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With the Divine Will
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Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Synchronization of the Natural Order With the Divine Will

This parsha has the unique distinction of being the organic beginning of the Torah. Rashi, in the famous opening lines to his peirush on Chumash, quotes the midrash which asks,

"shouldn't the Torah have started with the portion of 'hachodesh hazeh lochem', which is the first mitzvah that Israel was commanded? Why does the Chumash start with Bereishis? [The answer is] ...so that if the nations of the world will accuse Israel of being thieves by dint of having conquered the Land [of Israel] from the seven nations, they will reply that the entire world is G-d's; He created it and gave it to whom was fit in His eyes. He gave it to them by dint of His will, and by dint of His will took it from them and gave it to us."

This Rashi certainly can't mean that this will convince the nations of the world of anything. It hasn't for the last millennia, and by all accounts does not seem to be doing so now. Additionally, starting the Torah with hachodesh hazeh lochem seems odd. If we are meant to start the Torah with the world of mitzvos, then surely it is mattan Torah that we should start with. The Rambam (Peirush Hamishnayos) famously states that the validity of any mitzvah starts with the Sinaitic revelation. Any mitzvah given before [i.e. millah or gid hanasha] is still in effect only because it was repeated at Sinai. Why, then, would it be proper to start the Torah at our parsha?

To understand the fundamental difference between Bereishis and "hachodesh hazeh lochem", we will need to examine to fundamental contexts of "universe": natural/determined, versus "willed"/ choice. On the one hand we can posit that the most basic structure of our universe is "law and order", which fits so well with our experience of the immutable natural laws. In this context Hashem appeared and commanded particular deeds to be performed, and prohibited particular activities.

On the other hand, one may posit a supernatural context, wherein everything is the "will of G-d" and the natural order as such is but a temporary - albeit long-lived - particular "will of Hashem".

If we are to ask what is the most basic unit of our universe, we may well answer: time. It is the most unbending and unyielding of the four dimensions [Einstein aside.]

Thus Bereishis begins with time: In the beginning. The core unto of time is a day. There was night and daytime, forming "one day." This is the natural world, and time is immutable. "What was before" is irrelevant, and from the point of Bereishis on, day is a fixed unit of time. The holy day which comes out of this arrangement is Shabbos, which is characterized as "k'vi'ih v'kaymi - fixed and immutable."

But there is another unit of time called chodesh. This is an inherently fluctuating unit, as it has no direct correlation with "days"; any given month can be longer or shorter. But more importantly, its halachic status is given to change. The length of the month and its position in the year are set by humans. Humans act not only as observers of the passage of months, but we actually can add or subtract a month, as per our need.

Thus in the first model, time is fixed and man is the variable; in the second model man is fixed, i.e. aTEM, and time is variable.

The nations of the world have seven mitzvos, corresponding to the seven days of creation. Their world's framing context is a fixed natural order within which G-d is omnipotent. The additional mitzvos that we have are not simply more of the same, but rather are a function of a different contextualization of our existence. Chazal teach us that the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos represent the elements of the human body. It is the Torah of man, rather than the Torah of the world.

It would therefore not be adequate to being the Torah at mattan Torah. We must start with redefining the universe itself, such that man is the at the core and is the central point of reference of existence, and time is his obedient servant. The corresponding alternative to Bereishis is hachodesh hazeh lochem, not the Aseres Hadibros. And, indeed, the Torah's real Genesis is hachodesh hazeh.

Hashem did not want to leave creation distributed between two frameworks, one centered on temporality and one anthropocentric, which did not interface with each other. Such a bifurcation would run counter to Hashem's unity.

Translating this to the world of ethics, this would mean that a system in the universe in which Hashem was ethical according to a Torah viewpoint but seemingly unjust from the perspective of a [Divinely imbued] universal morality is unacceptable. Rather, Hashem engineered a universe in which the various articulations of His will all point in the same direction, and according to which Eretz Yisroel is understandably and justly ours from both perspectives - the perspective of hachodesh and the perspective of Bereishis.

The remarkable unity between the framework centered on time and the anthropocentric framework was not put into place to convince the nations of the world of the validity of our claim to Eretz Yisroel. Rather it was created to teach us that Torah is true both from our particularistic morality and according to its reflection in universal morality as well.

Mishpetei hashem Emmes, Tzadku Yachdav!

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

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date: Jan 10, 2019, 10:59 PM

subject: Rav Frand - Rambam Min HaTorah – Minayin? / Now You Are In Charge

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1061 Rosh Chodesh Bentching (Bircas Ha'chodesh). Good Shabbos!

Rambam Min HaTorah – Minayin? (Where is Maimonides Alluded to in Chumash?)

As we all know, the Rambam played a major role in the development of Klal Yisrael. It is axiomatic that every major development in Jewish history is alluded to in the Torah. The Vilna Gaon was once asked – where is the name of the Rambam alluded to in the Torah? The Vilna Gaon cited a pasuk in Parshas Bo: “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Pharaoh will not listen to you, in order to increase My wonders in the land of Egypt (Revos Mofsai B’eret Mitrayim).’” [Shmos 11:9]. The beginning letters of the words Revos Mofsai B’eret Mitrayim are Reish Mem Beis Mem – Rambam.

This is amazing because the Rambam was in fact a “wonder” in the land of Egypt. He lived a great part of his life in Eretz Mitrayim because he was persecuted in his home country of Spain. He ran away to Egypt where he lived in Alexandria and became the court physician. He literally became a “mofes” [wonder] in the Sultan’s court. He writes that lines of patients waited hours to see him. Despite all this, he authored his major works of Jewish scholarship that made a lasting impression on all subsequent Rabbinic literature. This is a Wonder. Thus, the Gaon pointed out that the words Revos Mofsai B’eret Mitrayim allude to Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, both in terms of their meaning and in terms of the acronym.

Now You Are In Charge

The first mitzva that Klal Yisrael receives as a nation is “This month (Nissan) shall be for you the first of the months...” [Shmos 12:2] The Jewish Court is obligated to establish the months of the year based on the sighting of the new moon. Then, based on the proclamations of the new month, Beis Din establishes the dates of the Jewish holidays (Yomim Tovim).

Immediately after the above-cited pasuk, the Torah launches into the mitzvos associated with the Korban Pesach [Paschal offering] including the associated mitzvos of eating Matzah and Marror. This is all in Parshas Bo.

If you and I had to pick what should be the first mitzva that Klal Yisrael would receive as the Chosen Nation, I do not think any of us would have suggested that that mitzva should be “This month shall be for you the first of the months...” True, it is a positive commandment. Beis Din needs to do it on behalf of Klal Yisrael. However, we would not consider it a “fundamental mitzva.”

Actually, if we wanted to pick a positive mitzva to be the “inaugural mitzva for Klal Yisrael”, Korban Pesach is an excellent choice. Korban Pesach together with Mitzvas Milah [the mitzva to circumcise] are the only two positive mitzvos for which failure to fulfill them makes a person liable to receive the punishment of Kares [excision from the nation]. In the hierarchy of importance of positive mitzvos, the Pesach [sacrifice] ranks almost at the top if not at the top of the list.

Yet, that is not the first mitzva. Since this entire parsha – from that point on – is about Pesach, it is logical to start the enumeration of mitzvos with the mitzva to offer the Paschal sacrifice. Why then, did Hashem choose the setting up of the calendar system as the very first mitzva that Klal Yisrael received as a nation?

The Kli Yakar gives a very practical answer to this question. In order to observe the Yom Tov of Pesach, we need to begin by establishing the New Moon of the month of Nissan (so that we will be able to determine when Pesach occurs).

I recently picked up a sefer called Chikrei Lev from a Rabbi Label Hyman, who was the Rav of the “Gra Shul” in the Bayit Vegan neighborhood of Jerusalem. [He writes in the introduction to his sefer that he is originally a Baltimorean who went to the Talmudical Academy (T.A.). He has a whole section mentioning old time Baltimorean rabbis and educators who had an influence on him.] He wrote a beautiful piece analyzing why Beis Din’s duty to proclaim Rosh Chodesh is in fact the first mitzva.

His basic point is that something very significant happened to Klal Yisrael when they were given this mitzva and the power to make Rosh Chodesh: They were given power over the moon. If we look in Sefer Bereshis [1:18], one of the first times that the Torah refers to the moon it says “And to rule in

the day and in the night...” The sun rules during the day and the moon rules at night. The moon is a force in creation. The Ramban writes in his Commentary to Bereshis that the tides and the waters of the world are all dependent on the moon. The moon has dominion over significant aspects of nature. When Klal Yisrael was given the power to declare Rosh Chodesh – they were empowered over one of the most powerful phenomenon in the world, namely the moon. Not only were they given the power over the moon, they were given the power over the calendar as well.

In fact, Chazal say that until this point in history, the Ribono shel Olam established when the Yomim Tovim occurred. Chazal say that Yitzchak was born on Pesach, Avraham ate matzah, and Yaakov and Eisav brought the tasty dishes to their father (to receive their blessings), all on Pesach. Who determined the timing of Yom Tov? The Medrash says that the Almighty established when the holidays occurred. At that point in history, the power of establishing the calendar was relegated to Him. Now He gave that power to Klal Yisrael.

It is an unbelievable power. When Beis Din decides which day is Rosh Hashanna, it automatically determines which day is Yom Kippur (ten days later). If Beis Din decides, for whatever reason (and the halacha is that even if they made a mistake in their calculations, whether willfully or un-willfully their proclamation is the final word on the matter). If Rosh HaShanna is on Monday, then Yom Kippur will be on Wednesday. Even if the Ribono shel Olam in Heaven knows that this is not the way it is supposed to really be, if Beis Din said that Wednesday is Yom Kippur then that is when Yom Kippur will be. If someone eats on Wednesday, he deserves Kares. If someone does not eat on Tuesday, he will be making a mistake. That is giving unbelievable power to Klal Yisrael.

The Gemara [Rosh HaShanna 8b] states, “This teaches that the Heavenly Court does not enter into Judgment until the “Lower Court” sanctifies the New Moon.” Rosh HaShanna is a very powerful day. All creatures in the world pass before Him like “bnei Maron.” The Ribono shel Olam sits in judgement on the entire world. Who will live and who die? Who determines when this auspicious day takes place? The Gemara says that the Almighty tells his Angels, “I am not going to sit in Judgment of the world until the Earthly Court establishes which day is the New Moon and therefore Rosh HaShanna.

This is an amazing power and that is the reason that this had to be the first mitzva. When a person is a slave, he is powerless. The only thing that can elevate a person out of this stage of servitude is to give the person amazing power. The Ibn Ezra writes there is nothing harder for a human being than to be a slave to another human being. Turning a nation that has been enslaved for 210 years into a free people requires a dramatic shift in their psychological mentality. The most effective way to accomplish that is to give them power – amazing power: Let them know that “Now you are in charge.”

This is the medicine that was needed to remove their slave mentality. That is why Kiddush HaChodesh had to be the first mitzva.

However, there is a major problem with power. As the 19 century British historian, Lord Acton, said: “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” So what is the antidote to that? The antidote to that is to look at the story of the moon.

Chazal say that the moon complained to the Ribono shel Olam and said, “Two kings cannot share one crown.” In other words, both the sun and the moon were given dominion over the heavens and such a “division of power” is simply not feasible. According to the Medrash, the Almighty accepted the argument of the moon and therefore diminished its power. From that point forward, the moon and the sun were no longer co-equal powers, but rather, Hashem ordered the moon to diminish itself.

The Medrash continues that at that point, the moon protested – “Because I offered a valid argument, I should be punished? I was right – two equal kings is not a feasible arrangement!” The Almighty then responded, “You are right – I will give you a reward. You are called ‘the small light’ (haMaor

haKatan). Yaakov Avinu was called 'katan'; Dovid HaMelech was called 'katan'. I am going to call the greatest people in history after you – they too are going to be called 'katan'. Not only that, but when you come out at night, I am going to give you billions of stars to accompany you."

This does not make any sense. The moon apparently did something wrong. The Ribono shel Olam punished the moon. Then the moon comes back and said "But that is not fair!" and the Ribono shel Olam responds, "Yes, you are right. Therefore, I am going to reward you..."

Did the moon do something wrong or did it not do something wrong?

Rabbi Hyman says a beautiful idea. Hashem told the moon to make itself smaller. It could have fulfilled the Divine Command by making itself 5% smaller than the sun. I do not know the exact proportions but the moon is far smaller than the sun. Furthermore, the moon could have just made itself smaller. It did not need to give up its own source of light (which it apparently originally had) such that it is now just a reflection of the sun. Why did the moon do that? In fulfilling the Divine Command, it did not just perfunctorily obey the command. It learned its lesson. It had been too haughty, it had been too proud and now when told to "minimize itself," it fulfilled this mitzva "mit alle hidurim" [above and beyond the requirements of the law and the call of duty]. The moon made itself a shining example of what it means to be humble. So now, the moon demonstrates what it means to have power, but to know how to handle that power.

Therefore, as a "consolation prize," the Ribono shel Olam says, "You are going to have billions of stars and I am going to name great people after you." The Chikrei Lev writes that is also the lesson of the mitzva of proclaiming the new moon. I gave you amazing power. You have control over the moon and you establish when the Yomim Tovim occur. You establish when Rosh HaShanna and Yom Kippur occur. You are in control. But never forget the lesson of the moon. Never forget that too much power can go to a person's head and it can corrupt.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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Weekly Parsha BO

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

At the beginning of this week's Torah reading Moshe is commanded by God to come to Pharaoh. The commentators of the Bible all deal with the strange verb used in this commandment. What does "bo" mean here – to come to Pharaoh? Should not a different verb such as approach or visit Pharaoh have been used? Since Hebrew is a very exact language, and as I have often mentioned, the opinion of the great Rabbi Elijah of Vilna is that there are no synonyms in the Torah. So, this word "bo" must carry with it a special significance, a nuanced insight that the Torah wishes to communicate to those who read and study its written word.

Among the many interpretations regarding this use of the word "bo," I find it fascinating that many commentators say that the word does not really mean 'to come,' but means 'to come into.' Moshe is instructed to come into the

psyche of Pharaoh, who has been afflicted with many plagues and yet remains stubborn and unyielding regarding freeing the Jewish people from bondage in Egypt. By understanding the psychology of Pharaoh, they will realize that Pharaoh's behavior is illogical, unrealistic and self-destructive. Pharaoh himself is vaguely aware that this is the case and every so often he offers to compromise with Moshe and grant some sort of temporary relief to the Jews from their bondage. Yet, at the end of the matter, Pharaoh remains obstinate and unwilling not only to free the Jews but unwilling to save himself and his nation from destruction.

By delving deeply into the psyche of Pharaoh, coming into him so to speak, Moshe realizes clearly that Pharaoh is no longer an independent agent given to make free and wise choices. Rather, he is now being controlled directly by heaven and it is heaven that has hardened his heart with hatred of the Jews, so that he can no longer even choose to save himself, as any rational human being would do.

Apparently, both in wickedness and goodness, when one has crossed the ultimate line, one's powers to exercise wise choices become diminished and even disappear. The rabbis commented that both love and hate cause people to behave irrationally and out of character for self-preservation and personal honor.

When that point is reached, it becomes apparent then that heavenly guidance has entered the picture and governs even the ultimate freedom of choice ordinarily granted to human beings. This is one of the important lessons that Moshe will learn from his encounter with Pharaoh. It helps explain the behavior of tyrants and megalomaniacs who seem determined to burn their house down while still inside. It also helps explain why righteous people are capable of extraordinary acts of goodness and kindness even at the expense of all rational understanding.

By coming into Pharaoh, by understanding him and by realizing how unhinged he really is, Moshe concludes that there is no point in his negotiating with him further. The Lord has hardened his heart and the Lord will be the sole agent for the redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Against Their Gods (Bo 5779)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The ninth plague – darkness – comes shrouded in a darkness of its own.

What is this plague doing here? It seems out of sequence. Thus far there have been eight plagues, and they have become steadily, inexorably, more serious. The first two, the Nile turning blood-red and the infestation of frogs, seemed more like omens than anything else. The third and fourth, gnats and wild beasts, caused worry, not crisis. The fifth, the plague that killed livestock, affected animals, not human beings.

The sixth, boils, was again a discomfort, but a serious one, no longer an external issue but a bodily affliction. (Remember that Job lost everything he had, but did not start cursing his fate until his body was covered with sores: Job 2.) The seventh and eighth, hail and locusts, destroyed the Egyptian grain. Now – with the loss of grain added to the loss of livestock in the fifth plague – there was no food. Still to come was the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, in retribution for Pharaoh's murder of Israelite children. It would be this that eventually broke Pharaoh's resolve.

So we would expect the ninth plague to be very serious indeed, something that threatened, even if it did not immediately take, human life. Instead we read what seems like an anti-climax:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand towards the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt – darkness that can be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand towards the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. (Exodus 10:21–23)

Darkness is a nuisance, but no more. The phrase “darkness that can be felt” suggests what happened: a khamsin, a sandstorm of a kind not unfamiliar in Egypt, which can last for several days, producing sand- and dust-filled air that obliterates the light of the sun. A khamsin is usually produced by a southern wind that blows into Egypt from the Sahara Desert. The worst sandstorm is usually the first of the season, in March. This fits the dating of the plague which happened shortly before the death of the firstborn, on Pesach.

The ninth plague was doubtless unusual in its intensity, but it was not an event of a kind wholly unknown to the Egyptians, then or now. Why then does it figure in the plague narrative, immediately prior to its climax? Why did it not happen nearer the beginning, as one of the less severe plagues?

The answer lies in a line from “Dayeinu,” the song we sing as part of the Haggadah: “If God had executed judgment against them [the Egyptians] but had not done so against their gods, it would have been sufficient.” Twice the Torah itself refers to this dimension of the plagues:

“I will pass through Egypt on that night, and I will kill every first-born in Egypt, man and animal. I will perform acts of judgment against all the gods of Egypt: I (alone) am God.” (Exodus 12:12)

The Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, struck down by the Lord; and against their gods, the Lord had executed judgment. (Numbers 33:4)

Not all the plagues were directed, in the first instance, against the Egyptians. Some were directed against things they worshipped as gods. That is the case in the first two plagues. The Nile was personified in ancient Egypt as the god Hapi and was worshipped as the source of fertility in an otherwise desert region. Offerings were made to it at times of inundation. The inundations themselves were attributed to one of the major Egyptian deities, Osiris. The plague of frogs would have been associated by the Egyptians with Heket, the goddess who was believed to attend births as a midwife, and who was depicted as a woman with the head of a frog.

The plagues were not only intended to punish Pharaoh and his people for their mistreatment of the Israelites, but also to show them the powerlessness of the gods in which they believed. What is at stake in this confrontation is the difference between myth – in which the gods are mere powers, to be tamed, propitiated or manipulated – and biblical monotheism, in which ethics (justice, compassion, human dignity) constitute the meeting point of God and mankind.

The symbolism of these plagues, often lost on us, would have been immediately apparent to the Egyptians. Two things now become clear. The first is why the Egyptian magicians declared, “This is the finger of God” (Ex. 8:15) only after the third plague, lice. The first two plagues would not have surprised them at all. They would have understood them as the work of Egyptian deities who, they believed, were sometimes angry with the people and took their revenge.

The second is the quite different symbolism the first two plagues were meant to have for the Israelites, and for us. As with the tenth plague, these were no mere miracles intended to demonstrate the power of the God of Israel, as if religion were a gladiatorial arena in which the strongest god wins. Their meaning was moral. They represented the most fundamental of all ethical principles, stated in the Noahide covenant in the words “He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen. 9:6). This is the rule of retributive justice, measure for measure: As you do, so shall you be done to. By first ordering the midwives to kill all male Israelite babies, and then, when that failed, by commanding, “Every boy who is born must be cast into the Nile” (Ex. 1:22), Pharaoh had turned what should have been symbols of life (the Nile, which fed Egyptian agriculture, and midwives) into agents of

death. The river that turned to blood, and the Heket-like frogs that infested the land, were not afflictions as such, but rather coded communications, as if to say to the Egyptians: reality has an ethical structure. See what it feels like when the gods you turned against the Israelites turn on you. If used for evil ends, the powers of nature will turn against man, so that what he does will be done to him in retribution. There is justice in history.

Hence the tenth plague, to which all the others were a mere prelude. Unlike all the other plagues, its significance was disclosed to Moses even before he set out on his mission, while he was still living with Jethro in Midian:

You shall say to Pharaoh: This is what the Lord says. “Israel is My son, My firstborn. I have told you to let My son go, that he may worship Me. If you refuse to let him go, I will kill your own firstborn son.” (Ex. 4:22–23)

Whereas the first two plagues were symbolic representations of the Egyptian murder of Israelite children, the tenth plague was the enactment of retributive justice, as if heaven was saying to the Egyptians: You committed, or supported, or passively accepted the murder of innocent children. There is only one way you will ever realise the wrong you did, namely, if you yourself suffer what you did to others.

This too helps explain the difference between the two words the Torah regularly uses to describe what God did in Egypt: *otot u’moftim*, “signs and wonders.” These two words are not two ways of describing the same thing – miracles. They describe quite different things. A *mofet*, a wonder, is indeed a miracle. An *ot*, a sign, is something else: a symbol (like *tefillin* or *circumcision*, both of which are called *ot*), that is to say, a coded communication, a message.

The significance of the ninth plague is now obvious. The greatest god in the Egyptian pantheon was Ra or Re, the sun god. The name of the Pharaoh often associated with the exodus, Ramses ii, means *meses*, “son of” (as in the name Moses) Ra, the god of the sun. Egypt – so its people believed – was ruled by the sun. Its human ruler, or Pharaoh, was semi-divine, the child of the sun god.

In the beginning of time, according to Egyptian myth, the sun god ruled together with Nun, the primeval waters. Eventually there were many deities. Ra then created human beings from his tears. Seeing, however, that they were deceitful, he sent the goddess Hathor to destroy them; only a few survived.

The plague of darkness was not a *mofet* but an *ot*, a sign. The obliteration of the sun signalled that there is a power greater than Ra. Yet what the plague represented was less the power of God over the sun, but the rejection by God of a civilisation that turned one man, Pharaoh, into an absolute ruler (son of the sun god) with the ability to enslave other human beings – and of a culture that could tolerate the murder of children because that is what Ra himself did.

When God told Moses to say to Pharaoh, “My son, My firstborn, Israel,” He was saying: I am the God who cares for His children, not one who kills His children. The ninth plague was a divine act of communication that said: there is not only physical darkness but also moral darkness. The best test of a civilisation is to see how it treats children, its own and others’. In an age of broken families, neglected and impoverished children, and worse – the use of children as instruments of war – that is a lesson we still need to learn. Shabbat shalom

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Would We Recognize the Ten Plagues Today? by Rabbi Gidon Rothstein

Posted By Gidon Rothstein On August 22, 2010 @ 2:21 pm In Education, New Posts | 7 Comments

Thinking of the question raised in the title of this essay, we might instinctively answer, of course, because we’ve seen this movie so many times before. Were Moses to come today and tell us to do—well, whatever, really, but let’s leave it at abandoning the exile—we’d obviously do it.

But that's a mirage, because it wouldn't happen so obviously; it would happen more something like this:

It wouldn't be Moshe Rabbenu who came to announce our need to leave behind not only our residences but our whole way of approaching the world (as my father a"h used to say each year at the Seder—we were freed not only physically and spiritually from Egypt, but culturally, leaving behind their worldview along with everything else). As my teacher, R. Dr. Haym Soloveitchik used to point out, the Raavad (or other great rabbis) were never born; Avremel (or Moishele) were born, and later became the Raavad, Rambam, Ramban, or whoever.

So this prophet wouldn't be someone instantly recognizable as the greatest leader of our history. It would, instead, be a member of a prominent Jewish family, perhaps with a sibling who was a leader of the Jewish community, but who had spent years out of the country because he had run afoul of the law. And, by the way, we should assume that while some people would recognize he had been right in whatever supposed crime he had committed, others would be equally confident that he was a criminal, that the government had been right to prosecute him.

So after years of hiding, with little or no contact with the US Jewish community, he'd come back one day, with the news that God was going to free us of all our attachments to the United States. Here, the analogy breaks down somewhat, because the US is a benevolent country, completely unlike Egypt; if we focus instead on how the US and the West in general has enslaved much of the Jewish community to its worldview—and this not by coercion, but by how attractive and sensible that worldview seems—we can get back to the hypothetical.

To be a little clearer on what I mean, this Moses might come to free us of our mistaken attachment to Western sexual ethics, to the Western view of the sanctity of life (in which abortion and euthanasia are both reasonable possibilities), and to the extreme Western version of devotion to science, in which scientific principles regularly deny God's power or ability to intervene or abrogate what are deemed laws of Nature (an attitude, incidentally, that carries over into other disciplines—historians, for example, will not only deny the role of Providence as a practical matter of making it impossible to prove anything; they will, many of them, deny it axiomatically).

So Moses and his brother—whose judgment will rapidly become questionable, as it becomes clear just how much he is being influenced by the returned prodigal—would manage to get in to see the President, without authorization. Their success in that, of course, would be the result of an unexplained breakdown in security, not because of any higher Power supporting them.

Once in the Oval Office, this Moses type would convey his message to the President, with the warning that God would visit terrible punishments should that message be ignored. To prove his point, his brother would throw his walking stick on the floor, to have it turn into a snake.

But in the twenty-first century, one of the President's science advisors would just have discovered that a certain species of snake, when handled by a threatening predator, becomes stiff as a staff until the danger passes. Racing back to his office, he, too, would produce a stick that turns into a snake on release.

So Moses would threaten the water supply (and, miraculously, the President would not jail him for making the threat); when, soon after, e coli or other dangerous materials turned up in the water, making it undrinkable, the President's security analysts would deny the miracle, demonstrating numerous holes in our water security, so that any madman could do that. Then, perhaps, nothing would happen for a few weeks (or months), but one day, this Moses would return, announcing that frogs are going to start dying all over the world. When that prediction started coming true (as, incidentally, is happening today), scientists would be puzzled, but would offer numerous hypotheses—none of which could yet be established conclusively, but they would be completely confident that more study would certainly eventually offer a fully natural explanation.

If you've read with me to this point, I suspect you reject the hypothetical as simple-minded, for one of two main reasons. Either you think that it's silly to think such a thing could happen today (as if to say that God only had the power back then to produce such changes of nature), or because you feel confident we'd get it this time.

Aside from the fact that we've had numerous problems with drinking water in the last little while—not to mention more than one major natural disaster, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, with no little loss of life—I was struck by Bergdorf Goodman's recent announcement that they were going to start patrolling their stores with specially trained dogs, who would sniff out any bedbug infestations that might occur. This happened, I believe, because another chain store had had to close down a store to try to deal with their own bedbug problem, as have some high-end hotels.

Now, bedbugs are not lice—the customary translation of ???—so maybe this is totally different. And perhaps readers will point out that we didn't have a prophet announce these plagues ahead of time. Perhaps those are, in fact, crucial differences, and none of the recent events (even just in the US—9/11, Hurricane Katrina, raging wildfires, mudslides, flooding of several rivers, contamination of various water supplies, wildlife disasters, economic dislocation of a once in a generation variety, and, now bedbug infestations—not to mention tsunamis, earthquakes, and mudslides in other parts of the world) have any connection to God. Although I cannot resist noting that bedbugs would be a particularly poetic way for God to react the US' leading role in rejecting God's morality around an activity that mostly takes place in bed.

But I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, so I cannot say any of this with any confidence. Rather, I am here to ask a question one step more theoretical: If God decided to communicate with us in a time when prophecy had not yet been restored, and God's message was that we needed to question fundamental assumptions we make about the culture we inhabit, how would God communicate that? Good times wouldn't do it, because it is in the nature of good times to feed on themselves, for people to assume that things are going largely well, that God is largely happy with us (otherwise, why give us good times?).

Denying the possibility that God is communicating with us by sending more difficult times, we close off, it seems to me, all God's options for getting that message across. In only the last decade, many Orthodox Jews, including leading rabbis, have rejected the possibility that cataclysms (let alone personal struggles, whether economic or medical) are God's call to radically change our ways.

Is that really only because no prophet said so ahead of time? After all, plenty of thinkers, Jewish or otherwise, have tried to encourage us to think in such ways; they have not predicted the events, but have offered interpretations after the fact, only to be ridiculed. And ridiculed, I note, not just because such people give often offer overly unidimensional, unsophisticated, unnuanced, or otherwise flawed readings of events. Repeatedly, I encounter seemingly Orthodox Jews who reject the possibility that major natural problems—including bedbug infestations—come from God, for whatever reason.

And if you reject that out of hand, is it really true that having a prophet named Moses—who only later would become Moshe Rabbenu—say ahead of time that this is why it is happening would be enough to change your mind?

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Bo: The Birth of a Nation

Rav Kook Torah

“This is how you must eat [the Passover offering]: with your waist belted, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You must eat it with chipazon - in haste.” (Ex. 12:11)

The word chipazon is an uncommon word. In the entire Bible, it appears only three times. Twice it is used to describe the Israelites’ haste when they fled Egypt. Why did they need to be ready to depart at a moment’s notice? According to the Midrash, there were in fact three parties who were in a rush for the Israelites to leave Egypt. The Egyptians, afraid of further plagues and catastrophes, wanted the Hebrew slaves to clear out as quickly as possible. The Israelites were in a hurry lest Pharaoh change his mind yet again and refuse to let them leave.

And there was a third party in a state of urgency. The Midrash speaks of the chipazon of the Shechinah. Why was God in a hurry?

A Hasty Redemption

The redemption from Egypt needed to be fast, like the swift release of an arrow from a bow. Here was a group of slaves who had almost completely forgotten the greatness of their souls, a treasured inheritance from their ancestors who were widely respected as holy princes (see Gen. 23:6). With a decisive wave of God’s hand, a nation brimming with courage and nobility of spirit, unlike any people the world had ever seen, was formed. This was the dramatic birth “of a nation from the midst of another nation” on the stage of human history.

A meteoric exodus from Egypt with wonders and miracles was critical to protect this fledgling nation from the dark confusion of universal paganism. The Jewish people needed to be quickly extracted from the idolatrous Egyptian milieu in which they had lived for centuries so that they would be free to raise the banner of pure faith and enlightened ideals.

The Future Redemption

The word chipazon appears a third time in the Bible, in Isaiah’s breathtaking description of the future redemption. Unlike the Exodus from Egypt, “You will not leave with haste - chipazon - or go in flight. For the Eternal will go before you, and your rear guard will be the God of Israel.” (52:12) Unlike the miraculous upheaval that brought about the dramatic launch of the Jewish people, the future redemption will be a gradual process, advancing step by step. Why will the future redemption be so different from the redemption from Egypt?

In Egypt, the Hebrew slaves had adopted the idolatrous culture of their neighbors. Their redemption required supernatural intervention, a Divine rescue from above. But the future redemption will take place within the laws of nature. It will emanate from the stirring of the human heart, itaruta deletata - an awakening from below. The Jewish people will rise from their exilic slumber, return to their homeland, regain their independence, reclaim their forests and cities, defend themselves from enemies who seek to destroy them, recreate their academies of Torah, and reestablish their spiritual center in Jerusalem. Step by step, without overriding the laws of nature, so that even the ba’al ha-neiss, the beneficiary of the miracle, is unaware of the great miracle that is unfolding.

Unlike the dramatic exodus from Egypt, the future redemption is not an escape from the world and its influences. Over the centuries, the Jewish people have succeeded in illuminating many aspects of the world that were full of darkness. Our influence has refined the world on many levels. The impact of our Torah and lifestyle, which we observed with dedication and self-sacrifice throughout the exile, served as a beacon of light for many nations.

The goals of the future redemption are twofold. First: to complete our national mission of spreading the light of Torah throughout the world. This light needs to be projected in its purest, most pristine form, cleansed from the dregs that have accumulated during centuries of exposure to negative influences. The second goal is to purify ourselves from those foreign tendencies which we have adopted through contact with other nations during our lengthy exile.

When we will once again stand strong and free on the majestic heights of our land, ready to realize our spiritual potential - only then will the nations be able to see our light.

We must draw upon the heritage of our redemption from Egypt and our miraculous birth as the people of Israel. The current process of redemption, manifest in the revitalization of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, must not be detached from our national mission as a light unto the nations. Then our future redemption will be not in haste, but will advance steadily, like the ever-spreading light of daybreak.¹

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ma’amarei HaRe’iyah, vol. I, p. 164)

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By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Bo

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky

Total Control

“Come to Pharaoh,” says the Almighty at the beginning of this week’s portion. “For I will harden his heart and the hearts of his servants in order to put my wonders in his midst.”

The concept of a hardened heart, influenced by Divine intervention, is grappled with by countless commentators and myriad meforshim. After all, how do we reconcile a Divinely hardened heart with free-will?

Some explain that Divinity only influenced Pharaoh’s physical resilience, as Hashem did not want to score a definitive knockout in the early rounds.

Others discuss how Divine intervention can actually hinder the opportunity of penitence.

All in all, the natural order was changed, and the imposition on Pharaoh’s free-will rarely occurs to the rest of humanity.

What troubles me, however, is the juxtaposition of Hashem’s request that Moshe once again beseech Pharaoh, followed by the words, “because I will harden his heart.”

Aren’t those two separate thoughts? Shouldn’t the command be “go to Pharaoh because I want him to free My people”?

From the word flow it seems that Hashem’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was a reason for Moshe to go to Pharaoh. Was it?

A friend of mine told me the following story. Years ago, he visited an amusement park. Among the attractions was a haunted house. It was pitch black inside, save for dim lights that illuminated all types of lurking monsters strategically placed to scare the defiant constituency that dared to enter the domain.

Reading the warnings for park patrons who were either under 12 years old, below a certain height, or suffering high blood pressure or heart disease, my friend hurried his family past the attraction. He only glanced at the almost infinite list of other caveats and exculpatory proclamations from the management. He surely did not want his kids to challenge him to the altar of the outrageous.

Then he noticed the line that was forming. The only life form it contained was tattooed motorcyclists, each more than six feet tall and broadly built. In spite of the ominous warnings that were posted, they stood anxiously in line waiting to prove their masculinity to themselves and the groups that hurried by the frightening attraction.

But nestled among the miscreants of machismo, he noticed a young boy, no more than seven-years-old, standing on line. He was laughing and giggling as if he were about to ride a carousel.

My friend could not contain himself. Surely, he could not let a young child like that show him up.

“Sonny,” he called to the boy. “Can’t you read? This is a really scary ride. And besides, you’re not even ten!” The boy just laughed. “Why should I be scared?”

“Why should you be scared?” my friend asked incredulously. “This is the scariest ride in the park! It is pitch black in there! You can’t see a thing — except for the monsters!”

The boy’s smile never faded. In fact it broadened. Then he revealed the source of his courage.

“You see the man over there?” He pointed to a middle-age fellow who sat in front of a switch-filled control box.

“Well that’s my dad! If I just give one scream,” exclaimed the child, “all he does is flip one switch and all the lights go on, and the monsters turn into plastic dummies!”

Rav Yecheil Meir Lifschutz of Gustinin explains that Hashem began the final stages of the redemption commanding Moshe, “Go to Pharaoh.”

Hashem’s next words were said as the reason to disregard any of Pharaoh’s yelling, shouting, and cavorting. They are totally meaningless, “Because I will harden his heart. I am the one in control. I am the one who hardens hearts and causes tyrants to drive you from their palaces.” With one flip of a heavenly switch they will chase after you in the darkest night and beg you to do the will of the Creator.” So “Go to Pharaoh,” says the Almighty “because I am the one who hardens his heart!”

When faced with challenges, we can approach them with a sense of certainty if we know that there is a higher destiny that steers our fate. We can even walk into the den of a Pharaoh with the confidence of one who knows that it is the Master of Creation who is pulling the switch.

Dedicated by Dr. and Mrs. Keith Staiman and family in memory of Ruth Wohlfarth

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bo
For the week ending 12 January 2019 / 6 Shevat 5779
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

I can attest that the following is a true story.
Before returning to New York City after his post-high school tour, “Reuven,” or “Robert” as he was then called, decided he would like to honor his Judaism and visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem. He picked as his caravanserai the Intercontinental Hotel on the Mount of Olives. He didn’t realize that the Intercontinental was built on a graveyard, and not just any graveyard. The Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives is the most ancient and most important Jewish cemetery in Jerusalem. Burial on the Mount of Olives started some 3,000 years ago in the First Temple Period, and continues to this day.

On the eve of Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 there were about 60,000 graves on the Mount of Olives. During the 19 years of Jordanian rule in eastern Jerusalem, roads were paved through the cemeteries, causing bones to be scattered, and tombstones were used as paving stones for roads in the Jordanian Army camp in Azariya, where an entire telephone booth was built out of tombstones. Jewish tombstones were also used as flooring in the latrines. Some of these graves were a thousand years old. A gas station and other buildings, including Robert’s choice of lodging, the Intercontinental Hotel, were erected on top of the Mount. After the site was retaken by the Israeli army in 1967, about 38,000 smashed or damaged tombstones were counted.

On his first night at the Intercontinental, Robert thought he might sample some of the much-celebrated cuisine at the hotel’s gourmet restaurant. He browsed the menu and selected the “well-aged” steak with champignons and chips a la star anise, flavored with cloves, nutmeg and mulled wine. “Mmm! Delicious!” he thought to himself.

The main course was served with all the false obsequiousness that only a waiter in an over-priced eatery can muster. “Enjoy your steak, dear sir!” Robert cut into his steak and out crawled a very alive worm.

Many years later, Robert, or Reuven as he was now called, reflected on the fact that dining on the graves of his grandfathers deserved a message that one day he would be steak for a worm.

“...My signs that I placed among them – that you may know I am G-d.”

G-d is sending us signs all the time. Some are quite obvious, and to ignore them requires a heart as stubborn as Pharaoh’s, but some signs become clear to us only when we have attained the spiritual level required to understand them.

§ Sources: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Let’s Talk It Over

I have long believed that all conflicts between people could be settled if the parties to the dispute would agree to simply sit down together and talk. There are, of course, times when I have come to question this belief. I often wonder whether it is not merely a vain fantasy of mine, or perhaps just wishful thinking. I have been forced to admit that some interpersonal disputes are intractable and that no amount of discussion could resolve them. But, by and large, I still adhere to this long-held belief and try, in both my personal life and various professional roles, to put that belief into practice. I attempt to get even the most stubborn opponents to sit down face-to-face and discuss their differences.

I had the good fortune during my training in the practice of marital therapy to experience the tutelage of a master marriage counselor. Her name was Ruth G. Newman, and she passed away long ago. I have forgotten much of what she taught me, but I clearly remember her insistence that the role of the marriage counselor was not to counsel. Rather, it was to get the husband and wife to talk to each other and to truly listen to each other. I witnessed her work many times, and was amazed at how even her most stubborn clients were able to overcome their stubbornness, engage in true dialogue, and achieve understanding of the other person’s point of view.

In this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16), we encounter an individual who arguably was the most stubborn person in the history of mankind. I speak, of course, of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who refused to release the Jewish people from their cruel and arduous enslavement, even after being subjected to an array of miraculous plagues. His obstinacy was partly the product of his own character but was immeasurably reinforced by the Almighty’s commitment to “harden his heart.” Already in last week’s Torah portion, Va’era, Moses was put on notice, at the very beginning of his mission, to “speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land,” but not to expect great success. Moses was forewarned: “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 7:2-3)

By the time we read this week’s parasha, Pharaoh and his people have already undergone no less than seven mighty plagues, with an impending eighth plague in the offing. But the very first verse of our parasha tells us not

to expect Pharaoh's obstinacy to soften: "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers..." Surely, if there was ever one person for whom conversation and the counsel of others were simply out of the question, Pharaoh was that man.

Nevertheless, Moses persists in his mission. He and Aaron go to Pharaoh and confront him in the name of the Lord: "How long will you refuse to humble yourself... Let My people go... For if you refuse... I will bring locusts on your territory... They shall devour the surviving remnant that was left to you after the hail... They shall eat away all your trees... They shall fill your palaces... Something that neither your fathers nor fathers' fathers have seen from the day they appeared on earth to this day."

Having delivered this dire threat, Moses then does something which is unprecedented and which catches us off guard. We are told: "With that he turned and left Pharaoh's presence." He does not wait for Pharaoh's response. He simply leaves the scene.

What are we to make of this sudden departure?

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, the great exegete known as Nachmanides, or Ramban, suggests an answer which both gives us an insight into Moses' thought processes and teaches us a lesson about the power of dialogue to overcome obduracy.

He writes: "Moses knew that the recent plague of hail frightened Pharaoh and his people very much. He reasoned that the fear of a deadly famine, which would inevitably result from the plague of locusts, might bring even Pharaoh to soften his heart. And so, without so much as asking Pharaoh for permission to leave, he summarily departed before Pharaoh could say yes or no. He did this to allow Pharaoh and his courtiers to discuss the matter and take counsel from one another. Indeed, this is exactly what happened. The courtiers said to Pharaoh, 'Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?' In the words of our rabbis of the Midrash, 'Moses observed that they were turning to each other, taking this threat seriously. So he left abruptly, so that they would indeed advise each other to repent.'"

Ramban readily admits that he was preceded by the rabbis of the Midrash in his insightful interpretation. Despite the fact that Moses had already become quite familiar with Pharaoh's extreme stubbornness, refusing to comply with Moses' demand even after seven devastating plagues, and despite the fact that the Almighty himself had told Moses that Pharaoh's heart would remain hardened, Moses still held out hope that Pharaoh would take the counsel of others, would "talk things over" and might relent. In Moses' judgment, repentance is always a possibility, and what makes it possible is conversation and dialogue.

Rabbi Simcha Z. Brodie, a great 20th century yeshiva dean whom I was privileged to meet in person, uses this passage in the writings of Ramban as the cornerstone of his theory about the importance of dialogue and of its power to change people. He goes so far as to argue that true spiritual greatness cannot be achieved without such dialogue.

To illustrate this point, he relates a story he heard from one of the disciples of the famed 19th-century moralist, Rabbi Israel Salanter. Rabbi Salanter was once told about a uniquely spiritual individual, one who had attained rare levels of piety. Rabbi Salanter refused to believe that an individual, acting alone, could achieve such an unusual stature. "If you would have told me this about one of the three saintly men from the town of Reisen (three famed early 19th century Pietists), I would believe you. Each of them had the others to help him ascend the ladder of holiness. But the man you just described to me lives in utter solitude. No one can achieve sublime spirituality alone."

Ramban and Rabbi Brodie are teaching us two useful and important lessons, lessons which Moses knew well. First, dialogue and the readiness to talk things over can soften even the hardest of hearts. Secondly, solitude may have its occasional value, but only a life of dialogue with others can foster moral and psychological growth.

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FaxHomily - Imrei Binyamin - Parsha Bo - New Beginnings
Rabbi Binyamin Kamenetzky's Thoughts on Parshas
Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky

A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,
transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky

Sponsored in memory of Yoel ben Avraham By Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Savitsky

This week, Hashem gave the first command addressed to the entire nation: "This month shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year." The Almighty gave the mitzvah of sanctifying Rosh Chodesh, the new moon, along with the importance of the first month.

Referring to Nissan, the Midrash tells us, "There is no greater month than this one, therefore it is called, 'The first'". This Midrash begs explanation. Why is "the first" a befitting title for the greatest month? If Nissan is indeed the greatest month, let it be called that! Why is "The first" the befitting title for Nissan?

A few months after the passing of my grandfather, my father, Rav Mordechai Kamenetzky, walked into a local shop which my grandfather would frequent. The proprietor, a religious immigrant, looked at my father, and with tears in his eyes, showed him a chair placed in the corner of the small store. "Your father came in here only a few years ago," he began. "While he was sitting in that chair, he saved my son's life!"

"Let me tell you what happened. Rav Binyamin came to patronize my shop, and noticed something bothering me. I responded to his concern, and told him that my son, who lived in Israel, was about to marry a gentile girl he had met while playing in the Israeli Philharmonic.

Rav Binyamin, reacted immediately. "Get him on the phone!" he declared. With no hope that a phone conversation would make a difference, I dialed his number and gave the phone to your father."

The shopkeeper pointed to the corner, and said, "Rav Kamenetzky went to that corner, sat down on that chair, and spent the next two hours talking to my son!"

"What happened?" my father asked. "What happened?? I have no idea how, but my son abandoned his plans, and is now married to a fine Jewish woman and has two children! Believe it or not, he is learning in kollel as well!" My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l explains the Midrash. There is nothing greater than a new beginning. The Jewish Nation was entrenched in the sinful atmosphere of Egypt, even falling to the 49th level of impurity. Yet with just a few mitzvos, they were able to begin again with a new start. They sanctified themselves and became the Chosen Nation, growing spirituality daily, until they received the Torah only 50 days later. This new start, the refreshing new beginning, is symbolized in the "first" month of Nissan.

One of the most seminal events in the Exodus began with the power of the Jewish People to create Roshei Chodashim, new months, and thus new beginnings.

Good Shabbos!

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Ohr Somayach

Insights into Halacha

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

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Ben-Tzion Spitz

Bo: the Kabbalistic body

It is in moments of illness that we are compelled to recognize that we live not alone but chained to a creature of a different kingdom, whole worlds apart, who has no knowledge of us and by whom it is impossible to make ourselves understood: our body. -Marcel Proust

On the eve of the Israelite exodus from Egyptian slavery, the Torah interrupts the dramatic narrative to discuss the rituals of Pesach which will be kept for generations, including the Pesach sacrifice which would be offered thereafter in the Temple. The description is quite specific, including details which were unique to the Pesach in Egypt, as well as to those that are meant to be continued for generations. The Torah even goes so far as to describe the positioning of the body parts of the sacrifice.

The Berdichever chooses that description for an explanation of the deeper meaning of human body parts, and how the human body is in some fashion a mirror of God's divine attributes. Following is his explanation of a Kabbalistic view of the body:

The legs represent the attribute of "Emuna" (faith), which itself can be distinguished by two different characteristics. The first characteristic of faith is the belief that God is the antecedent of everything in our reality, and that our reality was created and is constantly sustained by God's will. The second aspect of faith, specifically for a Jew, is the belief that we are His people, that He is close to us, that He listens to our prayers and is able, ready and willing to fulfill our needs.

The reproductive organ represents the bond, the connection which we need to create with our own faith.

The torso represents "Tiferet," the glory or the splendor that we need to pursue, for God to be pleased with us, proud of us, to thereby bring glory to God.

The arms represent "Ahava," love, and "Yirah," awe. The right arm is "Ahava," the love we must have for God; the left is "Yirah," our need to be in awe of God.

The head, the seat of the intellect, represents our need to explore and consider the greatness of God, the myriads of ministering angels at His beck and call who themselves serve God with tremendous love and awe.

When a person brings all his body parts to bear in serving God, in all its representations, he then gains humility, to the point of basically reducing the ego and annulling oneself by comprehending the true spiritual reality of our existence.

That, the Berdichever assures us, leads directly to happiness.

May our body parts work healthily and in concert to fulfill divine goals, and indeed, lead us to greater happiness.

*Dedication - To Chaya and Jason Kanner on their amazing hospitality.
Shabbat Shalom*

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Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Bo

פרשת בא תשל"ט

בא אל פרעה כי אני הכבדתי את לבו ואת לב עבדיו

Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn. (10:1)

Rashi explains that Hashem sent Moshe to warn Pharaoh of the upcoming plague. Why warn Pharaoh if his reaction would be negative as a result of Hashem hardening his heart? A warning should serve a purpose. Apparently, this warning did not. *Horav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Brisk*, Yerushalayim, explains this based upon a principle quoted from *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, Mashgiach Yeshivas Mir*. When Sarah *Imeinu* gave birth to Yitzchak *Avinu* at the age of 90 years old, the Torah makes a big "to do" about the overt miracle that she had experienced. In

contrast, when Yocheved gave birth to Moshe *Rabbeinu* at 130 years old, the Torah mentions it only in passing. One would think that Yocheved's personal miracle was at least as worthy of note as that of Sarah.

Simply, we could say that Sarah was born without the anatomical organs necessary to produce a child. Her miracle was transformative in the sense that she now had a womb, so that she had the capability to conceive a baby and carry it to term. Indeed, the miracle was that she essentially had become a new person. Yocheved actually had two children, Miriam and Aharon, before giving birth to Moshe. If we are to record miracles, their births should precede that of Moshe.

The *Mashgiach* explains that veritably all *teva*, what we call nature, is actually *neis*, miracle. There is no such thing as "nature," since everything occurs through the agency of Divine will. Just as Hashem delivered Heavenly *manna* to sustain the Jewish People during their forty-year trek in the wilderness, He causes wheat – that will one day become bread – to grow from the ground. We think that bread is a natural occurrence. It is as natural as Heavenly *manna*. Likewise, when a blind man undergoes a procedure that grants him eyesight, it is considered to be a miracle; when one who is gravely ill is the fortunate recipient of a transplant that grants him a new lease on life, it is deemed a miracle. In contrast, waking up every morning with all organs and limbs intact and in working condition is viewed as natural. Why? Indeed, we bless Hashem daily: *Pokeiach ivrim*, Who gives sight to the blind; *Zokeif kefufim*, straightens those who are bent over, etc. Without Hashem, we are unable to function. We would not even exist!

What distinguishes one miracle from another? Why is Sarah *Imeinu's* miracle recorded in the Torah, while Yocheved's is not? When a *Navi*, Prophet, informs a person of an upcoming event – either one of a positive nature or vice versa – such a miracle is worthy of inclusion in the Torah. It was foretold – we waited for it to occur – it happened. This makes it worthy of being chronicled in the Torah. A *neis* that was not foreshadowed, but "just happened" is not documented in the Torah. Sarah's miracle was forecast by the Heavenly Angel who visited her; Yocheved's miracle "just happened."

According to the above principle, *Rav Soloveitchik* explains why Moshe was instructed to warn Pharaoh of the upcoming plague. This warning (despite the knowledge that the warning would be to no avail, because Pharaoh's heart had been hardened) allows for the miracle to be recorded in the Torah, so that everyone will "know" Hashem.

ויט משה את ידו על השמים ויהי חשך אפלה בכל ארץ מצרים

Moshe stretched forth his hand towards the heavens, and there was a thick darkness throughout the Land of Egypt. (10:22)

Chazal (Midrash Rabbah/Shemos 14:2) ask from whence came this *choshech*, darkness. Rabbi Yehudah says it came from on High. It was a Heavenly/otherworldly darkness, as it says in *Tehillim* 18:12, "He made darkness His concealment, around Him His shelter." (This means: even when Hashem intervenes in a swift and stunning manner in human affairs, He remains concealed [*Ibn Ezra*], or alternatively, man quickly forgets Hashem's role in all that happens to him [*Horav S.R. Hirsch*]). The question is obvious: If the darkness that plagued Egypt was from Heaven – where in Heaven was it to be found? Is there darkness in *Shomayim*, Heaven? The *Navi* says: *U'nehira imei shrei*, "And light dwells with Him" (*Daniel* 2:22). Furthermore, we are taught (based upon a *pasuk* in *Yeshayah* 19:22) that the darkness which descended over Egypt affected only Egyptians, while simultaneously it was light for the Jews. It was the very same darkness that served a dual purpose: darkness and oblivion for the Egyptians; light and clarity for the Jews. How is this to be understood?

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, cites the *Sifsei Kohen* who explains that the darkness that blinded the Egyptians was, indeed, Heavenly light which darkened the eyes of the Egyptians. Due to their evil, they were unable to see. This is similar to gazing at the sun on an unusually sunny, bright day. One is blinded, unable to see. The wicked Egyptians were so

overwhelmed by the otherworldly light that they were left devoid of vision, the reality around them obscured.

The Jews, on the other hand, were worthy of seeing. Due to their distinction, they were not overwhelmed and blinded by the Heavenly light. Their vision was able to penetrate its rays, to see the brilliance that surrounded them with amazing clarity. Thus, the very same light that shined for the Jews darkened the lives of the Egyptians. The Jew could walk into an Egyptian home and see what was concealed from the Egyptian's eyes, that the darkness was actually light.

Ner l'ragli Devarecha v'Ohr linesivasi, "Your word is a candle for my feet and a light for my path" (*Tehilim* 119:105). The Torah illuminates man's way, enabling him to proceed to his destination in life with vigor and surefootedness. This *pasuk* is a reference to the light that emanates from (one who studies) Torah and *mitzvah* observance. Therefore, darkness descended on Egypt, a darkness that was comprised of the Heavenly light which Hashem sent down, a light that darkened the eyes of the Egyptians, but was a source of powerful illumination for the Jews.

Rav Pincus concludes with a powerful observation. We live in a time in which the world around us clamors for the denigration and disenfranchisement of the Jews. There are those who would do us harm for no other reason than our being born into the Jewish faith – a faith which we observe religiously. The term anti-Semitism is thrown around all of the time to the point that many of our co-religionists bend over backwards to do anything and everything to appease those around us, to assimilate in any way that garners favor in the eyes of the gentile. The solution is right in front of our eyes: *Ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr*; the light of the Torah will prevail. It provides us with the necessary light, while it concurrently darkens the vision of those who would do us harm. The *choshech* of *Mitzrayim* obfuscates their nefarious vision, impairing their efforts to cause us harm.

וישאל איש מאת רעהו ואשה מאת רעותה כלי כסף וכלי זהב

Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels. (11:2)

Hashem asked Moshe *Rabbeinu* to make a special effort to impress upon the Jews the significance of requesting silver and gold vessels from the Egyptians, because, if they did not leave Egypt with a sizable financial portfolio, Avraham *Avinu's* *neshamah*, soul, would have a "complaint" against Hashem. *She'lo yomar oso tzaddik V'avadum v'inu osam – kayeim ba'hem – v'acharei chein yeitzu b'r'chush gadol – lo kayeim ba'hem*; "So that the righteous person (Avraham) should not say, 'G-d carried out in full measure the prophecy that his offspring will be oppressed, but not the companion promise that they will leave their captivity with great wealth.'" The question is obvious: If Hashem made a promise, it should be kept regardless of "it" or "what" the *tzaddik* would say. A promise of wealth is a promise to which He must adhere. Second, what is the meaning of *kayeim ba'hem*, "He fulfilled them/carried out in full measure"? *Ba'hem* means in or with them; rather, it should have said *la'hem*, for them.

The *Klausenberger Rebbe*, *zl*, explains this practically. The criteria for defining who is a Jew should have parameters that extend beyond strict religious observance. A Jew who has yet to observe *Shabbos*, *kashrus*, etc. is still a Jew. The *Rebbe* was speaking following the European Holocaust, when the Nazis, *yms"h*, murdered us even if our Jewish pedigree had skipped a few generations. (In other words, even if a person was not *Halachically* biologically a Jew, the Nazis considered him/her as Jewish as long as his/her Jewish blood hailed back three generations. The *Rebbe* is not talking about such circumstances, because the person was not Jewish, according to *Halachah*.)

The *Rebbe* interpreted the statement in the following manner. In terms of being a slave, they were Jewish – they were enslaved, persecuted, afflicted and murdered. *Kayeim bahem*; they were *kayeim*, considered Jews. If so, then the second half of the promise must also be fulfilled in them. Let them have their rightful portion of the wealth. They have a right to it, because *kayeim ba'hem*. The wicked ones characterized them as Jews. The

persecutors confirmed their Jewishness. They should, likewise, share in the reward.

The *Rebbe* employed this interpretation to explain David *Hamelech's* statement in *Tehillim* 87:6. *Hashem yispor b'ch'sov amim*, "Hashem will count when He records nations." The Almighty will count/consider Jews in accordance to the records of the gentiles. Hashem will count Jews based upon the criteria set by the gentiles, who do not concern themselves with the religious affiliation of Jews. As long as something connects individuals to our People, they view them as Jews. While Hashem will certainly not include those who are *Halachically* not Jewish, He will not exclude them, however, due to their lack of observance.

והיה לך לאות על ירך ולזכרון בין עיניך

And it shall be for you a sign, your arm and a reminder between your eyes. (13:9)

The *mitzvah* of *Tefillin* – two boxes which each contain four short *parshiyos* from the Torah inscribed on parchment, and worn on the arm and the forehead – is one of the most important *mitzvos* of the Torah. One of the boxes is worn on the arm, opposite the heart, which is the seat of one's emotions; the other is placed above the forehead, resting opposite the cerebrum. Thus, our attention is directed to the head, the heart and to the hand, thereby implying that our actions must be dedicated to Hashem in such a manner that we conjoin our emotions/passion together with our intellect and power of reason. Placed on the arm opposite the heart and on the head, the *Tefillin* signify the submission of one's mind, heart and actions to Hashem, as well as the reign of the intellect over emotion. We must experience a balance between the two, applying the heart and mind to our everyday endeavor. *Tefillin* comprise the badge of the Jew. Indeed, the *Talmud* is referring to one who is no longer observant, calling him a *karkafta di lo manach Tefillin*, "one who does not put on *Tefillin*." It is the single act of service to the Almighty that defines our relationship with Him. One who does not put on *Tefillin* has rejected this relationship.

Tefillin are symbolically identified with *bar-mitzvah*, despite the fact that, when a boy reaches Jewish adulthood (thirteen years old), he becomes obligated in executing all 613 *mitzvos*. Why is *Tefillin* singled out? *Mishnas Yeshoshua* (quoted by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*) explains that the mere fact that *Tefillin shel yad*, the *Tefillin* worn on the arm, are put on prior to placing the *Tefillin shel rosh*, the *Tefillin* of the head, on the forehead, is – in and of itself – a powerful lesson in *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. We imply that we, as Jews, are prepared "to do," even before our mind/intellect, seat of reason, is able to grasp the rationale for the *mitzvah*. We accept the yoke of service to Hashem, as we declared at *Har Sinai*, *Naaseh v'nishma*; "We will do and we will listen." As a young boy enters adulthood, he must ingrain in his mind that, as Jews, we serve, we act, even when circumstances appear questionable, even when we do not truly understand the *mitzvah*. Lack of rationale (which is on our part) is no reason for faltering in performing a *mitzvah*.

Tefillin is about love – between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. When one loves, any form of separation is overwhelming. Every moment spent together is exceedingly precious. Every bit of communication, every memento, anything that reminds one of his love, is treasured. Thus, a simple ring that is given to concretize the bond of love has special meaning. Every time one looks at the ring, the love is remembered. Hashem's love for His children is the greatest love that exists. To believe in Hashem is to share this love. Hashem's creating the world purely for altruistic reasons was an act of love. His love is boundless, infinite, beyond anything that we can possibly fathom. It is in force even when we do not deserve it, because a loving Father never gives up on his child. Nonetheless, it is our duty to strengthen that bond of love. Faith and love are extremely tenuous concepts. We speak of them and think about them, but, unless we do something definitive/tangible to concretize these emotions, our attention wanes, and they become nebulous and insignificant, the victims of complacency.

Tefillin serves to help us remember the love. It is our ring, the concretization of our relationship. The Torah talks of three forms of love: “*b’chol levavecha*, “with all your heart,” *b’chol nafshecha*, “with all your soul,” *u’bchol me’odecha*, “and with all your might.” The *Tefillin* worn on the left arm, opposite the heart, submits/dedicates our heart, the seat of life, to the love of Hashem. The *Tefillin* worn next to the brain, the seat of one’s intellect and soul, represents our dedication to loving Hashem with all our soul. The *Tefillin* worn on the arm, the symbol of strength, binds all of our powers to the love of G-d.

Now we understand that one who rejects *Tefillin* repudiates Hashem’s love – and faith without love is lacking in conviction.

Walking into a *shul* in the morning and looking around at the worshippers putting on their *Tefillin* gives one the impression that it is a simple, everyday ritual act – which it is. We all put on *Tefillin* out of habit. Some run into *shul*, put on (the *Tallis* followed by) *Tefillin* and move on to the daily *davening*. Some might arrive earlier to recite *Tehillim*, to learn, but, when it comes to the *Tefillin*, it is usually the same: put them on as a preparation for *davening*. As we all know, however, the action is only as good as the accompanying attitude. Obviously, one should keep in mind that he is performing a special *mitzvah* that underscores the reciprocal love we share with Hashem. I came across the following thought from the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, *Horav Aryeh Levine, zl*, which is quite inspiring.

As *Rav Ha’assirim*, chaplain to those incarcerated by the British, *Rav Aryeh* had the sad experience of spending the last days and moments with the *Kedoshim* who had been found guilty by the British court and sentenced to die. When *Rav Aryeh* spoke to the pre-*bar-mitzvah* boys in the *mamlachti dati* school in Hertziliya, he described to the boys the last few hours of the lives of two martyrs.

The *Rav* came with two pairs of *Tefillin* for the two men to put on for the last time. They took them into their hands and could not stop kissing the boxes. They put them on and, with tears flowing down their faces, they recited *Shema Yisrael*. When they removed the *Tefillin*, they held them lovingly, unable to let go of them. Finally, the guard signaled that their time was up. They had to take their last walk.

Rav Aryeh looked at the boys and asked, “Is it only when we are parting from the *Tefillin* for the last time in our life that we should be so emotional? What about one who has his entire life ahead of him – should he not cherish every moment spent with his *Tefillin*?”

How true. We act instinctively, because we are creatures of habit. If we would remember that the *Tefillin* are Hashem’s sign of abiding love for us, we might manifest greater care and feeling when we put on our *Tefillin*.

One last story. *Reb Yosef* lived in one of Yerushalayim’s large apartment complexes. A friendly fellow, he made it a point to get to know everyone who lived there – not because he was particularly nosy; he just liked to help people. One elderly man rarely went out. He suffered from a large bump on his back. He sat home alone, learning. The neighbors treated him royally, looking out for him and offering assistance whenever possible. They knew neither his life story, nor the reason for the unsightly bump on his back.

One day, this man felt sick, and he was taken to the hospital. The situation quickly advanced to a serious state. Having developed a relationship with *Reb Yosef*, he called for him. Obviously, *Reb Yosef* dropped whatever he was doing and proceeded to the hospital where the man was hooked up to a number of lines and tubes. The situation did not look hopeful. The man looked up at *Reb Yosef* and said, “I have to ask you for a favor. I really have no one else. I have one son who lives somewhere in the diaspora. Unfortunately, he left the fold years ago, and we have nothing to do with one another. If somehow you are able to contact him, I have an envelope of money with me for you to use to purchase a pair of *Tefillin* for him. Although he is not *frum*, observant, now, I am certain once I “transition” to the *Olam Ha’Emes*, World of Truth, I will be able to intercede on his behalf that he be imbued with a desire to return to Hashem’.

The man continued talking, realizing that this was probably his last chance to relate the story of his life for posterity. Perhaps his son would one day find it meaningful: “I was six years old when my mother died. My father was unable to care for me, so the neighbors lent a hand. Thus, I went from home to home, caregiver to caregiver; no mother, no father to speak of – I was alone in the world. I wanted so much to learn. I met a kind man who was a candle maker. I made a deal with him: I would sell his candles all over the city, while he would hire a Torah tutor for me whom he would pay with my wages

“One day”, he continued, with tears beginning to well-up in his eyes, “I came to a home occupied by a group of men who had long ago left the Jewish religion. They made fun of my religious garb, my *payos*, long jacket and black hat. They were bent on causing me to sin. The pressure was mounting until I ran to the window and jumped – not realizing that we were on the third floor! I was badly injured and, after months in the hospital, I was released with a stark reminder of the accident. That terrible bump has been with me ever since. Somehow, later in life, I met a wonderful woman who, despite my disfigurement, married me. We had a son. When he was a teenager, my wife died, leaving me to raise him alone. I did the best I could, but, apparently, it was not enough.

“I have one more favor to ask of you. Please bring me a map of the cemetery which shows the available parcels of land for burial. I would like to select my final resting place.” The next day, *Reb Yosef* returned with the map of the cemetery. The man nixed most of the places. He obviously had demanding criteria concerning next to whom he wanted to lay. He explained, “From the time that I jumped from the window, I was careful never to look at anything, anyone, or anywhere that was spiritually harmful to my eyes. I avoided sin by my willingness to relinquish my life. I would like to lie next to someone whom I am certain guarded his eyes his entire life.” In the end, he selected a corner of the cemetery where old *shaimos*, Torah volumes that were unusable, and infants that had tragically died, were buried. The man died the next morning. His burial took place that very same day. The work of locating his son began in earnest.

The story continues in America. Thousands of cars were moving back and forth on the highway. One car (the driver) lost control and sustained serious injuries. He was taken to the emergency room and, after a day, moved to a hospital bed to recuperate. Two days later, a man entered his hospital room, and said, “Good morning. I am visiting from the Holy Land. I heard that there is a young man with ties to *Eretz Yisrael* convalescing in the hospital. I decided to come visit you.” They began to speak. The patient told the visitor about his father who “lived” in *Eretz Yisrael*. The man listened: “Actually, I knew your father. Very special man. Indeed, he was a holy soul!” The son had no idea that his father had died. One more of life’s challenges for him to deal with.

The son told his visitor, “I do not know what has come over me. It has been more than twenty years since I last put on *Tefillin*. I reneged on my religious observance. Suddenly, the last few months ‘something’ has been compelling me to return to my People, to once again become observant.” (This was probably due to his father’s Heavenly intercession.)

The visitor from *Eretz Yisrael* returned home and immediately contacted *Reb Yosef*, relating to him the story of the elderly man’s son. *Reb Yosef* went out that day and purchased a fine, kosher pair of *Tefillin* and sent it to the man’s son, who was in the process of becoming a *baal teshuvah*, returning to his religious observance. We derive from here, says the *Nadvorna Rebbe, Shlita* (who heard the story from *Reb Yosef*), that when one acts with *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, the influence of this action will endure and be the source of positive inspiration for generations to come. ***Va’ani Tefillah***

וְלֹא נִבְּוֹשׁ כִּי בָךְ בְּנֵהוּנִי – V’lo neivosh ki Becha vatachnu.

Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl, interprets this *Tefillah* as our plea to Hashem that we should not be embarrassed when we arrive in the next world. He quotes the *Zohar HaKadosh* that explains this concept of

embarrassment as resulting from something (such as a character trait) being identified as part of a person, when, in fact, it is not. (For example, people refer to him as righteous, when, in truth, he is not that righteous.) This is different than the shame one experiences when he is caught acting improperly. In this world, we strive for people to perceive us in a certain manner, and when we are not perceived in this manner, we are embarrassed. In the World of Truth, we are up against the concept of absolute truth. When we are exposed to such scrutiny, we fear self-embarrassment if everything that we have believed about ourselves turns out to be not as true as we had thought. When we “arrive” in *Olam Habba*, we do not want to discover that we have been wrong in taking our spiritual achievement for granted.

Furthermore, when we arrive in *Olam Habba*, we will have the opportunity to meet our forebears from previous generations. Are we prepared to answer their piercing questions concerning our spiritual plateau? What will we say when they ask us: “How could you?” “Why didn’t you?” I think the reader understands the trajectory of the *dvar Torah*. If we do not want to be embarrassed, we should be meticulous in our observance.

Sponsored in loving memory of Vivian Stone

היה לאה בת שמעון ז"ה נפטרה ז"י שבט תשס"ט

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**Weekly Halacha :: Parshas Bo
Cleaning Garments On Shabbos
Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

Laundering garments is prohibited on Shabbos for it is a *toladah* of one of the thirty-nine Shabbos Labors, Melaben, Bleaching. While laundering usually entails the use of water and/or cleaning agents, removing dirt from a garment even without them may also fall under the halachic prohibition of Laundering. It is this type of Laundering which is the subject of our discussion.

Removing dust or dirt particles from a garment

There is a dispute among the Rishonim whether or not removing dust or other dirt particles from a garment is considered Laundering. Some hold that removing any speck of dirt from a garment, even if it is not absorbed into the fabric of the garment but is merely lying on its surface [like a feather or a loose thread], is Biblically forbidden since the garment is being transformed from “dirty” to “clean.”[1] A second opinion maintains that removing any dirt, whether it is absorbed into the fabric [like dust] or not, is totally permitted, since a dusty garment is not considered dirty and removing the dust is not considered Laundering[2]. A third, middle-of-the road view, holds that only dust which is trapped between the fibers of the fabric may not be removed, while dirt which lies on the surface, may[3].

The basic halachah follows the middle-of-the-road opinion[4], forbidding one to remove dirt that has been absorbed into the fabric[5] while allowing one to remove a feather or a loose thread that has landed on the garment[6] [using one’s hands or a soft, dry cloth; a brush may not be used(7)]. Accordingly, one should be careful not to let his clothing fall on the ground and get dusty so that he does not come to desecrate the Shabbos[8]. If, however, one’s clothes should get dirty from dust, there is a mitigating factor which may permit removing dust from a garment:

Removing dust from a garment is only considered Laundering if the person wearing the garment[9] is particular not to wear clothes in such a condition. In other words, if the garment is so dirty that its owner would not wear it[10], then cleaning it is considered Laundering. If the garment is not

significantly dirty, i.e., its owner would not refuse to wear it[11], it may be cleaned so long as the following two conditions are met:

- No brush is used.
- The garment it is not shaken or scrubbed vigorously; it may be gently shaken or lightly dusted only[12].

Question: Can anything be done to a dusty garment [that is significantly dirty] whose owner has no other suitable clothing and is embarrassed to be seen publicly in such a dirty garment?

Discussion: The poskim permit one to ask a non-Jew to remove the dust[13]. While generally one may not ask a non-Jew to do anything that a Jew is not permitted to do on Shabbos, in this case he may, since as stated above, there are opinions that maintain that it is even permitted for a Jew to remove dust from a garment on Shabbos. [It is questionable, however, whether one may instruct the non-Jew to use a brush(14).]

- If a non-Jew is not available and the owner is embarrassed to be seen in public wearing a dusty garment, some poskim permit a Jew to clean the garment, provided that it is cleaned in an unusual manner, e.g., with one’s elbow[15].

Removing a stain from a garment

Halachically speaking, there are two types of stains: 1) a wet stain which is absorbed into the fabric of the garment, e.g., a ketchup stain, and 2) a stain which is made when a piece of dirt or food falls on a garment and hardens there. There are different rules for each of these stains.

A wet stain which is absorbed into the garment:

It is strictly prohibited to remove on Shabbos a stain which is absorbed into the fabric and can be removed only with water or a cleaning agent. This is the classic Biblical prohibition of Laundering. Even if the stain is so insignificant that the owner will not be deterred from wearing the garment because of it, it is still strictly forbidden to remove it with water or any other cleaning agent.

If no water or cleaning agent is used, then it is permitted to remove the stain if it is insignificant and would not deter the owner from wearing the stained garment. If the stain is significant, however, it is prohibited to remove it if the stain will be removed completely, i.e., it will leave no mark whatsoever on the garment. If, however, the stain is only partially removed – some mark will remain – one is permitted to remove it. Two conditions apply:

- No brush may be used.
- The stain may not be scrubbed away; it may only be gently wiped off with a dry cloth or removed by hand, with a knife, etc[16].

Dirt which adheres to the garment’s surface

A stain which results from dirt or food that has attached itself to a garment can also be removed if it will be only partially removed or when it is “insignificant,” as explained earlier[17]. It can be removed either by scratching it off or by rubbing the reverse side of the material until the dirt is dislodged.

There is, however, one notable difference between this type of stain and the wet stain which became absorbed into the fabric of a garment. The removal of a dry stain is subject to the laws of Grinding, a forbidden Shabbos Labor. If the dirt or food has dried or hardened, then scratching or peeling it off will cause it to crumble, which is a rabbinical violation of the prohibition against Grinding. Therefore:

- If the garment was stained by mud and the mud has dried, it may not be rubbed off – even if the stain is insignificant or will leave a mark – because of the prohibition against Grinding[18].
- If the garment was stained by unprocessed food which grows from the ground, e.g., fruits and vegetables, it may not be removed because of the prohibition against Grinding. But a stain from food which has already been ground, like baby cereal, may be removed because Grinding does not apply to previously ground food[19].
- Beans or potatoes from cholent are not subject to the prohibition against Grinding, since they are cooked so thoroughly that they are

considered “previously ground”, and the prohibition of Grinding does not apply to them[20].

• Even when the prohibition of Grinding applies, it is permitted – when necessary – to ask a non-Jew to remove this type of stain on Shabbos[21].

[1] *Sefer ha-Zichronos*, quoted by Magen Avraham 302:4. [2] *Tosafos, Shabbos 147a* and many other *Rishonim*. [3] *Rashi, Shabbos 147a*, as explained by *Rama and Beur ha-Gra 302:1*, and other *Rishonim*. [4] *Rama, Shulchan Aruch Harav and Aruch ha-Shulchan* strongly recommend that one be stringent and follow this view [but do not absolutely require it]. *Chayei Adam and Mishnah Berurah*, however, are of the opinion that the basic halachah is in accordance with this view and one may not be lenient. [5] In theory, there may be some dust which lies completely on the surface of the garment and is not absorbed into the fabric. In practice, however, this is almost impossible to determine. [6] A minority view rules like the first opinion that even feathers and threads are prohibited: *Magen Avraham*, quoted by *Chayei Adam 22:9* and *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 80:39*; *Ben Ish Chai*, quoted by *Kaf ha-Chayim 302:11*. See also *Aruch ha-Shulchan 302:9*, who rules according to this view in the unlikely event of a person who is reluctant to wear a garment because of the feathers, etc. [7] *Beur Halachah 302:1*. [8] *Mishnah Berurah 302:6*. [9] It remains questionable whether or not another person [who is bothered by the dirt] can clean the garment if the wearer himself is not particular; *Beur Halachah 302:1 (s.v. v'hu)*. See *Shulchan Shelomo 302:2-2*. [10] This is determined by assessing the individual wearer's willingness to wear a dusty garment on weekdays, even if he would not wear it on Shabbos, Yom Tov or other special occasions; *Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 15, note 89 and Tikunim u'Miluim)*. [11] While this is sometimes difficult to determine, there are two general guidelines to follow: 1) One would normally be reluctant to wear dark (black or dark blue) clothes which are dusty, but not brightly colored clothing; 2) One would normally be particular not to wear new, or freshly laundered clothes which are dirty, but would be less particular if the clothing were obviously worn or faded. [12] *Mishnah Berurah 302:36* and *Beur Halachah 302:1 (s.v. yeish)* and 7 (*s.v. d'havi*). [13] *Mishnah Berurah 302:6*. [14] Since this may be prohibited according to all views. If the non-Jew uses the brush on his own, to make his job easier, he need not be stopped. [15] *Misgeres ha-Shulchan on Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 80:80*, quoted by *Minchas Shabbos 80:143*. See *Beur Halachah 302:1 (s.v. lachush)*, who seems to rely on this only when the garment is clearly not new or newly pressed. See also *She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 80:36*, who disagrees with this leniency. [16] Entire section based on the view of the *Mishnah Berurah 302:11* and 36, and *Beur Halachah (s.v. d'havi)*. This is also the view of *Da'as Torah 302:7*. There are, however, *poskim* who are more lenient and allow a stain to be removed even when it will be completely removed, as long as it is not scrubbed vigorously; see *Aruch ha-Shulchan 302:9*; *Ketzos ha-Shulchan 116:3*. [17] See previous note that other *poskim* are more lenient and permit removing stains as long as they are not scrubbed vigorously. [18] *O.C. 302:7*. [19] See *Rama 321:12*. [20] See *Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 6:9* and 15:28. [21] *Mishnah Berurah 302:36* and *Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 44*.
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Ohr Somayach :: Insights Into Halacha
For the week ending 18 February 2017 / 22 Shevat 5777
The Dating / Davening Dilemma
Rabbi Yehuda Spitz
'Chatzos' is prominently featured in *Parashas Bo*, with *Makkas Bechoros* occurring at the exact stroke of midnight. More contemporarily, this time holds great relevance for

us, especially with *Tu B'Shvat* coming up, when the largest Yeshiva in America, *Lakewood New Jersey's B.M.G.*, “opens its freezer”, and hundreds, if not thousands, of *Bochurim* are now permitted to date...

Many are familiar with the *Mishna*[1] that declares that there was no day of rejoicing in Israel like *Tu B'Av* due to the unique manner of attaining *shidduchim* on that day. Yet, for many single girls of marriageable age in the Greater New York area nowadays, the day of greatest joy might actually be *Tu B'Shvat*. On that day annually, the largest Yeshiva in America, *Lakewood New Jersey's B.M.G.*, “opens its freezer”, and hundreds, if not thousands, of *Bochurim* are now permitted to date.

These *Bochurim* rent cars, drive into New York, and seek out their future life partner. Lounges across the city (Brooklyn Marriot, anyone?) are taken up by black-hatted and jacketed young men and their dressed-up date. After dropping their date back off at home, many of our earnest young men rush to catch *Maariv* at *Boro Park's* landmark “minyan factory”, the *Shomrei Shabbos Shul (Maariv Minyanim* at least up until 2:30 A.M.), before grabbing a bite to eat at *Amnon's* up the block (before he closes at 2 A.M.) and ultimately heading back to *Lakewood*.

But the question is not necessarily if there is a *Maariv* Minyan that late; the question is whether one should daven *Maariv* that late. It turns out, as with many issues in halacha, that there is no simple answer. But first, some background is necessary.

Back to Basics

The very first *Mishna* in *Shas*[2] records a 3-Way halachic dispute about the final time one is allowed to daven *Maariv*. *R' Eliezer* ruled until the “end of the first watch”, meaning either a third or a quarter of the night. The *Chachamim* ruled until “*Chatzos*”, referring to halachic midnight, while *Rabban Gamliel* ruled until *amud hashachar*, daybreak. The *Mishna* then relates a story about *Rabban Gamliel's* sons who came home from a *Simcha* after midnight and told their father that they had not yet davened *Maariv (Krias Shma)*. He replied that since it was not yet daybreak, they were still required to daven *Maariv*. He added that the *Chachamim* only ruled that one may not pray after midnight in order to “distance people from transgression” and ensure that they pray at the proper time and not be preoccupied and possibly fall asleep without davening.

The *Gemara* later rules[3] that the halacha follows *Rabban Gamliel's* opinion. This seems to imply that one may daven *Maariv* all night long. However, in practice, this is not so straightforward, as there is a huge *machlokes Rishonim* as to the *Gemara's* proper intent with its ruling.

Rulings of the *Rishonim*

The *Rambam*[4], as well as many other *Rishonim* including the *Rif*, *Ramban*, and *SMAg*[5], rule that one must daven *Maariv* before *Chatzos*. If for some reason one did not, he still has until daybreak to fulfill his obligation for the evening prayer. Although this seems to sharply contrast with the *Gemara's* conclusion, the *Beis Yosef*[6] explains that this is truly the *Gemara's* intent. Although the halacha follows *Rabban Gamliel's* *shitta*, this is only *b'dieved*, when for some reason or another one did not end up davening *Maariv* before midnight. Yet, he maintains that *l'chatchila*, *Rabban Gamliel* would agree to the *Chachamim* that one needs to daven before *Chatzos*. In fact, this is how he himself codifies the halacha in the *Shulchan Aruch*[7].

Yet, other *Rishonim*, including the *Rashba*, *Rosh*, *Sefer HaChinuch* and the *Tur*[8], all maintain that the *Gemara's* intent follows its basic understanding. Meaning that the *Chachamim* were of the opinion that *Maariv* must be prayed before midnight while *Rabban Gamliel* disagrees, maintaining that one has until daybreak to do so. Since the *Gemara* concludes that *Rabban Gamliel's* opinion was the correct one, they rule that one may therefore daven *Maariv l'chatchila* any time he wants, all night long.

There is even a third minority opinion, that of the *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona*[9]. They maintain that one is prohibited to daven *Maariv* after *Chatzos*. They explain that since a related *Gemara* states that one who transgresses the words of the *Chachamim* is ‘*chayav missa*’, worthy of the death penalty, the *Gemara* intended to change the bottom line[10]. Although *me'ikar hadin* one may technically daven afterward, once the *Chachamim* ruled that one may only do so until halachic midnight, they aver that that has since become the new halacha.

So... What Do We Do?

Many later authorities, most notably the famed *Shaagas Aryeh*[11], question the *Beis Yosef's* understanding of the *Gemara*, due to a variety of concerns. Chief among their issues is that if the *Gemara* explicitly concluded that the halacha follows *Rabban Gamliel's* opinion, then one should be able to daven all night long. The ruling that one needs to daven before *Chatzos* (even if *b'dieved* one may still do so later) is essentially the *Chachamim's* opinion. They argue that if that is truly the *Gemara's* intent, it would have concluded simply that the halacha follows the *Chachamim*! The *Shaagas Aryeh* therefore rules that the *psak* of the *Tur* and *Rosh* is the correct one and one may daven *Maariv* up until *Alos HaShachar*. Other halachic decisors, however, defend the *Shulchan Aruch's* position and rule accordingly[12], while several, including the *Chayei*

Adam and the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, simply and straightforwardly rule like the Shulchan Aruch.

The Mishna Berura[13] cites many Rishonim on both sides of the dispute, and concludes that if at all possible, one must follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch and daven before Chatzos. Yet, under extenuating circumstances, for example one who is busy teaching others Torah (perhaps a late night Daf Yomi shiur) may rely on the lenient opinion and daven Maariv after midnight.

Contemporary Rule

So with so many differing opinions to follow, how do contemporary poskim rule?

Well, the Yalkut Yosef [14] understandably follows the Shulchan Aruch's ruling. In fact, Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul rules that since Bnei Sefard follow the Shulchan Aruch's ruling ('ain lanu elah divrei HaShulchan Aruch'), one should rather daven Maariv b'yechidus (in private) before Chatzos than with a minyan after Chatzos!

But that psak is not reserved for Sefardim. Indeed, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is quoted as holding similarly. The Ishei Yisrael also rules this way, quoting Rav Chaim Kanievsky, as does the Avnei Yashpei[15], maintaining that it is preferable to daven Maariv b'yechidus before Chatzos than with a minyan after Chatzos. They cite proof from the Elyah Rabba (Orach Chaim 235, 4) and Derech HaChaim (Hilchos Tashlumin 5) who write that the zeman for all of Maariv follows the zeman of Krias Shema, and only up until Chatzos is considered the zeman for all of Tefillas Maariv[16].

Additionally, if one delays his davening Maariv until after Chatzos he is "transgressing the divrei Chachamim"[17]; therefore they maintain that one must daven Maariv l'chatchila before Chatzos, even b'yechidus if need be.

On the other hand, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv[18] is quoted as ruling that if the only minyan applicable is after Chatzos, then one should make sure to recite Krias Shema before Chatzos (as that was main issue in the Mishna in the first place). Once one does that he may then daven the full Maariv with the minyan after Chatzos. This was also the opinion of Rav Yehuda Tirnauer, long time rabbi of the aforementioned Shomrei Shabbos Shul. There is a sign posted there that one who wishes to daven Maariv after Chatzos should l'chatchila recite Krias Shema before Chatzos[19].

Back to our baffled and befuddled Bochor. Although some may argue that a date (especially a bad one) would be considered an extenuating circumstance, nevertheless, it just might be worthwhile for him to end the date a tad early and try to manage Maariv before midnight. Undoubtedly, his morning chavrusa will thank him too.

[1] Mishna Taanis Ch. 4, 8; 26b.

[2] Brachos Ch. 1, 1; 2a.

[3] Brachos 9a; statement of Shmuel.

[4] Ramban (Hilchos Krias Shma Ch. 1, 9).

[5] Rif (Brachos 2a), Ramban (Brachos 2a), SmaG (Positive Commandments 18). Other Rishonim who rule this way include the SmaK (Mitzva 104), Rabbeinu Yerucham (Sefer HaAdam Nesiv 3 Ch. 2) and the Abudraham (Hilchos Krias Shma). Rav Ovadiah M' Bartenura and the Tosafos Yom Tov in their commentaries on the first Mishna in Brachos imply this way as well.

[6] Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 235 s.v. aval & umashma).

[7] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 235, 3).

[8] Rashba (Brachos 2a s.v. Masinin), Rosh (Brachos Ch. 1, 9), Sefer HaChinuch (Parshas Eikev, Mitzva 433 s.v. uzmani), and the Tur (Orach Chaim 235, 3).

[9] Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona (Brachos 2a s.v. vkol ha'over). What this author finds interesting is that earlier Rabbeinu Yona (1a s.v. v'chachamim) is quoted as ruling similarly to the Ramban (although he maintained that both Rabban Gamliel and the Chachamim held that one must daven Maariv immediately after Tzeis HaKochavim). Yet, one day later, he later qualified the ruling and effectively changed the halacha. It must be stressed that this opinion is a 'daas yachid' and many later authorities, including the poskim mentioned in footnote 11, argue quite vehemently against it. The halacha does not follow this opinion.

[10] Brachos 4a.

[11] Shu"t Shaagas Aryeh (4). Others who question the Shulchan Aruch's ruling include the Bach (Orach Chaim 235, end 3), Pnei Yehoshua (Brachos 9a s.v. sham b' Gemara), Sfas Emes (Brachos 2a s.v. ad), and the Beis HaLevi (Shu"t Beis HaLevi vol. 1, 34, 4). Although none of them seem to actively rule against the Shulchan Aruch (as opposed to the Shaagas Aryeh who does quite vigorously), it is interesting to note that the Torah Temima, in his autobiographical Mekor Baruch (cited in Shu"t Moadim U'Zmanim vol. 4, 269 footnote 1), tells a story about the Beis HaLevi where he claimed that he ruled that one may daven Maariv l'chatchila all night long. Rav Moshe Sternbuch in his sefer Hilchos HaGr"a U'Minragav (120, pg. 134) cites this as proof that the Beis HaLevi did indeed rule like the Shaagas Aryeh. Rav Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, in his Seder HaZmanim (2) defends the Shaagas Aryeh's shittah at length and concludes that he is indeed correct. Obviously, the poskim mentioned in this article offer much more halachic rationale and proofs to their opinions. However, the main thrusts of their views are presented here.

[12] See Shu"t Pri Yitzchak (vol. 2, 2), who attacks the Shaagas Aryeh's position at length, and concludes that the Shulchan Aruch was correct in his ruling. Other later authorities including the Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 34, 5) and the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (70, 2) simply and straightforwardly rule like the Shulchan Aruch. The Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 235, 18) writes that it was the Shulchan Aruch's prerogative to rule like the Ramban and SmaG without even mentioning the dissenting opinion of the Rashba, Rosh, and Tur, as apparently that shitta is the "ikar one according to his great knowledge". [Although he does disagree with the Shulchan Aruch's ruling like the minority opinion of the Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah that one should ideally daven immediately after Tzeis HaKochavim, and concluding that perhaps this why we find that many are not too 'medakdek' with this.] Oddly, this author did not find the Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Ben Ish Chai or Kaf Hachaim discussing this issue.

[13] Biur Halacha (235 s.v. uzmana). The Divrei Chamudos (Brachos Ch. 1, 45) and Shaarei Teshuva (ad loc. 7) rule this way as well. See also Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer (vol. 6, 2, 3) who proves from the Ramban (see also Rema (Orach Chaim 106, 3) that one who is involved with Tzorcei Tzibbur has equal dispensation to one who is teaching Torah publicly.

[14] Yalkut Yosef (on Hilchos Brachos pg. 753 & Kitzur Shulchan Aruch - Orach Chaim 235, 3) and Shu"t Ohr L'Tzion (vol. 2, Ch. 15, 9).

[15] Halichos Shlomo on Tefillah (Ch. 13, footnote 51), Ishei Yisrael (Ch. 28, 15), and Avnei Yashpei (on Hilchos Tefilla Ch. 11, 11, pg. 158).

[16] However, it must be noted that the Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 108, end Mishbetzos Zahav 3) does not accept this. See also Mishna Berura (ad loc. 15).

[17] See Elyah Rabba (Orach Chaim 275, 11), Mishna Berura (ad loc. 27), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 25). However, the Butchatcher Rav (Eshel Avraham ad loc. Tinyana) proves that starting Maariv before Chatzos is sufficient not to transgress this.

[18] Ashrei Halsh (Orach Chaim vol. 1, Ch. 42, 21).

[19] Thanks are due to R' Yoel Rosenfeld for pointing this out and sending this author a picture of the sign. For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu. Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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