were subsumed in the national euphoria of that victory of arms. Apparently our emotions and history operate always on two different planes. One is the national struggle for success and survival. The other is the personal cost and pain of individual Jews in achieving that national success and survival. Are these two planes of emotions ever reconcilable? How are they to be viewed by us?

Jewish history begins with the Akeidah - with the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham. This near tragedy turns into the cornerstone of Jewish history and merit. It is in the merit of the Akeidah that we base our prayers to God. The martyrdom of the many Jews over the centuries is constantly remembered by us in our appeals for Heavenly aid and mercy. It is the personal tragedy that apparently fuels and aids the national triumph and survival. Viewed in such a light, the tragedy of the many thousands of Jews who perished in Egypt somehow causes the eventual exodus to be hastened.

Since God's ways, so to speak, are beyond our ability of comprehension and understanding, no one can offer any comforting or logical reason why this should be so. But there is no denying that this personal tragedy - national survival mode, is a basic pattern of Jewish history, if not even a basic facet of the Jewish faith. It is difficult to assess the current Jewish world in accordance with this pattern.

There have been many who have stated that the State of Israel is a result of the Holocaust. I have never voiced such an opinion since it impinges upon God's omniscient qualities. Nevertheless, we are witness to the sacrifice of the few or the many as the case may be that have led to the national benefit and deliverance of Israel and the Jewish people. So in remembering the exodus from Egypt we should also bear in mind the memory of those Jews who died there. It is a stark reminder of how things work out in our world.
Shabat shalom.

**TORAH WEEKLY—Parshat Bo
For the week ending 27 January 2007 / 8 Shevat 5767
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first-born, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the first-born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating chametz on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first-born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, pidyon haben (redemption of the first-born son) and tefillin.

INSIGHTS

The Secret of Persuasion

“and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son. that you may know I am Hashem” (10:2)

A true story.

After a presentation on Jewish outreach, a member of the audience approached the rabbi, “Rabbi, do you know I was able to bring a 92-year old lady back to Torah and mitzvot.”

“Wow! How did you do that?” asked the rabbi.

“I own a nursing home, and this lady, Mrs. Greenberg, came to live there. Of course we ordered her kosher food.

A couple of weeks later, the state inspector for nursing homes came to check, and she complained to him, ‘They don't give me normal food, here! They give me weird food. I want normal food like everyone else here.’ The inspector called me in on the spot and said, ‘This lady says you don't give her normal food.’ So I replied, ‘We're giving her better than normal food, we're giving her kosher food.’

‘I don't want kosher, I want normal!’ she said.

‘But, Mrs. Greenberg, kosher food is better for your health.’

‘You think, at ninety-two, I'm worried about cholesterol? Just give me normal food!’

‘But, Mrs. Greenberg, kosher food tastes better.’

‘At my age, you think I can taste anything? I just want normal food like everyone else.’

‘But, Mrs. Greenberg, kosher food is more expensive than regular food.’

‘Keep the extra and just give me NORMAL FOOD!’

The inspector said to me, ‘Listen, I'm coming back here in three months, and if you're not giving her the same food as everyone else, I'm going to close you down.’

So that's what happened, Rabbi, I persuaded her to eat kosher. Now she lights Shabbat candles and everything.”

“Yes,” said the rabbi, “but what did you say to her to convince her to change?”

“I have no idea. But Rabbi, you're missing the point - he was going to close me down!”

The secret of persuasion is commitment.

“and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son. that you may know I am Hashem.”

When you want someone else to accept what you tell him or her, you first have to be completely convinced it's true yourself. Only then will your words be accepted.

In order for our children, or elderly ladies for that matter, to be convinced of what we are saying - “that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son” - we first have to “know I am Hashem.”

Ohel Yehoshua and a story heard from Mordechai Weissman

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARSHAS BO

Stretch forth your hand towards the Heavens, and there shall be darkness upon the land of Egypt, and the darkness will be tangible. (10:21)

The ninth plague, darkness, was much more than simply an absence of light: it was thick and palpable; it was tangible. During the first three days of this plague, the Egyptians were still able to move around, but they could not see one another. The impenetrable darkness served as a thick barrier between Egyptian brothers. During the next three days, matters became increasingly worse. Now, they could not move from their places. Whoever was standing could not sit, and whoever was sitting could not stand up. They were frozen in position at the onset of this plague. This was truly a severe punishment, but can we say that it was worse than anything that had preceded it? How are we to understand the severity of this plague?

Horav Shabsi Yudelevitz, zl, tells the story of a maggid, preacher, who traveled from town to town lecturing on ethical behavior and mitzvah observance. He once came to a small community, far-off the beaten path, and began to exhort the members of the community with a passionate, fiery speech. His words, which emanated from his heart, entered into the hearts of his listeners, especially when he described the punishment associated with Gehinnom, Purgatory, and the reward of Gan Eden, Paradise. Within a few days, a change was noticed in the community, as mitzvah observance increased and ethical behavior came into vogue. Certainly, everyone wanted to obtain his portion in the World to Come. Well, almost everybody. There was one man who approached the maggid and publicly declared, "Rebbe, I want to go to Gehinnom!" "Gehinnom?" asked the maggid. "Are you sane? Why would you want to go to Gehinnom?"

"Rebbe, listen to me. Let me explain the rationale for my statement," the villager replied. "Let us imagine that after I have lived my 'one hundred and twenty' years, I arrive at my rightful place in Gan Eden. What will I do there in the company of all the righteous, the rabbanim and the tzaddikim? My entire life I have lived among the common folk, the simple Jew. I am comfortable with them, because I can converse with them. What am I going to do in the company of the righteous? With whom will I speak? In Gehinnom, I will feel at home!"

The maggid looked at this simple Jew and said, "My friend, you are greatly mistaken. You think that in the World of Truth you will meet up with your friends? No. When the time comes for your soul to return to its source, you will discover that it is not the way you think. Gan Eden is filled with incredible light. Joy abounds everywhere. Tzaddikim are seated together, all basking in the shine of the Shechinah. They have the opportunity to meet those who have lived a life of righteousness, piety and ethics.

"Conversely, in Gehinnom, darkness prevails. One person neither sees another nor even lifts a hand to him. In Gehinnom, a person is all alone in the darkness. It is solitary confinement at its nadir."

We now return to our original question: What was so severe about the plague of darkness? Unquestionably, the fact that all of Egypt was suffering together made a difference and helped to ease the pain and misery that resulted from each plague. True, it was debilitating, but the individual was not suffering alone. There were others. We are all in this together. This continued for the first eight plagues. Each Egyptian suffered, but he suffered less because he knew that his fellow Egyptian was also suffering. When makas choshech appeared, however, things were no longer the same. Now, each individual was alone. No Egyptian could see, or speak to, or touch his friend. He could not move. He was alone. There was nowhere to go - and no one from whom - to seek comfort. When a

person cannot share his plight with a friend, his misery becomes that much more severe. Makas choshech was the Egyptian's preview of Gehinnom.

There are different forms of loneliness. The cure for this unfortunate state of being is to belong. We are made to belong. We belong to Hashem; we belong to each other; we belong to the past, a heritage; and we belong to a future, to a legacy. When we destroy these bonds of "belonging," we impoverish our lives, exposing ourselves to the frustration and abuse that accompanies being alone.

The greatest tragedy of the modern-day assimilated Jew is probably that he has severed his relationship with his tradition, causing himself to hang in the air, like a lost kite, knocked around by the changing winds of doctrine. While loneliness is a terrible state of being and one that we should attempt to ameliorate, it is also, for some, a serious affliction. There are individuals who, although surrounded by people, feel terribly alone. How is this possible? When one is so wrapped up in himself that he perceives himself as "all alone," even though he is in the presence of people, he is truly disturbed. Such people will often think that they are better than anyone else, truly a breed unto themselves. This form of loneliness is, in a sense, self-imposed, the by-product of arrogance. This person is alone because he has written off people. Others can no longer help him until he is ready to help himself.

And touch the lintel and the two doorposts with some blood that is in the basin... and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your homes to smite... you shall observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever. (12:22,23,24)

What is the meaning of the Torah's injunction to "observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever"? The commandment to smear the blood on the doorposts was in effect only for Pesach Mitzrayim, the first Pesach, which Klal Yisrael observed in Egypt on the night of their liberation. Yechi Yehudah explains this from a mussar, ethical, approach. The battle that we constantly wage with the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, is a difficult one. As in all battles, one can only be successful if he has studied the tactics of his opponents and has found a way to triumph over them. The evil-inclination has a powerful tactic: subtlety. It does not approach a person and say, "Sin." No, the yetzer hora is very crafty. It first convinces the individual to deviate ever so slightly and then adds to that deviation until the person is so distant from his original way of life that idol-worship is no longer remote and inconceivable. Clearly, the more one becomes subjugated to the yetzer hora, the greater and more difficult it is to extricate himself from its hold.

Thus, the most important step one must take in warding off the yetzer hora is to not grant him access into his life. In other words, he should not allow him through the front door. Once the evil-inclination has gotten beyond the "threshold," he has entered, and it is that much more difficult to succeed in battling him. This is what the pasuk is teaching us. How do we win the war against the yetzer hora? How do we succeed over the mashchis, destroyer? We must not allow him past the mezuzah, blocking his entrance through the doorway of our lives. This is an exhortation forever, for every generation: Do not allow the yetzer hora to enter, for it will be that much harder to push him out.

Bnei Yisrael journeyed from Raamses to Succos, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. (12:37)

The Zohar HaKadosh interprets the kof of k'sheish, about six (hundred thousand), as being a kof ha'dimyon, kof that compares. The dimyon, parallel, in this case is the Heavenly Hosts. In other words, at that point, Klal Yisrael was so spiritually elevated that they were compared to the Angels on High. The Sefas Emes derives a powerful lesson from this pasuk. One day earlier, the Jews had been steeped in the tumah, spiritual contamination, of Egypt. They had sunken down to the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity and were standing at the edge of the fiftieth level. With one more step, they would be lost to eternity. This situation compelled Hashem to liberate them before it would become too late. Yet, one day later, as soon as they were out of the filth of Egypt and its tentacles, they ascended to the level of the Heavenly Angels! This teaches us the greatness of the Jew. One day, he is under the hold of Egypt and sinking to the depths of depravity. The next moment, after he had divested himself of the defilement of the physical environment in which he had been living, he

is able to elevate himself to a previously unrealistic and unattainable spiritual plateau. This is because the Jew is inherently holy and pure. When he falls under the influence of spiritual contamination, it is only an external lining which prevents him from reaching out and returning to his source. When he is removed from this challenging environment, however, he is able to return to his intrinsic spiritual self.

The Sefas Emes writes, "Veritably, just as it is necessary to believe in the Almighty, despite our inability to understand His hidden ways, so, too, must we believe in the Jewish People, even when they appear to be soiled and ugly." This is the underlying meaning of Shlomo Ha'Melech's statement in Shir HaShirim 1:5, "Though I am black (with sin); yet comely (with virtue)." Every Jew has an inner beauty, a concealed holiness that penetrates his essence. We must believe that this inner holiness can spark and flare up, instantly transforming the individual into a different person. At the end of the Kovetz Ha'aros the following question is presented. In Shemos 4:27, Hashem refers to Klal Yisrael as B'ni b'chori Yisrael, "My firstborn son is Yisrael." Yet, in Devarim 14:1, the Torah says, "You are children to Hashem." This implies that we are the only ones to be called children of Hashem. How then can we be referred to as His firstborn? The term firstborn indicates that there are other children, while the pasuk in Devarim clearly states that we are the only ones. How can we be the firstborn, if we are the only ones? Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, distinguishes between the period preceding Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah, and the period afterwards, when accepting Hashem's Torah rendering Klal Yisrael His only children.

Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, cites the Pri Tzaddik, who explains that the ministering angels are also called Bnei Elokim, sons of G-d. Thus, Klal Yisrael is referred to as the b'chor, firstborn, in comparison to the angels. This reflects our inherent kedushah, which can supersede even that of the Heavenly angels.

The Sefas Emes addresses the multitude of Jews who live in galus, exile, subject to the constant harassment of the gentile host country, with its ensuing persecutions and daily challenges to their spiritual belief. The yetzer hora has a running tirade in his effort to discourage the Jewish heart and mind from maintaining its belief in and commitment to the Almighty. Yes, it is true, that previous generations functioned on a more elevated spiritual plane, and they were still not redeemed from exile. So, to what do we (this was in the 19th century) have to look forward? What are our chances? Every Jew has in himself a powerful source of inner kedushah that can spring forth, radiate and illuminate his life. He should never despair, because as long as that kedushah exists within the Jew, there is always hope. It is the will of Hashem that we continue to remain in exile. The time will come, however, when it will be over. It is our obligation to guard and sustain that latent kedushah from within, so that we will be prepared to respond appropriately when the moment of redemption arrives.

We see the "before" and "after" pictures of many young men and women who have become baalei Teshuvah, returned to an observant lifestyle. One would think that they have been transformed. The Sefas Emes implies that there was nothing more than a superficial transformation, an unveiling of the individual's true essence. The kedushah had been concealed within, hidden beneath an exterior facade of materialism and the effects of contemporary culture and society, masquerading the real ben Torah or bas Yisrael. When the veil was lifted, the real person began to radiate forth.

And it happened when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to send us out, that Hashem killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... Therefore, I offer to Hashem all male first issue of the womb, and I shall redeem all the firstborn of my sons. (13:15)

We are taught that Hashem distinguished between the bechorei Yisrael, Jewish firstborn, and the bechorei Mitzrayim, Egyptian firstborn. Since the Jewish firstborn were spared from death while the Egyptian firstborn were killed, the level of kedushah, holiness, of the Jewish firstborn was elevated. They became holier because they were saved. This is enigmatic. While it is understandable that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Hashem for sparing the Jewish firstborn, what is the connection between being spared from death and an increase in personal holiness?

Horav Chaim Goldvicht, zl, notes that we find throughout halachah that an act of kinyan, acquisition, imposes kedushah on the object which was acquired. For example, the wife of a Kohen - and even his gentile slave - is permitted to partake of Terumah, which is normally designated only for a Kohen. Yet, since they have a relationship with the Kohen by virtue of a kinyan, either of matrimony or of ownership, they have become elevated in holiness and can now share in his Terumah. Since "belonging" to him creates a shibud, reciprocal obligation, on their part to him, thus their spiritual status is elevated.

When we think about it, we may suggest that herein lies the secret of kedushas Yisrael, the holiness of a Jew. We are kanui, acquired by - and, thus, belong to - Hashem. This reality imbues us with kedushah. We belong to the Almighty!

This kinyan took place as we left Egypt. Avadai heim, "They are My servants - (because) I have taken them out of Egypt" (Vayikra 25:42). This act of liberation was Hashem's kinyan. He redeemed us and, therefore, we are now His. This is why the idea of the Exodus plays such a seminal role in the life of a Jew. We constantly reiterate it in our daily readings and traditions. We understand now that not only do we owe Hashem a debt of gratitude, but we also belong to Him. Our very existence as a free nation is due to Him.

Understandably, the level of kedushah directly correlates with the nature and force of the kinyan. Every added endeavor, every emphasis that is involved in making this act of acquisition more concrete, stronger and more impressive, adds to the level of kedushah created by this relationship. Thus, smiting the Egyptian firstborn, while simultaneously sparing the Jewish firstborn, was clearly a powerful and definitive act of acquisition, which catalyzed a greater level of kedushah. Hence, the Jewish firstborns became holy to Hashem. They received a stronger kinyan and, therefore, a greater level of kedushah than the average Jew. Sparing the Jewish firstborns from death increased their relationship with Hashem, thereby granting them greater kedushah.

Rav Goldvicht underscores this idea with regard to our daily lives. A person who has merited a special salvation from Hashem, who has been privileged to enjoy an unwarranted and unprecedented favor, not only has a profound debt of gratitude to pay, but he also has an enormous obligation. He becomes meshubad, obliged, to Hashem. This idea may be derived from the words of Avraham Avinu, "I am but dust and ashes" (Bereishis 18:27). Chazal explain: Avraham intimated, "Had I been killed by Amrafel, would I not have been dust? And if Nimrod would have succeeded in burning me alive, would I not have been ashes?" In other words, our Patriarch was acutely aware that these two instances of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, and Heavenly salvation established him as a new entity before the Creator. He was not afar v'eifar, dust and ashes. He became sanctified and consecrated to Hashem as a result of his salvation.

Every Jew that is alive today is a descendant of someone who had achieved this zenith. Those who have survived the persecutors that have tormented us throughout history have earned the title of afar v'eifar. We must uphold their legacy in our commitment to Hashem.

Dirshu Hashem v'uzo, Bakshu Panav tamid. Seek Hashem and His strength, seek His Presence always.

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, understands this prayer as a request to merit a specific and critical perspective on life. Indeed such an outlook is the product of work - working on oneself. In order to develop a profound insight into the workings of Hashgachah Pratis, Divine Providence, the individual must understand that each and every aspect of this hashgachah is for his ultimate good fortune. The Name Hashem implies Middas HaRachamim, the Attribute of Mercy, while the word oz (uzo) (His) strength, by its very nature signifies Middas HaDin, the Attribute of Strict Justice. Hashem's benevolence fills the world in general and our lives in particular. This is a reality. Regrettably, we do not always have the ability to penetrate the veil of ambiguity which clouds and often conceals the truth. Even though it may be hidden from us, it is nonetheless a reality in the universe. It is a metzius, an entity, that is real, a bona-fide reality that is an intrinsic component of our faith. David Hamelech entreats Hashem (Tehillim 55:8), "Show us Your kindness, Hashem." We know it is there. We know it exists, but please show it to us, grant us the privilege of

perceiving it in a tangible manner. We are, thus, told to seek Hashem/His mercy, even under circumstances that appear as uzo, His strength/Divine Justice. This seeking should continue tamid, always.

Sponsored l'zchus ul'refuah sheleima for Baruch ben Sara Chasia b'soch she'or cholei yisroel

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by HaRav Zev Leff

Rabbi Leff's website: www.rabbileff.net

Parshas Bo

A Light Unto the Nations

The Israelites [also] did as Moses had said. They requested silver and gold articles and clothing from the Egyptians. God Made the Egyptians respect the people, and they granted their request. [The Israelites] thus drained Egypt of its wealth (Shemos 12:35-36).

Prior to the Exodus, Hashem caused the Jews to find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. The immediate reason for this was so that the Egyptians would readily offer their vessels of gold and silver to Bnei Yisrael, in fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham that his descendants would leave their servitude with great wealth. But if that were Hashem's only intention, it would have been sufficient to cause the Egyptians to give over their wealth out of fear of Bnei Yisrael.

We must, therefore, seek another explanation for the miracle of the Jews finding favor in the eyes of the Egyptians (see Ramban to Shemos 113)-i.e., some reason why it made a difference whether the Egyptians loved and respected us or merely feared us?

Throughout our galus we have been mocked, hated and killed by the nations of the world. We have had to strengthen ourselves not to concern ourselves with those who deride us because of our service to Hashem (see Rema to Orach Hachaim 1:1). There is a danger, however that this state of affairs will be seen as being the way things are meant to be, that we will view the mockery to which we are subjected as an indication of the perfection of our avodah.

The Torah teaches us that the opposite is true "Learn and observe [the Torah] for it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear of all these laws and proclaim that this is truly a great, wise and understanding nation" (Devarim 4 6). It is clear that the Torah attaches importance to the respect given us by the nations of the world.

The Netziv writes (Ha'amek Davar to Bamidbar 14:21) that the goal of creation is that God's glory fill the entire earth i.e., that all human beings recognize Him. As we proclaim twice daily in the Shema, our perception of the oneness of God will only be complete when Hashem, Who is acknowledged now only by the Jewish People, will be the one God recognized by the entire world. "When Hashem will be King over the whole world, on that day will He be One and His Name one" (Zechariah 14 9).

This acknowledgment of God by the nations of the world is so important that the miracle of the splitting of the Sea was performed in order that "the Egyptians should know that I am God" (Shemos 7 5). Ibn Ezra adds that the Egyptians referred to were those who drowned. Thus the splitting of the Sea was warranted even for the few seconds of recognition of God by the drowning Egyptians. The World to Come is not limited to Jews; the righteous gentile, who observes the mitzvos incumbent upon him as Divine imperatives, also merits Olam Haba.

We, the Nation of Priests, represent Hashem to the world by our exemplary lifestyle, and imbue the world with knowledge of His existence. "We are a light unto the nations" (Yeshayahu 42:6). The Netziv explains that this function could have been achieved by the Jewish people settling in Eretz Yisrael and inspiring the entire world through an awareness of the miraculous Divine Providence that guides the Jew in his land. We did not merit this. As a consequence, it became necessary to spread the knowledge of Hashem by living among the nations and causing them to witness how we sacrifice ourselves for God's Name. Our survival as a solitary lamb among seventy hungry wolves points to the existence of a Divine Creator, whose Divine Providence guides and protects His nation.

The halachah consistently exhorts us to act in a way which will effect a kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the Divine Name), and thereby brings us respect as a holy and upright people. We are forbidden to desecrate God's Name by giving the gentiles reason to castigate us for conduct unbecoming a holy nation (see Choshen Mishpat 266 regarding returning lost articles to a non-Jew). Kiddush Hashem is a facet of the mitzvah of ahavas Hashem, love of God. Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvos writes that this mitzvah includes an imperative to call out to all mankind to serve God and acknowledge Him.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 6) says, " 'And he is a witness,' this refers to Yisrael, as it says, 'You are my witnesses, says Hashem, and I am your Lord....' If you will not testify, you will carry His sin." If you do not relate My existence to the nations, says Hashem, I will exact punishment from you. The nations of the world should ideally function in unison with us to proclaim and acknowledge the Creator.

We bring seventy sacrifices on Succos for the benefit of the seventy nations, yet we bring them in descending order to intimate that the nations should decrease. There is no contradiction in this. The need for seventy distinct nations is only a result of the Tower of Babel at which mankind united to deny God. As a consequence, God created divisions among them to thwart this attempt to countermand the purpose of man. The ideal, however, is that mankind should unite in the service of God. As the prophet Zephaniah proclaims, "Then will I return to the nations a clear language so that they can all call on the Name of Hashem and serve Him in unison" (Zephaniah 3 9).

As God's representatives, we must ultimately command the respect and favor of the nations of the world in order to fill the world with His glory. That occurs, says Rashi, only when we fulfill the mitzvos properly. A mitzvah fulfilled properly is Godly and perfect and can only command respect and admiration. If we fail to perform the mitzvos properly, however, then we will be considered fools. Derision and mockery will be our lot, for the portion of the mitzvah improperly performed is not Divine and therefore elicits ridicule that then spreads and encompasses the entire mitzvah.

Chazal explain that the verse, "All nations of the earth will see that God's Name has been called upon you and will respect and fear you," refers to the tefillin placed on the head. The Vilna Gaon added that this means not just the tefillin on the head but the tefillin in the head - i.e., the internalized intention with which the mitzvah is performed.

The scorn of the nations of the world is not a sign of our perfection, but rather that something is lacking in our service of Hashem, that we have failed in our role of leading a life of holiness separate from the nations and their lifestyles. The halachah "Esav hates Yaakov" guards us against the possibility of assimilation and spiritual self-destruction. But when we fulfill our role properly, the entire world will want to share in our service of Hashem.

Prior to our first redemption-the model of the final redemption to come-Hashem brought us favor in the Egyptians' eyes so that we would not forget this ideal. The Egyptians readily gave us vessels of gold and silver to enhance our service to Hashem in the desert. The clothing they gave us represented the honor and glory in which they wished to garb us. And so it will be in the final redemption.

May we merit, through our meticulous performance of the mitzvos the respect, honor, and admiration of the entire world, rather than the mockery and abuse that is our current lot. Then all nations will follow our lead in serving Hashem and bringing the world to perfection.

Pidyon Haben Redemption of the Firstborn

Sanctify to Me every firstborn that initiates the womb among the Israelites (Shemos 13 2).

The Torah explains the requirement of redeeming the firstborn in 1 terms of Hashem having acquired all the firstborn of the Jews when he killed the firstborn Egyptians. But there is a problem with this explanation the slain Egyptian firstborns encompass many more types of firstborns than those we are required to redeem. The killing of the firstborn of Egypt affected both firstborn male and firstborn females and the firstborns of both mothers and those of the fathers.

But the Torah requires only the firstborn male of the mother to be redeemed.

When one is the beneficiary of a miraculous salvation, he, as it were, draws from his bank account of merits. Thus the salvation of one is "on credit" and must be paid off with future mitzvos. God's beneficence creates reciprocal obligations for those who do not deserve the benefits bestowed. Thus the blessing we recite upon being delivered from a dangerous situation, birkas hagomel, can be translated as "... He who grants the obligated benefits."

The redemption of the firstborn stems from the fact that our redemption in Egypt was an undeserved miracle, which therefore created an obligation of extra service to Hashem. The Kohen from whom the firstborn is redeemed stands in place of the firstborn in fulfilling this added responsibility.

We can now understand why the firstborn females need not be redeemed. Although Jewish males sunk into idolatry in Egypt, the women remained steadfastly faithful to Hashem. It was in the merit of the righteous women in Egypt that our ancestors were redeemed. Therefore the firstborn females deserved to be saved, and their miraculous salvation entailed no redemption.

The explanation of why only the firstborn of the mother requires redemption is different. We read in the Haggadah that God alone smote the firstborn Egyptians "I and not an angel; I and not a seraph; I and not an agent; I am Hashem, I and no other." And yet Hashem explicitly warned the Jewish people to stay indoors that night so the "destroying angel" would not harm them (Shemos 1222-23). And Chazal interpreted the preceding Hashem in the verse, "And God (veHashem) smote all of the firstborn," as referring to the Heavenly Court. So it would seem that the angels did take part in this plague.

Chelkas Yoav notes that it is impossible for either an angel or man to determine the firstborn of the father. Thus only Hashem could kill the firstborn of the fathers Ani Hashem-I am Hashem Who distinguished between the seed that formed a firstborn and the seed that did not form a firstborn." The firstborn of the mothers, however, were killed by the destroying angels, which can determine whether a woman has previously given birth.

When Moshe first describes the killing of the firstborn (Shemos 115), he says that every firstborn in Egypt "from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the slavewoman" will die. But when the plague actually took place, the Torah describes God as smiting every firstborn "from the firstborn of Pharaoh until the firstborn of the captive in prison" (Shemos 12:24). The first verse merely says that all firstborn in Egypt will die, not specifically that God will smite them. Hence it refers to the firstborn of the mothers as well, and the slavewoman is mentioned. The second verse, by contrast, says that Hashem smote all the firstborn, and therefore refers to the firstborn of the father. Thus the male captive is mentioned as the furthest extent of the punishment.

We know that when Hashem gives over the power of destruction to an angel, the angel does not distinguish between tzaddik and rasha; all are affected equally. It could be, however, that this only goes so far as including those who may not deserve being killed under normal circumstances, but does not include those who have a specific merit to protect them.

When Hashem Himself brings destruction, only those deserving of such destruction are affected. Thus, the Jewish firstborn of the fathers -whose Egyptian counterparts were smitten by God personally- were not saved miraculously. There was simply no specific reason why they should be killed, and therefore no redemption is necessary as a consequence of their being spared. The firstborn of the Jewish mothers, however-whose Egyptian counterparts were smitten by the destroying angels-were miraculously saved, since normally they would have required some special merit to save them. Thus only the firstborn of the mother is included in the mitzvah of redemption of the firstborn. But this only applies to the male firstborn of Jewish mothers, for the females did possess the special merit of not being sunken in idolatry.

If one has only enough money to pay for his expenses to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for one of the three Festivals or to redeem his son,

the pidyon haben (redemption of the son) takes precedence. This is surprising, for generally a mitzvah that has a set time takes precedence over pidyon haben, which can be fulfilled at a later date.

On the three pilgrimage Festivals, a Jew came to Jerusalem to see and be seen by Hashem. He was, as it were, reviewed by the King to determine his share of service in God's Kingdom and to set his responsibility for the coming months, when he would return home to serve God with the bounty he had been given. Pidyon haben, on the other hand, is the payment of a debt past due, for being given a firstborn son, who is the product of an undeserved miracle. One cannot begin to establish future responsibilities and contributions to God's Kingdom before he has paid his past debts to that Kingdom. Hence pidyon haben takes precedence over the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

May we recognize our indebtedness to Hashem for all the undeserved bounty He provides us and commit ourselves to serve Him with all our hearts and souls.

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“RavFrاند” List - Parshas Bo

“Two Plus Two Equals Four” Is Not That Simple To Understand

This week's parsha contains two of the four chapters that are contained within our Tephillin. [Shmos 13:1-16] The last pasuk [verse] of the second of those two chapters concludes Parshas Bo: “And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and for ‘totofos’ between your eyes, for with a strong hand Hashem removed us from Egypt.”

Rashi explains that the word ‘totofos’ means Tephillin. The head Tephillin are so called because they consist of four chambers (one for each of the four chapters contained therein). Rashi references the Gemara [Sanhedrin 4b] that analyzes the etymology of the word ‘totofos’: “Tat” in the Kaspi language means two and ‘Pas’ in the Afriki language means two. This is how we know that ‘totofos’ (two plus two) equals the four-chambered head Tephillin.

This is a difficult Gemara. Why does the Torah use such an oblique fashion to tell us the number of chambers in the Head Tephillin? The Torah should have at least chosen a word that means four (albeit in another language). Why “two plus two”?

Rav Dovid Cohen suggests a very novel approach to this problem:

What are the four sections that we insert into the Tephillin? The first two are “Kadesh” [Sanctify] and “v’haya ki yeivi’acha” [and it will be when He will bring you] that are located in Parshas Bo. The second two are “Shma” [Hear] and “v’haya im shamo” [and it will be if you will hearken] which are located in the Parshiyos of V’Eschanan and Ekev, respectively.

The problem is that the Parshiyos of V’Eschanan and Ekev, like the rest of the Book of Devorim, were spoken during the fortieth year of the Jews’ sojourn in the desert. So what did the Jews put in their Tephillin during the forty years in the desert?

There are two possible answers to this question. Either they did not wear Tephillin for the first forty years in the wilderness (which Rav Dovid Cohen does not want to accept) or they in fact wore Tephillin in the desert that only had the two sections mentioned in the book of Shmos (Kadesh and v’haya ki yeivi’acha).

Therefore it makes sense why the pasuk uses the word totofos, which, as explained, alludes to a two plus two equation. The explanation for the two plus two equation is that at one time Tephillin had two chapters and then two more were added later (in the fortieth year of their traveling), so that it ultimately contained four chapters.

Going Out With Great Wealth, Plus Self-Esteem

Before Klal Yisrael left Egypt, they were given a special command: “Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels.” [Shmos 11:2] This is why the Jews left Egypt extremely wealthy. They took the gold and silver from their Egyptian neighbors.

This was in fact a fulfillment of the Almighty’s promise to Avraham “Afterwards (i.e. - after the 400 years of being strangers and enslaved) they will leave with great wealth” [Bereshis 15:14]. In fact, the Talmud makes

the point that Hashem had to “request” of Moshe that he “please speak in the ears of the people” so that it not be said that the years of slavery were endured but the promise of great wealth was not fulfilled.

Imagine the scene: The Jewish slaves were the trusted employees of their Egyptian masters for so many years. In fact, they were, of course, more than just trusted employees. They were more than workers, more than servants. We are talking about slaves! Now the slave knocks on the master’s door and says “You know what, I always liked that silver candelabra you have. Give it to me.”

Why did the Almighty set it up like this? His promise of great wealth could have come about in so many other ways. Just like the manna came miraculously and the water came miraculously, He could have sent us great wealth miraculously. Why did he give it to us in such a way that we had to “borrow” it and then not return it?

In the back of most Gemaras there is a famous commentary known as the RaShaSh - Rav Shmuel Shtarshon. He was not only an author (he wrote comments on every folio of Shas with the exception of 3) he was also a wealthy man and ran a Gema”ch (a free loan society). He once lent money to a tailor for a year. Payback time came and the tailor returned to the home of the RaShaSh with an envelope containing the money. He knocked on the door, Rav Shtarshon was busy writing his commentary so he came to the door, took the envelope, stuck it in the sefer [book] he was learning at the time and continued on writing his commentary. He then closed the book and completely forgot about the envelope.

A couple of months later, he reviewed his Gema”ch ledger and he saw that the tailor never paid back the money that he borrowed. He went to the tailor and asked for payment. The tailor insisted that he paid already. The RaShaSh had no recollection of the payment and continued pressing the man for repayment. Ultimately the RaShaSh took the tailor to a din Torah (a religious tribunal) to settle the matter. The court ruled in favor of the tailor. However, the general population did not believe the simple tailor against the great Talmid Chochom, Rav Shmuel Shtarshon. They boycotted his tailor shop to show their displeasure.

His business went down the drain. He could not make a living to the extent that he had to leave town. His life was ruined.

One fine day, the RaShash picked up a sefer he had not learned from in many months. Lo and behold, he found the envelope with the tailor’s money. He was beside himself with grief. He sought out the tailor and begged forgiveness. However, the tailor was not willing to accept the apology. “It’s too late. I’m ruined already.” The RaShaSh insisted that he would go to the Beis Medrash, give a bang on the bimah and announce publicly “the tailor was right and I was wrong.”

The tailor said, “Tough. They will never believe you. They will say that you are such a great Tzadik, you just want to make me feel good and appease me, even though I really never paid you the money.”

The RaShaSh then said, “No. There is something I can do for you. I have a daughter and you have a son who needs a shidduch. Your son is not a big Talmid Chochom and he is the son of a simple tailor, but if we become mechutanim, then everybody will know that you were right and I was wrong.” And that is what he did. He gave his daughter in marriage to the tailor’s son to rebuild the reputation and self-esteem of the man whose reputation and self-esteem he had sullied.

The matter with the “great wealth” at the end of the enslavement is similar. If the Jews had merely received miraculous compensation after 400 years of hard work and bitter enslavement, that would not have given them back the self-esteem that wore away during all those years of brutal slavery. Their payment had to come directly from the masters for whom they labored. It did not suffice to merely leave Egypt with their money. They had to leave with their pride as well. For that it was necessary to direct them to go knocking on the doors of the Egyptian masters and to take their finest items of gold and silver - because it was coming to them. Their masters owed it to them!

The side lesson to be learned here from the story of the RaShaSh is that when the Almighty wants a poor tailor’s son to find a prestigious shidduch [matrimonial match], then some way or another, He will make it happen!

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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Do You Believe in Miracles? Is It One of the 613?

The TorahWeb Foundation.

The Jewish nation was founded both individually and collectively in a miraculous environment. Yitzchak was born of parents regarding whom the Torah testifies, "now Avraham and Sarah were old, well on in years, the manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah" (Braisheis 18:11). The enslaved nation, even prior to the exodus, witnessed the wonders of Hashem in Egypt in conjunction with the ten plagues. They were escorted out of Egypt with the divine cloud by day, and by night with a pillar of fire. They walked through water on dry land and witnessed the Egyptians drown. At Marah, the bitter waters turned sweet by throwing a bitter tree therein, and seventy date palms granted them as they entered the desert.

The daily miraculous ration of man that nourished them rotted if kept overnight for the morrow, except Shabbos, when they were commanded to take a double portion which retained its freshness. The menorah was fashioned miraculously out of fire, as was the briach hatichon - the one middle bar inside the planks of the mishkan kept all the planks secure. For forty years they were surrounded by constant miracles. The great importance and significance of these miracles, teaches the Ramban in parshas Bo, is to impress upon the Jewish nation the close personal relationship that Hashem has with Bnei Yisroel. His hashgacha pratit - Divine intervention and concern for their welfare - is the cornerstone upon which the Jewish people is founded.

Sadly, but realistically, the nature of man is to forget. Not only do later generations forget the impact of miracles, but even the one to whom the miracle occurred is wont to forget. Case in point: when King Shaul hesitates to allow Dovid to fight Golyas, Dovid defends himself by sharing his prowess in defending the sheep from the attack of both a lion and a bear. Dovid said, "v'nasah she meihaeider - the lion or bear would carry off a sheep" (Shmuel I 17:34). The word is written "seh" - a sheep - but is read "zeh - this". The Vilna Gaon (in Kol Eliyahu) explains based upon the medrash, Dovid slaughtered the sheep after he saved it, and from its skin he made a vest which he wore constantly, enabling him to remember the miracle always. If not for the vest, Dovid would have forgotten. It is the "zeh" that he showed Shaul. Rav Yerachameal Kronshlit"z in his sefer V'Talmudo B'Yado notes that while Moshe successfully prays for the recovery of his sister Miriam, he does not pray on his own behalf to have his speech impediment cured, as Moshe wanted to always remember the miracle of the angel directing his infant hand to the hot coals rather than the alluring gold (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemos #166). Had his speech defect been removed, he too may have forgotten the miracle.

If the direct beneficiaries of the miracle is prone to forget it rachmana litzlan, all the more so their descendants and future generations. To prevent this from happening, to keep the memory of the miracles fresh in the minds of all generations, explains the Ramban (ibid), many mitzvos have as their primary purpose "zecher l'yitziyas mitarayim" - to remember the exodus from Egypt and its accompanying miracles and wonders. To offset the heresy that Hashem is removed from the activities of mankind, Hashem suspends nature, and has us incorporate His miraculous involvement as an integral part of many mitzvos. Thus, our donning tefilin, mezuzos on our doors, the many prohibitions of chometz coupled with the mitzvah of eating matzah, all keep the memory of the miracle alive and vibrant. Our annual immigration to the sukkah is explained by the Torah as "l'maan yadeuh dorosaychem" (Vayikra 23:43) - so that your generations will know that millions of people were fed, clothed, and sustained miraculously for forty years in a desert environment.

The Torah (Devarim 6:16) warns "lo senasu - you shall not test Hashem". The Ramban understands this to mean you are not to say that if Hashem is indeed in our midst, let Him prove Himself by performing miracles on our behalf. This is wrong on several levels, including a lack of trust and faith in the past performances and the inherent deficient manner of serving Hashem - based upon a reward. Moreover, while miracles are performed, it is not the desire of Hashem to perform open miracles regularly, and it is the way of Hashem most often to minimize the extent of the miracle. Thus,

technically, notes the Ramban (Braisheis 6:19), even many arks the size of Noach's ark would not suffice to house all the animals and their provisions for a year's time. Yet, by having Noach build a relatively large ark, the miraculous was couched within the natural order of things.

The Steipler zt"l in his sefer Chayey Olam suggests an interesting reason why miracles were the order of the day at the foundation of our people. They needed to learn the very important lesson of our connection to Hashem. However, the presence of open miracles diminishes the free will of man. In addition, having witnessed open miracles the level of expectation and accountability for man is raised, and even smaller infractions are treated more seriously. Given the nature of man to forget the miracles, it can only serve to create obstacles on man's behalf.

In the bracha of modim, we recite thrice daily, "al nisecha shebechol yom imanu", we thank Hashem for Your miracles that are with us every day. It includes the natural phenomena around us most often taken for granted, such as the burning of oil. As R' Chanina said (Gemara Taanis), "the one who endowed oil with the ability to burn can cause vinegar to burn". It also includes the survival of the state of Israel, surrounded by multitudes of unfriendly Arabs. It includes His hasgacha pratit - direct involvement in our personal and communal lives as the many mitzvos of zecher l'yitziyas Mitrayim proclaim.

While belief in miracles is not one of the 613 mitzvos, it is the theme, and at the heart of, many mitzvos.

h a a r e t z

Portion of the Week / Secret of togetherness

By Benjamin Lau

"Where will you be for the Passover seder?" This perennial Jewish question contains many emotions related to changing family situations. Numerous attempts to escape that pressure-cooker fail. Indeed something about this festival returns us to the crowded family table. The atmosphere was created at the first Passover seder, celebrated in Egypt the night before the 10th plague of the eldest sons, and on the eve of the Exodus from Egypt.

The first seder meal, known in traditional Jewish sources as the "Passover in Egypt," was intended to turn a nation of slaves into independent individuals with liberated souls. To effect the transformation, God commands the Jews to prepare: "Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover" (Exodus 12:21). In a world of slavery, the family has no meaning: Individual survival under Egypt's harsh regime blurs family, let alone national, identity.

The first stage in the Exodus from bondage to freedom is the creation of the intimate family circle. All Jews in Egypt must seek out their private family units and participate together in the festive Passover meal. At the repast's height, the elders transmit their history to the younger generation. This is a ritualistic, ceremonial meal, whose chief feature is unification of the family and sitting around the table for an entire evening - "... and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning" (Exod. 12:22).

The Torah seeks to impart to Jews the atmosphere of the "Passover in Egypt" for posterity as "an ordinance for ever" (Exod. 12:14). Thus, immediately following the Exodus, God gives instructions to Moses and Aaron: "And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover ... In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it" (Exod. 12:43-47). The verses' literal interpretation conveys the idea that we must reconstruct that initial Passover's atmosphere annually in our intimate family circle. Yet Yonatan Ben Uziel's translation (one of the Aramaic versions of the Bible) gives this last verse precisely the opposite meaning, as he writes: "The Jewish people will intermingle in its various communities in celebrating it (Passover)." In modern jargon, the intimate family holiday thus acquires a communal character: Families and communities must intermingle to create the matrix of the "Jewish people." The message here is clear and simple: Jews must not seek the shelter of the family unit, but must instead unite to

form the single fabric of "the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel" (Exod. 12:6), which together celebrates Passover.

Intermingling of people

The midrash that clarifies a point of halakha (Jewish law) with respect to this verse conveys the same idea: "Why is it written in the Torah, 'All the congregation of Israel shall keep it'? Because the the Torah tells us, 'Draw out and take you a lamb.' Does that mean that, just as the first Passover in Egypt had to be celebrated in the family circle, future generations must celebrate Passover in the family circle? No, because the Torah says, 'All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.' Namely, the Passover sacrifice must be eaten only when there is an intermingling of people."

The midrash considers the possibility of retaining the ceremony's original format - namely, the Passover celebration within the family circle. However, it then rejects that option and, assigning the verse a unique interpretation, chooses an alternative - "when there is an intermingling of people" - totally unlike the way the first Passover was celebrated in Egypt.

The Passover meal in Egypt is intended to create an identity for a nation of slaves. The Jews must distinguish themselves from the Egyptians and embark on a new cultural experience. The blood on the lintel and doorposts expresses the conversion to Judaism of the family, the household. The blood of circumcision preceding the blood on the lintel and doorposts expresses the individual's devotion to God. These two situations involving blood create the individual's and family's circles of identity with God. At the first Passover meal, the Jews must unite at the family level before leaving Egypt as a unified national group.

The interpretations that the classic rabbinical authorities give remove the Jews from the intimate family circle, transferring them to the experience of the collective. In the absence of the nation's experience of "Passover in Egypt," the holiday becomes a component of our national identity. There is no such concept as "my" or "your" Passover sacrifice - only "our Passover sacrifice."

Nonetheless, many mishnayot (Babylonian Talmud, Pessachim Tractate) stress the need for carefully preparing the list of participants in the Passover meal that is consumed in private homes. We can choose the members of the group eating the Passover sacrifice with us. However, once the group is formed, the list is closed: Only "members" can eat the Passover sacrifice, and people cannot transfer to another group once their membership in a given group has been established. These laws intensify the status of the group (rather than the family), severing it from the tumult of the "whole assembly of the congregation of Israel."

Obviously, Passover has two focuses. The first is the intimate family unit, which has an educational dimension: The older generation must convey its personal and family story to the next generation. This is the seder's essence and it is the secret of Jewish togetherness. At the table, we tell the Passover story with all its twists and turns. This is how we inculcate the family memory in the younger generation. The second focus is the holiday itself - when we leave our homes, discovering the community where we live. We intermingle, and "my Passover" encounters "yours" so that together we will have "our Passover."

Perhaps the Moroccan-Jewish holiday of Mimouna, celebrated the day after Passover ends, provides this kind of experience. When I leave my home, I find that, beyond it, there is also "our home." There is a more general reality "out there" - a national reality. And there, in that reality, we can join together in the secret of Jewish togetherness.

Shabbat Shalom | www.ou.org

Parashat Bo: Not your friendly pulpit rabbi, and seder in a foxhole

Rav Nachman Kahana

Parashat Bo 5767

Part One: Virtual Reality

In last week's parasha, Shemot, Moshe Rabbeinu bursts onto the stage of Jewish history from out of "nowhere".

Moshe is correct in his assessment at the burning bush; that the Jewish leadership and people have no reason to believe that he was sent by HaShem to free them, because he was unknown - a total stranger.

Moshe did not go to cheder with the others of his age, nor did he carry on his back 100 kilo stones - he was firmly entrenched in the palace with the nobility of Egypt.

And now just one week later in this week's parasha, we find ourselves preparing for the demise of the great Moshe. For Chazal teach us that on the first of the month of Shevat Moshe Rabbeinu began his parting soliloquy, which ended 37 days later on the 7th of Adar; that soliloquy being the content of the Book of Devarim.

And in the forty years between Moshe's arrival and his death on Mount Nevo, he continued to remain "unknown". When appearing before the people he wore a mask to cover the rays of light which emerged from his face; he moved his tent outside the area of the general camp and even distanced himself from his immediate family.

Moshe was not your "friendly" pulpit rabbi which every congregation loves. He was, as stated in the Gemara Sanhedrin 6b, a man of the law who opposed compromise among litigants, preferring the strict decisions of halacha.

Why did HaShem choose this personality to be the law-giver to Am Yisrael?

I suggest that herein lays a fundamental fact in who we Jews are vis a vis the world.

Moshe was distant from the nation; so too is the Torah he brought from the heavens not part of man's design in this world; and so too is Am Yisrael not part of the 6 billion people who make up humanity.

Our survival and destiny have no equal in the saga of history. After 2000 years of exile, we have returned to our biblical-historic homeland, after 80 generations of Jews have succeeded in keeping the dream alive and passing it on from the inferno of the Temple's destruction to beyond the inferno of the death camps of Europe.

We are indeed a mysterious entity whose existence defies all understanding.

Many non-Jews are beginning to catch on to this; now we just have to persuade some of our leaders of this truism!

Part Two: Uneven Distribution of Historic Responsibility

Our parsha lays down the rules concerning the Seder night of Pessach. A lamb or goat under one year old is shechted (ritually slaughtered) and roasted as the korban pessach, and eaten by people who previously had subscribed to form a "group" which will be "registered" with this particular korban Pessach. It is to be eaten by all in the same room and a bone may not be broken, and a Jew who does not conform to the Torah laws may not partake of its meat. And there are more details.

Chazal liken the seder meal to the feast Hashem will prepare in the future for the righteous. The Gemara in Pesachim informs us that the menu will include "yayin ha'meshumar" - wine made of grapes preserved from Gan Eden, and meat of the "Shor ha'bar" - the "wild ox". And, of course, flesh of the "livayatan" fish will be an option for those who do not rely on the shechita of the Creator.

The Gemara in Pesachim also relates what will happen at the end of the great feast. A cup of wine will be passed to Avraham Avieniu to recite the birkat ha zeemun. Avraham will refuse on the grounds that he is not worthy because he brought the evil Yishmael into the world.

The cup will be passed to Yitzchak. He too will refuse because he begot the evil Eisav.

Yaakov will receive the cup; he too will refuse because he married two sisters, which was destined to be prohibited by the Torah.

The cup will then be passed to Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe will declare that he does not merit the honor because he did not enter Eretz Yisrael.

It will then be passed to Yehoshua, who will decline because he did not merit to have a male offspring to whom he could convey the mesora (tradition) of the Torah.

Finally, the cup of the mitzva will be passed to King David, who will welcome it and declare that he is worthy of the mitzvah of leading birkat hamazon (grace after meals).

Let's return to the Pessach seder.

Picture a frum family living in any one of the great Torah centers in the galut; they could even be your next door neighbors!

The home of Reb Sender and Mrs. Rayza is impeccable; the result of the great time and energy, not to speak of the money, which the expeditious and skillful ba'alat ha'bayit (woman of the house) has devoted to it.

The sofas and arm chairs in the sitting room, which look so inviting if not for the thick plastic covers which insure that the upholstery retains its "new" look.

The five meter long dining table is covered with the finest Irish linen table cloth. In the middle of the table stands the imposing sterling silver candle sticks handed down from mother to daughter for generations. The china is the finest Rosenthal, with each plate delicately rounded off with a band of gold. The silverware has been put away in favor of goldware in honor of the great night.

On the table, under a hand embroidered silk cloth lay the matzot. On the insistence of the two sons learning in the recently opened Yeshiva Taharas Ha'Torah in Las Vegas (in order to bring the voice of Torah even to the entrance of Gehennom) the matzas are from the first 18 minute batch, guaranteeing that no naughty piece of dough would be hiding in any of the rollers. The hand matzot were personally chosen by the Rebbe of the shteible where the family davens after leaving the central shul which was costing too much. The rebbe assured the boys that the matzas were bubble free with no overturned edges.

The wall to wall carpet is as deep as the grass in the beautiful garden. Above the table hangs the family's pride and joy - a many faceted crystal chandelier, personally chosen by Rayza on the family's last visit to Prague. Reb Sender is wearing his new bekesh, the one with the swirls of blue with a gold buckled gartel. Rayza has just said the Shehechyanu blessing over the \$3000 dress imported from Paris. The boys are handsome in their wide brimmed black hats and the two girls will make beautiful kallahs when the time comes, dressed in their very expensive dresses.

The seder goes better than expected. Words of Torah, beginning with an invitation to the hungry to join with them in the meal, despite the fact that there is not a needy person within 50 miles. A lively discussion develops on the characters of the "four sons". The afikomen is "stolen": by the youngest daughter who for its return has succeeded in extorting from abba a vacation in Hawaii.

Songs of thanks to Hashem for freeing the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt are recited. For it is a mitzva on this night for each person to consider himself as if he and she were slaves in Mitzrayim.

Birkat hamazon is said, as is the second part of Hallel. Chad Gadya puts the final touch on the mitzvot of the night. Now, just as the Hashem destroys the "Angel of Death in the song, father jumps up and gathering the family in a circle they all break out in a frenzy of song - "Leshana ha'ba'a Be'Yerushalayim" - next year in Jerusalem. Again and again around the table "Leshana ha'ba'a Be'Yerushalayim" is sounded. Louder and louder until their song merges with the same melody resounding from the neighbors' homes, cutting a path into the highest realms of heaven.

Suddenly Mama collapses into a chair crying hysterically. The singing stops. Father runs over and asks why she is crying just now at the apex of the beautiful sacred night?

"What do you mean next year in Yerushalayim? What about the table, the chandelier, the deep carpet, the Rosenthal China! How can we leave all this?"

Father approaches Mama. And taking her hand while gently dabbing her tears away, in a voice full of compassion says to his beloved wife, "Darling, don't cry, IT'S ONLY A SONG!"

Ten thousand kilometers to the east, in Eretz Yisrael, lives Reb Sender's brother Kalman.

Kalman had moved to Eretz Yisrael many years ago, and was blessed with a beautiful family and an adequate apartment. His son, Yossi, will not be home for the Seder night since he is doing his army service within the Hesder yeshiva system.

But the parents are not overly worried, because Yossi himself told them that he is in a safe place in the north, and that next year they will all be together for the seder.

At 12 noon, on the 14th of Nisan, erev Pessach, Yossi and three other soldiers from the same yeshiva, were called to the company commander's room, where he informed them that they have been chosen to fill an assignment that evening, on the Seder night. They were to cross the border into Hisbollah territory in Southern Lebanon and man the out-post bunker on hill 432.

Yossi knew the hill well; he had been there several times in the past year. It was sarcastically called a "bunker", but in reality it was a fox hole large enough for four soldiers. Their assignment was to track terrorist movements and destroy them on contact. It was tolerable except when it rained, which caused the bottom of the hole to be soggy and muddy. But today the four hoped that it would rain, even though chances were small since it was late in the season. On the 14th of every Hebrew month the moon is full, which presents a greater danger when crossing into enemy territory; so rain would be a mixed blessing.

At 5 PM, they were given the necessary arms and ammunition. In addition, the army rabbinate had provided them with 4 plastic containers each holding 3 matzot and all the ingredients necessary for a seder, as well as 4 plastic bottles of wine, sufficient for 4 cups, and of course an Haggada.

At 6 PM they waited at the fence for the electricity to be turned off, in order to cross into hostile territory. Yossi held in his hand a map of the mine field they would have to cross. "It was so strange," Yossi thought, "this is the area assigned to the tribe of Naftali, and we have to enter it crawling on our stomachs."

At 6:15 PM the small aperture in the gate opened and they passed through. As they had hoped, it was raining and the thick fog was to their advantage.

At that moment, ten thousand kilometers to the west, it was 12 noon and Yossi's two cousins in New York were just entering the mikva to prepare for the Pessach holiday.

The 4 soldiers reached hill 432 after walking double time for 5 kilometers. They removed the camouflage and settled in, pulled the grassy cover over them.

Each soldier was assigned a direction. Talking was forbidden. If any murderers were sighted, a light tap on the shoulder would bring them all to the proper direction. After settling in, they prayed ma'ariv and began the seder. In was finished within a half hour, and not unexpectedly, the four cups of "wine" had no detrimental effect on their senses.

At 6 PM in NY, the family returned from shul to begin their seder. It was then 12 midnight in Eretz Yisrael and the four soldiers were waging a heroic battle against boredom and sleep. The minutes crawled by and at the first approach of light they exited their outpost and returned through the mine field and electric fence to the base. After reporting to the officer in charge, the four entered their tent, and collapsed on their cots without removing clothing or shoes, because in an hour they would have to begin the shacharit service.

Lets return to the feast which the gemara in Pesachim describes.

Avraham and Yitzchak would be denied the honor of beginning the blessing because they had sons who were not worthy of being called "Jews".

Ya'akov could not bless because he had a problematic marital situation.

Moshe could not because he did not enter Eretz Yisrael, and Yehoshua because he was not blessed with a son.

The one who Hashem would choose to lead the se'uda blessing would be King David.

How strange! David suffered from all the maladies of those who were denied the privileged of Blessing. He had three sons whose conduct was condemned - Amnon, Avshalom and Adoniyahu.

David too had a problematic marital situation with Batsheva; yet he was the chosen of the Chosen.

What did David have that granted him the greatest honor?

David Hamelech was the king of Israel who fought for the Jewish nation in Eretz Yisrael. He reached the Biblical borders of the promised land as set down in the Torah.

So at the coming Pessach seder, let us raise up our cups to Yossi and his comrades in arms, as they tread in the footsteps of the King of Israel, the Messiah of Israel, chosen by Hashem to lead the Jewish nation in the land in which the Creator resides and commands His nation to dwell within. Shabbat Shalom

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion - Bo Donkey-Holiness

Immediately before leaving Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to commemorate the final plague of “Makkat Bechorot” (the Death of the Firstborn) through the mitzvah of consecrating the firstborn. This mitzvah applies not only to people, but also to kosher animals, and - surprisingly - first-born donkeys: “Every firstling donkey must be redeemed with a sheep” [Ex. 13:13].

Why do donkeys have the holiness of bechor?

The firstborn holiness of donkeys is even more surprising when we consider that these animals are 100% impure. Some non-kosher animals, such as camels and pigs, have only one sign of impurity. Donkeys, however, carry both signs of impurity. The Zohar teaches that the donkey is “avi avot hatuma”, the ultimate source of impurity.

In addition, 16th century Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (the Maharal of Prague) noted that the Hebrew word for donkey (chamur) is the same as the word for material (“chomer”). The donkey, he explained, is a symbol of crassness and physicality [Gevurot Hashem ch. 29]. So why did the Torah designate this ignoble creature to have the special holiness of bechor that must be redeemed?

Hidden Holiness

One explanation proposed by the Talmud [Bechorot 5b] is that the donkeys helped facilitate the Exodus as they carried the treasures of Egyptian gold and silver. Yet the Israelites could have used some other pack animal. It would appear that there is something special about the donkey, that it represents an inner truth about the redemption of the Jewish people, both in Egypt and in the future national rebirth of the Messianic Era.

The Israelites in Egypt had sunk to the lowest levels of immorality and impurity. Outwardly, they were indistinguishable from their Egyptian masters. Even the angels were unable to distinguish between the two nations. They questioned God’s decision to save the Israelites at the Red Sea, protesting, “These are idol worshippers and these are idol worshippers!”

But like the donkey, the impurity of the Jewish people was only on the surface, hiding a great inner holiness. It was a superficial blemish, as it says, “Do not look upon me that I am black; for (it is only) the sun that has tanned me” [Song of Songs 1:6].

Messiah’s Donkey

We find a similar concept with regard to the future redemption. The Sages noted that the Messianic Era is described in conflicting terms. In Daniel’s nighttime vision, the Messianic king arrives “with the clouds of the heaven” [7:13]. The prophet Zechariah, on the hand, speaks of a righteous king who makes his appearance as “a pauper riding on a donkey” [9:9]. So how will the Messiah come - on heavenly clouds, or humbly on a common donkey?

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explained that the form in which the Messiah will appear depends on us. “If they merit, he will come ‘on heavenly clouds.’ If they do not merit, then he will be ‘a pauper riding on a donkey’” [Sanhedrin 98a]. In other words, if the Jewish people attain a spiritual level high enough, they merit a supernatural redemption with wonders and miracles. If, however, the redemption arrives because it is the final hour for its arrival - but the Jewish people are not deserving - then the redemption will come through natural means [see Ohr HaChaim on Num. 24:17].

“A pauper riding on a donkey” is a metaphor for undeserved redemption without our merits, like the poverty of a poor man. It is a redemption based on natural processes, as exemplified by the donkey, a symbol of the

material world. Yet this donkey, while externally crass and impure, has a special holiness hidden within - the holiness of the firstborn.

According to Rav Kook, the Messiah’s donkey represents the period of “Ikveta deMashicha,” the generation when the ‘footsteps’ (ikvot) of redemption are first heard. The Talmud [Sotah 49b] describes this era as one of terrible spiritual decline, replete with brazenness and immorality, falsehood and corrupt government. But the Zohar teaches that, despite its external faults, the generation will be “good on the inside.” This inner goodness is reflected in the special souls of the pre-messianic era; despite the heavy darkness clouding their behavior and beliefs, they are blessed with an innate segulah holiness, as expressed by their great love for the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

The Function of “Chevlei Mashiach”

The Sages recognized the deeply disturbing nature of “Ikveta deMashicha”, using the term “chevlei mashiach”, the birth pangs preceding the Messianic Era. In his seminal work, Orot, Rav Kook discussed various reasons for the intense materialism and lack of spirituality that pervades the era of national revival. His central argument is that the Messianic ‘birth pangs’ come to correct an imbalance stemming from centuries of exile.

Rav Kook explained the process by way of analogy. The dregs in the bottom of the wine bottle are needed to preserve the wine. If a bottle lacks dregs and we wish to correct the situation by adding dregs, the initial effect will be to muddy the entire bottle, temporarily ruining it. But as the dregs settle at the bottom of the bottle, the wine regains its clarity and benefits from the preservative powers of the dregs.

So too, the wicked and the base are needed to ensure the flow of normal life. The Exile, with its concentration on purely spiritual pursuits, weakened the life force of the Jewish people to such an extent that its national survival was endangered. The Jewish people needed to return to their land in order to survive as a nation. The return to the land and to a more balanced national life meant an increased involvement in the material side of life. Initially, the crassness and brazenness of the pre-messianic era will cause great consternation. But as the negative forces are subdued, like the settling of the wine dregs, their alarming and detrimental aspects will be neutralized.

Transforming Darkness to Light

The “Ikveta deMashicha” is a trying time, and not all of the Sages were eager to experience it. Yet Rav Yosef showed great spiritual fortitude, saying, “Let the Messiah come, and may I merit to sit in the shadow of his donkey’s dung” [Sanhedrin 98b]. Once again, the donkey metaphor.

Rav Yosef was accustomed to looking at the inner essence of things. He recognized the tremendous inner holiness hidden in this problematic generation, as symbolized by the Messiah’s donkey. Rav Yosef understood that the Messianic light would demonstrate how to utilize all forces, even the most coarse, for the sake of good. He knew that the darkness of national rebirth would lead to an even greater light of Torah and knowledge of God.

[adapted from Igrot HaRe’iyah vol. II, p. 188, letter 555 (1913) (“Igeret Takana”); Orot p. 85 (Orot HaTechiyah sec. 45)]

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THE ALTER ON THE PARSHA

Shmuessen of Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, Zt”l, the Alter of Slabodka
Adapted from Sefer Ohr HaTzafun

Edited & Compiled by Rabbi Eliezer Grunberg Chaver Kollel Ner David
PARSHAS BO 5767

מוסר הבריאה

The many facets of creation and the unique roles of the various creatures of the world teach us valuable lessons that can propel us to great heights in our service of Hashem.

The Midrash explains that every species has a purpose, even the tiniest insects and the most destructive wild beasts. Hashem created them to be His messengers, to punish the wicked and mete out justice. These creatures fulfill their responsibilities with the utmost dedication, and we must learn from them how meticulous we must be in our own service of Hashem. (שמור ירא, ב”ר י”ד)

The posuk (שמות י"ד:) says, "הנני מביא מהר ארבה בגבולך" - "Tomorrow, I will bring a locust-swarm into your border." The locusts did not proceed beyond the border of Mitzrayim. The Midrash Rabbah (שמו"ר י"ג:) cites the posuk in Yeshaya (כ"ו) "כי כאשר משפטך לארץ צדק למדו", "When Your justice comes to the land, righteousness is learned." Only those that were deserving of punishment were harmed; justice was meted out with perfect righteousness. These creatures served Hashem faithfully and precisely even while on a mission of destruction and despite their inherent destructive nature.

Surely, a human being, the crowning glory of creation, must be extremely careful never to overstep the boundaries of Bein Adam Lachaveiro and infringe upon another person's rights. Every action that man takes should be in accordance with Hashem's will and be carried out with the utmost precision.

But the lessons of Hashem's creation go much further than simply being loyal and refraining from overstepping our boundaries. The foundation of the universe is kindness, as the posuk in Tehillim (פ"ט) says, "עולם חסד" - "A world of kindness, He will build"; every creature's mission is to perform kindness. Hashem's messengers to punish the wicked are, at the same time, doing chessed for the victims of oppression.

The frogs, lice, locusts and wild animals were saving millions of Jews from the persecution and slavery of the Egyptians. The plagues also brought peace to the Egyptians and their neighbors by determining the exact borders of each country (ע' שמו"ר י"ב). But even these unparalleled acts of kindness are imperfect in the eyes of Hashem and they are not enough to justify these creatures' existence.

Chazal (ב"ר ל"ג:) tell us that Noach did not want to take the raven into the ark, because the raven is selfish and behaves with cruelty even to its own children, and Noach did not see a purpose in its existence. Hashem, however, told Noach that the raven would serve an important purpose in the future by bringing food to Eliyahu HaNavi in his time of need and should therefore be saved with the rest of the animals.

Surely, the raven, like the frogs, lice, locusts and wild animals serves, at times, as a messenger of Hashem to punish the wicked and liberate the oppressed. Nevertheless, that kindness entails an inherent aspect of cruelty that renders the chessed incomplete. Only the one act of total kindness that the raven would perform for Eliyahu HaNavi gave it the merit to exist.

Many creatures were created with cruel natures, and the primary role of these creatures is to cause harm; nevertheless, their existence is dependant on their ability to at times perform acts of perfect kindness. How much more so, is it incumbent upon the human being, whose whole purpose is to emulate the goodness of his Creator, to continuously strive to benefit others and beautify the universe with acts of pure kindness.

MAZEL TOV to AVRUMI KESSLER on becoming Bar Mitzvah - The Kessler family

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YatedUSA Parshas Bo 7 Shevat 5767
Halacha Discussion
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Which Festive Occasions May a Mourner Attend?

When a close relative passes away, the family is required to sit shivah, followed by a three-week period of less "severe" mourning called sheloshim. One who loses a parent observes a full year of mourning, starting with the day of burial and ending twelve months later.² This extended period of mourning, known as "twelve months," was instituted by the Sages in order to pay proper respect to parents. Since a child is obligated to honor parents even after their death, the mourning period for parents is longer than for any other relative.³ [A child should not mourn for "twelve months" if a parent explicitly requested that he not do so.]⁴

One of the main features of this extended mourning period is the restriction on attending festive meals which take place outside of the mourner's home.⁵ In the view of the Rabbis, partaking of festive meals outside of one's home is inappropriate for one who is in mourning. But what exactly constitutes a festive meal and what does not is a subject of much debate among the Rishonim and is further complicated by the various customs which have evolved over the years. What follows is an attempt to clarify the sources so that the reader can present his specific case to his rabbi for a ruling.⁶

Note: Our discussion only covers the mourning period known as "twelve months." The laws for shivah [or sheloshim for a parent⁷] are stricter and are not the subject of this discussion.

The views of the Rishonim

There are different views among the Rishonim⁸ as to the type of meal which is restricted. [Note that only the meal is restricted. It is clearly permitted for a mourner to attend a bris, a pidyon ha-ben or any other mitzvah ceremony (other than a wedding) before the meal begins.⁹] The following are three main views:

1. The restriction applies only to meals which are strictly of a social nature and have no religious significance (seudas ha-reshus). Any mitzvah celebration, e.g., a wedding, bris, bar mitzvah, etc., may be attended.¹⁰
2. The restriction applies [mainly¹¹] to meals of mitzvah celebration such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, brisim, etc. This is because the mitzvah itself lends a festive atmosphere to the occasion. There are two exceptions: 1) Weddings – if the absence of the mourner will cause great distress to the groom or bride and mar their simchah¹²; and 2) A meal which the mourner is obligated to eat, such as Korban Pesach or ma'aser sheini during the time of the Beis ha-Mikdash.¹³
3. The restriction applies only to weddings [or Sheva Berachos] and remains in effect even if the absence of the mourner will cause distress to the groom or bride.¹⁴ Other mitzvah celebrations, such as a bris, pidyon ha-ben, bar mitzvah or siyum, are permitted.¹⁵

The view of the Shulchan Aruch

Shulchan Aruch deals with this issue from two different angles. First, the Rama rules that the basic halachah is a compromise between the second and the third views listed above. Thus he rules that all mitzvah celebrations — other than weddings — may be attended [as in the third view], and even a wedding may be attended if the simchah will be marred by the mourner's absence [as in the second view].

But after positing all of the above, the Rama goes on to say that it has become the custom that a mourner does not attend any meal outside of his home, neither meals of a social nature [as in the first view] nor any type of seudas mitzvah, including a bris or a pidyon ha-ben. While the Rama's custom is recorded in all of the later poskim and has become the accepted minhag Yisrael, there are conflicting opinions as to whether the custom covers all meals outside the home or whether there are some exceptions. Some poskim mention a siyum¹⁶ or a seudas bar mitzvah¹⁷ as exceptions,¹⁸ while others specifically include them in the Rama's ban and prohibit attending them.¹⁹

The Rama's custom notwithstanding, it is clear that a mourner is not forbidden to eat a meal outside of his home if otherwise he would not have a place to eat. Thus it is permitted, for example, to invite an out-of-town mourner who needs a place to eat,²⁰ or to invite a mourner's family for supper when circumstances have made it difficult for them to prepare their own food.

Does it make a difference if it is Shabbos or Yom Tov?

Some poskim²¹ maintain that the Rama's custom of not eating meals outside of the mourner's home applies only to weekday meals; on Shabbos it is permitted to attend certain meals,²² e.g., a bris, a seudas Shabbos or a group seudah shelishis.²³ Other poskim do not agree with this leniency and do not differentiate between Shabbos and weekdays.²⁴

But most poskim agree that a relative who is a mourner²⁵ – whose absence from a simchah will surely be felt or noted by the participants – may attend any meal on Shabbos, even a Sheva Berachos meal. This is because it is

prohibited to make a public display of mourning on Shabbos.²⁶ If people will notice that a relative who should be there is not present, it is as if the “mourning” is taking place publicly.²⁷

Where no meal is served

The Shulchan Aruch quoted above discusses only attending a meal outside of the mourner’s home. There is no mention, however, about partaking in a simchah where only refreshments or snacks are served.

Harav S.Z. Auerbach was asked whether the Rama’s custom refers only to meals eaten outside of the home or also to attending a kiddush or a simchah where refreshments are served. He answered that a mourner is permitted to attend such a kiddush or a simchah, congratulate the celebrants, partake minimally of the food and then leave.²⁸ He noted that even such limited participation should be avoided if there is dancing or music being played.

Harav Auerbach added that it is permitted to attend in this limited fashion, only in order to celebrate a simchah or a mitzvah observance. It is prohibited, however, for a mourner to attend any function whose purpose is purely social. Thus it is prohibited for a mourner to invite people to his house, or to go to other people’s homes, for a social gathering even if no meal is served.²⁹

Attending a wedding: special circumstances

As previously stated, a mourner may not attend a wedding celebration. Nor may he enter a wedding hall while a wedding is taking place, even if he will not be eating there or actively participating in the wedding.

There are three views quoted in Shulchan Aruch³⁰ about attending the chupah only³¹: Some allow it; others allow it only if the chupah takes place outside of the wedding hall, e.g., in a shul [or outdoors]; others prohibit even that,³² and require the mourner to stand outside the shul [or hall] while the chupah is taking place.³³

Upon consultation with a rabbi, there could be room for leniency to allow the following mourners to attend a wedding:

- Parents and grandparents of the groom and bride.³⁴
- Siblings [who have been living together in one home].³⁵
- A shoshvin (one who escorts the bride or groom to the chupah).³⁶
- For the sake of family harmony (shalom bayis).³⁷
- If otherwise there will be no minyan at the wedding.³⁸
- The mesader kiddushin.³⁹
- A cantor, sexton, musician, photographer, or anyone whose livelihood depends upon being present.⁴⁰
- In certain unique situations, when the absence of a relative will seriously interfere with the happiness of the groom or bride.⁴¹

Rama quotes a view that any mourner may attend a wedding if he serves as a waiter⁴² and does not partake of the food while in attendance at the wedding dinner. It has become customary that only relatives rely on this leniency.⁴³

Note: In a previous column (Parashas Shemos) the subject of affectionate physical contact between a brother and a sister (and an uncle and a niece), was reviewed. A number of prominent Rabbonim have pointed out that the basic halachah quoted in that column can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. For practical halachic ruling on this (and every other) subject, one should consult with his rav or halachic authority.

(Footnotes)

1 Mishnah Berurah 568:44.

2 During a leap year, no mourning is observed during the thirteenth month; the restrictions end after twelve months.

3 Igros Moshe Y.D. 1:255. See Nekudos ha-Kesef Y.D. 402 on Taz 9.

4 Shach Y.D. 344:9.

5 It is permitted to take part in any meal (except a wedding) which takes place at the mourner’s home; Rama Y.D. 391:2. When possible, Sheva Berachos should be avoided as well; see Pnei Baruch, pg. 214, note 30, and pg. 460; Nishmas Yisrael, pg. 294.

6 Each case must be evaluated on its own merit, as sometimes there are extenuating circumstances, such as family obligations or shalom bayis issues, which may affect the final decision.

7 Sheloshim observed for other relatives generally follows the same guidelines as the “twelve months” for a parent.

8 There are also various interpretations among the latter authorities in explanation of the views of the Rishonim. Here, we have followed mainly the interpretation of the Aruch ha-Shulchan.

9 Gesher ha-Chayim 21:8-5.

10 Smag, quoted in Beis Yosef Y.D. 391, but not directly quoted in Shulchan Aruch.

11 Apparently, this view also holds that festive meals of a social nature are prohibited [since this is stated explicitly in Moed Katan 22b], but it still maintains that mitzvah celebrations are stricter.

12 Ra’avad, quoted by Rama, as explained by Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 391:5. [The actual situation described in the source deals with the wedding of an orphan.] See, however, Noda b’Yehudah Y.D. 1:100, who maintains that this exception applies only if the wedding will otherwise be canceled.

13 Accordingly, this exception does not apply nowadays. [See Radvaz on Rambam, Hilchos Aveil 6:6 for an explanation.]

14 Ramban, as explained by Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 391:6. If the mourner’s absence will cause the wedding to be canceled, it would be permitted to attend; *ibid*.

15 Nimukei Yosef, quoted by Rama Y.D. 391:3. According to this opinion, attending a bris is questionable, since it is debatable whether or not a bris is considered a festive occasion; Rama, *ibid*.

16 See Shach Y.D. 246:27, as apparently understood by Rav Akiva Eiger, Dagul Mirevavah and Pischei Teshuvah in Y.D. 391. See also Gesher ha-Chayim 21:8-6; 22:2-6. According to this view, it is permitted to attend a melaveh malkah whose purpose is to raise funds for charity if no music is played; She’arim Metzuyanim b’Halachah 212:1; Nishmas Yisrael, pg. 274.

17 See sources quoted in note 115. This applies only to the meal that takes place on the day of the bar mitzvah or if the bar mitzvah boy recites a drashah. [Contemporary poskim note that nowadays the custom is to be stringent concerning a bar mitzvah; Pnei Baruch, pg. 224, note 63.]

18 Provided that no music is played; She’arim Metzuyanim b’Halachah 212:1.

19 Chochmas Adam 161:2; Derech ha-Chayim; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 212:1; Tuv Ta’am v’Da’as 3:86. But even according to this view it is permitted to attend a siyum if the mourner himself is the mesayem (Beis Lechem Yehudah Y.D. 391:2; see Mishnah Berurah 669:8), or if the siyum is being held in memory of the deceased (Nishmas Yisrael, pgs. 261-262).

20 See Da’as Kedoshim Y.D. 391, who permits eating in a hotel.

21 She’elas Yaavetz 2:180; Rav Efrayim Z. Margaliyos, 26; Kol Bo, pg. 361; Gesher ha-Chayim, pg. 233.

22 But a Sheva Berachos, etc., is prohibited even according to this view.

23 Eating these meals in the company of friends enhances the special Shabbos atmosphere. If the purpose of the meal is purely social, however, it may be prohibited according to all views.

24 Pischei Teshuvah 391:2 and 4; Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:161. Seemingly, this is also the view of all the major poskim who do not differentiate between Shabbos and Yom Tov.

25 Or a close friend; Tzitz Eliezer (Even Yaakov 56).

26 Even during the shivah or sheloshim.

27 She’elas Yaavetz 2:180; Rav Efraim Z. Margaliyos, 26; Pischei Teshuvah 391:4; Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:161. There is an opinion (Shach Y.D. 393:7) that holds that a public show of mourning is only prohibited during the Shabbos of the shivah. If so, this leniency does not apply; Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchasah 65:66.

28 Minchas Shelomo 2:96-12. According to Harav Auerbach’s opinion, apparently, it is permitted to attend any simchah where no actual meal is served. While there certainly are sources upon which this decision may be based (see Teshuvah Me’ahavah 3:77-1), it is not clear whether all poskim are in agreement; see Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:161 who allows attending a shalom zachar only if the mourner’s absence will be noticed.

29 This ruling is based on the words of the Shulchan Aruch and Taz Y.D. 385:1, Teshuvos Binyan Olam 62 and Gesher ha-Chayim 21:7-9.

30 Y.D. 391:3. See Aruch ha-Shulchan 12.

31 Chupah means the actual ceremony [even though music is being played; Shevet ha-Levi 1:213]. It does not include the reception after the chupah.

32 Unless the mourner is honored with reciting a berachah under the chupah.

33 While there is no clear decision or binding custom, the Rama seems to rule according to the second view, and Gesher ha-Chayim 21:8-4 writes that this has become the custom.

34 Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 391:10; Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:171 and O.C. 4: 40-16 [who permits parents to attend a child’s wedding even during shivah]; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchasah 65:66 and Tikunim u’Miluim) concerning Sheva Berachos.

35 Gilyon Maharsha Y.D. 391:1.

36 Some poskim permit a shoshvin to attend the wedding but not to partake of the food, while others allow him to eat if he also “serves a little bit.”

37 Igros Moshe Y.D. 1:255; Tzitz Eliezer (Even Yaakov 56-9).

38 Rav Akiva Eiger; Y.D. 391:3.

39 He should not, however, partake of the meal; Kol Bo, pg. 360.

40 See Kol Bo, pg. 360; Gesher ha-Chayim 21:8-3; Pnei Baruch, pg. 227, note 73.
41 Tzitz Eliezer (Even Yaakov 56). Not all poskim agree with this leniency.
42 A "waiter" means serving the entire meal, just like any other waiter who is employed by the caterer; Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Pnei Baruch, pg. 216, note 35.
43 Gesher ha-Chayim 21:8-11.

THE WEEKLY DAF :: Ta'anit 16 - 22
For the week ending 27 January 2007 / 8 Shevat 5767
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach
COMPLAIN TO THE MANUFACTURER

"Shalom Aleichem, Rebbe," said the stranger to Rabbi Elazar ben Shimon. Rabbi Elazar was returning home from his studies in Migdal Gedor in an exceedingly good mood because of the vast amount of Torah knowledge he had acquired at the Yeshiva.

The sage was so put off by the exceptional ugliness of his greeter that, instead of returning the greeting, he remarked on the greeter's unpleasant appearance and asked him if all the people where he came from were equally ugly.

"I don't know about that," replied the ugly stranger, "but I suggest that you go to the manufacturer who created me and complain to Him about how ugly His creation is."

When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had deeply hurt the stranger he begged his forgiveness. But the latter was adamant in refusing to forgive him until he "brought his complaint to the manufacturer." All the way home he rode behind the stubborn stranger imploring his forgiveness until they finally reached his city where a crowd came out to welcome him with cries of "Shalom Aleichem, our rabbi and teacher."

Now it was the stranger's turn to embarrass the sage and he related to the townspeople what had transpired between them. They begged him to nevertheless forgive him because of his greatness in Torah, and he consented to do so on the condition that the sage not make such behavior habitual.

The commentaries explain that the mysterious stranger was the Prophet Eliyahu in disguise who appeared in this fashion in order to teach the sage a lesson. Maharsha points out that Rabbi Elazar had assumed that there was something morally corrupt about the man which was reflected in his external appearance, just as wisdom is reflected in the visage of a wise man. Such an assumption did not, however, justify rude behavior, and Eliyahu's response cured him of it. (Ta'anit 20a)

CITIZENS OF THE WORLD TO COME

"Is there anyone in this marketplace of Beilafit who is a citizen of the World to Come?" This was the question posed by Rabbi Broka of Chozah to someone who was privy to such heavenly secrets the Prophet Eliyahu.

Although the prophet was at first hard pressed to find someone of such status among the throngs in the busy marketplace, he did eventually point to two brothers who passed before them and identified them as citizens of the World to Come. The sage was curious to know what these two ordinary looking people had done to deserve that title, so he asked them what they were involved in.

"We are happy people who make other people happy," they replied. "When we see someone depressed we cheer him up, and if we see two people quarrelling we make fun of their situation until they make peace."

Rashi explains their peacemaking role as a ticket to the World to Come on the basis of our Sages teaching that one who brings peace between one man and another is rewarded both in this world and in the World to Come.

The connection between cheering up a depressed person and the World to Come, writes Maharsha, can be understood through what our Sages say about Hashem empathizing with the suffering of a sinner executed for his crime by declaring, "How heavy is My head, how heavy is My arm."

Every Jew, say our Sages, has a share in the World to Come. But his connection with it is only in the hereafter. Rabbi Broka was looking for a "citizen" of that world whose life reflected those other-worldly values and who was only a "tourist" in this world. Those two entertainers had that other-worldly perspective of Hashem being unhappy, as it were, if one of

His creatures was unhappy. Their sensitivity to Hashem's happiness which motivated them to cheer up a depressed person proved that they were indeed "citizens" of the World to Come even while here on earth. (Ta'anit 22a)

DEEPER INSIGHTS :: Ta'anit 16 - 22
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THROW AWAY THE DEAD RODENT! Ta'anit 16a

What is considered a complete teshuva (repentance) for sin?

A profound insight is offered in our gemara by Rabbi Ada bar Ahaba:

"One who has sinned and confessed his sin but has not really retracted is similar to one who has become ritually impure by holding on to a dead rodent and immerses himself in a mikveh to purify himself while still holding on to the dead rodent. He may immerse himself in all of the waters in the world but they will not purify him. Once he throws away the dead rodent, any mikveh will make him pure."

Rambam (Laws of Teshuva 2:3) uses this statement as a basis for his prescription for complete teshuva but uses the term "makes up his mind to abandon the sin" rather than "retracted" which appears in the gemara. This change may be understood in light of what he writes in the preceding paragraph where he mentions the different components of teshuva: Regret for the past, verbal confession of the sin, and a resolution not to repeat it are all mentioned, but he also adds the need to "abandon the sin".

Retraction and regret are certainly vital to the process of teshuva, but if one does not analyze the root of the sin which he has committed - the underlying weakness of character which caused him to go wrong - he is indeed like one who attempts to achieve purity while holding on to the dead rodent which will contaminate him over and over. It is like someone who takes an aspirin to cure an illness that requires surgery.

Throw away the dead rodent, urges the Sage, and get rid of your problem so that you can achieve a complete return.

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"One should always be as flexible as a reed and not as unyielding as a cedar. This is why a reed has merited to have made from it a quill to write a Sefer Torah, tefillin and mezuzot."

Rabbi Elazar ben Shimon -Ta'anit 20b

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