

Weekly Parsha BO 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's Torah reading highlights the final contentious debate between Moshe and the Pharaoh of Egypt. The opening sentence that introduces the drama describes that Moshe should somehow come to Pharaoh and warn him of the consequences that the continuing oppression of the Jewish people will bring upon him and his nation.

The Hebrew text lends itself in the reading that Moshe should somehow come into Pharaoh, i.e., the name of the Parsha, "Bo". Moshe is supposed to get to Pharaoh's palace and gain some sort of understanding that will explain the stubbornness and masochism that dominates Pharaoh's relationship with the Jewish people and his refusal to free them from subjugation and slavery.

What is undoubtedly perplexing is the adamant refusal by Pharaoh to listen to the words of his own officers and advisors, who tell him that Egypt is lost. Yet despite everything - the plagues, the advice of his consultants and the imminent destruction of Egypt that Pharaoh is undoubtedly also aware of, he continues his suicidal course, and finds it impossible to save himself and his people from further tragedy. What drives Pharaoh to this extreme?

The Torah itself provides an answer, that the Lord has hardened the heart of the Pharaoh to such an extent that, no matter what blows will be visited upon him, and what the cost to Egypt will be, he will attempt to persevere and enforce this policy of enslavement over the Jews. Pharaoh has lost control of the situation, for Heaven is intervening and Pharaoh's judgment is clouded.

Because of this circumstance, the hardening of the Pharaoh's heart by Heaven, the moral question is raised by all the great commentators. If free will has been taken away from Pharaoh, then how can he be held accountable for his actions, and why should the Egyptian people be punished if they really have no choice but to pursue the cause of enslaving the Jewish people?

There have been many ideas advanced over the ages that deal with this logical, philosophical, and moral issue. It is clear the Torah informs us that there is a point of no return regarding the behavior of nations and individuals. Once that line is crossed, even though

initially it is a matter of free will, there is no longer any way to avoid the consequences of their choice.

It is analogous to missing the exit on a superhighway and finding that there is no other road that can lead them back to make the correct turn off the highway. The hardening of the heart of the Pharaoh recognizes the set of choices that he originally made in enslaving the Jewish people and refusing to listen to the words and warnings by others. Having made that choice in his own heart, he suffers the consequence of his behavior. He simply has 'missed the exit' and isn't able to return to the correct path and direction.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Telling the Story (Bo)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Go to Washington and take a tour of the memorials and you will make a fascinating discovery. Begin at the Lincoln Memorial with its giant statue of the man who braved civil war and presided over the ending of slavery. On one side you will see the Gettysburg Address, that masterpiece of brevity with its invocation of "a new birth of freedom." On the other is the great Second Inaugural with its message of healing: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right..." Walk down to the Potomac basin and you see the Martin Luther King Memorial with its sixteen quotes from the great fighter for civil rights, among them his 1963 statement, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." And giving its name to the monument as a whole, a sentence from the I Have a Dream speech, "Out of the Mountain of Despair, a Stone of Hope."

Continue along the tree-lined avenue bordering the water and you arrive at the Roosevelt Memorial, constructed as a series of six spaces, one for each decade of his public career, each with a passage from one of the defining speeches of the time, most famously, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

Lastly, bordering the Basin at its southern edge, is a Greek temple dedicated to the author of the American Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson. Around the dome are the words he wrote to Benjamin Rush: "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind

of man.” Defining the circular space are four panels, each with lengthy quotations from Jefferson’s writings, one from the Declaration itself, another beginning, “Almighty God hath created the mind free,” and a third “God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?”

Each of these four monuments is built around texts, and each tells a story.

Now compare the monuments in London, most conspicuously those in Parliament Square. The memorial to former Prime Minister David Lloyd George contains three words: David Lloyd George. The one to Nelson Mandela has two: Nelson Mandela, and the Winston Churchill memorial just one: Churchill. Winston Churchill was a man of words, in his early life a journalist, later a historian, author of almost fifty books. He won the Nobel Prize not for Peace but for Literature. He delivered as many speeches and coined as many unforgettable sentences as Jefferson or Lincoln, Roosevelt or Martin Luther King Jr., but none of his utterances is engraved on the plinth beneath his statue. He is memorialised only by his name.

The difference between the American and British monuments is unmistakable, and the reason is that Britain and the United States have a quite different political and moral culture. England is, or was until recently, a tradition-based society. In such societies, things are as they are because that is how they were “since time immemorial.” It is unnecessary to ask why. Those who belong, know. Those who need to ask, show thereby that they don’t belong.

American society is different because from the Pilgrim Fathers onward it was based on the concept of covenant as set out in Tanach, especially in Exodus and Deuteronomy. The early settlers were Puritans, in the Calvinist tradition, the closest Christianity came to basing its politics on the Hebrew Bible. Covenantal societies are not based on tradition. The Puritans, like the Israelites three thousand years earlier, were revolutionaries, attempting to create a new type of society, one unlike Egypt or, in the case of America, England. Michael Walzer called his book on the politics of the seventeenth century Puritans, *The Revolution of the Saints*.^[1] They were trying to overthrow the tradition that gave absolute power to kings and maintained established hierarchies of class.

Covenantal societies always represent a conscious new beginning by a group of people dedicated to an ideal. The story of the founders, the journey they made, the obstacles they had to overcome and the vision that drove them are essential elements of a covenantal culture. Retelling the story, handing it onto one’s children, and dedicating oneself to continuing the work that earlier generations began, are fundamental to the ethos of such a society. A covenanted nation is not simply there because it is there. It is there to fulfil a moral vision. That is what led G. K. Chesterton to call the United States a nation “with the soul of a church,”^[2] the only one in the world “founded on a creed”^[3] (Chesterton’s antisemitism prevented him from crediting the true source of America’s political philosophy, the Hebrew Bible).

The history of storytelling as an essential part of moral education begins in this week’s parsha. It is quite extraordinary how, on the brink of the Exodus, Moses three times turns to the future and to the duty of parents to educate their children about the story that was shortly to unfold: “When your children ask you, ‘What is this service to you?’ you shall answer, ‘It is the Passover service to God. He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, sparing our homes’ (Ex. 12:25-27). ‘On that day, you shall tell your child, ‘It is because of this that God acted for me when I left Egypt’” (Ex. 13:8). “Your child may later ask you, ‘What is this?’ You shall answer them, ‘With a show of power, God brought us out of Egypt, the place of slavery’ (Ex. 13:14).

This is truly extraordinary. The Israelites have not yet emerged into the dazzling light of freedom. They are still slaves. Yet already Moses is directing their minds to the far horizon of the future and giving them the responsibility of passing on their story to succeeding generations. It is as if Moses were saying: Forget where you came from and why, and you will eventually lose your identity, your continuity and your *raison d’être*. You will come to think of yourself as the mere member of a nation among nations, one ethnicity among many. Forget the story of freedom and you will eventually lose freedom itself.

Rarely indeed have philosophers written on the importance of storytelling for the moral life. Yet that is how we become the people we are. The great exception among modern philosophers has been Alasdair MacIntyre, who wrote, in his classic *After*

Virtue, “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” Deprive children of stories, says MacIntyre, and you leave them “anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.”[4]

No one understood this more clearly than Moses, who knew that without a specific identity it is almost impossible not to lapse into whatever is the current idolatry of the age – rationalism, idealism, nationalism, fascism, communism, postmodernism, relativism, individualism, hedonism, or consumerism, to name only the most recent. The alternative, a society based on tradition alone, crumbles as soon as respect for tradition dies, which it always does at some stage or another.

Identity, which is always particular, is based on story, the narrative that links me to the past, guides me in the present, and places on me responsibility for the future. And no story, at least in the West, was more influential than that of the Exodus, the memory that the Supreme Power intervened in history to liberate the supremely powerless, together with the covenant that followed whereby the Israelites bound themselves to God in a promise to create a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, where individuals were respected as the image of God, where one day in seven all hierarchies of power were suspended, and where dignity and justice were accessible to all. We never quite reached that ideal state, but we never ceased to travel toward it and believed it was there at journey’s end.

“The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us,” said the BBC’s political correspondent, Andrew Marr.[5] God created man, Elie Wiesel once wrote, because God loves stories.[6] What other cultures have done through systems, Jews have done through stories. And in Judaism, the stories are not engraved in stone on memorials, magnificent though that is. They are told at home, around the table, from parents to children as the gift of the past to the future. That is how storytelling in Judaism was devolved, domesticated, and democratised.

Only the most basic elements of morality are universal: “thin” abstractions like justice or liberty tend to mean different things to different people in different places and different times. But if we want our children and our society to be moral, we need a collective story that tells us where we came from and what our task is in the world. The story of the Exodus,

especially as told on Pesach at the Seder table, is always the same yet ever-changing, an almost infinite set of variations on a single set of themes that we all internalise in ways that are unique to us, yet we all share as members of the same historically extended community.

There are stories that ennoble, and others that stultify, leaving us prisoners of ancient grievances or impossible ambitions. The Jewish story is in its way the oldest of all, yet ever young, and we are each a part of it. It tells us who we are and who our ancestors hoped we would be. Storytelling is the great vehicle of moral education. It was the Torah’s insight that a people who told their children the story of freedom and its responsibilities would stay free for as long as humankind lives and breathes and hopes.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bo

The Highest Form of Divine Service Is Going Against Your Nature

When Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim, the pasuk in this week’s parsha says that no dogs barked at them (Shemos 11:7). The pasuk in Mishpatim says “People of holiness shall you be to Me, you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field, to the dog you shall throw it” (Shemos 22:30). Rashi comments that dogs were singled out to be thrown the non-kosher meat as an indication that the Almighty does not withhold reward from any deserving creature. In other words, as reward for not barking at the Jews when they left Egypt, the dogs are to be given the treife meat that could not be consumed by Jews.

The question that can be asked is as follows: In last week’s parsha, Chazal say that the frogs jumped everywhere—even into the Egyptian’s ovens. In this way, they sanctified the Name of G-d. Now, who is more deserving of reward, a frog for jumping into a fiery oven or a dog for not barking? Logically, we would say the frogs sacrificed their lives and were more deserving of reward than the dogs. Yet, the Torah does not say that we should give our dried worms (or anything else) to the frogs as a reward for their meritorious service in Mitzrayim.

A second observation can be made: In Perek Shirah, all the animals of the animal world sing praises to the Almighty. Chazal say that the song offered by the dogs is: “Come let us prostrate ourselves and bow, let us kneel before Hashem our Maker.” (Tehillim 95:6). The Medrash notes that Rav Yeshaya the disciple of

Rav Chanina ben Dosa fasted 85 separate days. He could not understand how dogs merited to sing praises (Shirah) to the Almighty. The pasuk refers to dogs as brazen souls (Azzai Nefesh) (Yeshaya 56:11). Every creature has its identifying characteristic. Dogs personify the attribute of chutzpah! So, Rav Yeshaya could not understand how dogs could say Shirah. He fasted 85 times to be given Divine insight as to how this strange idea could be understood.

The Medrash says that an Angel came to Rav Yeshaya and told him that he was sent from Heaven to inform him that the dogs merited singing Shirah to the Almighty by virtue of their meritorious behavior at the time of the Exodus, about which it is written “No dog whet its tongue” (Shemos 11:7). Not only did they merit singing Shirah, but dogs also merit that their excrement is used to tan the hide of animals in preparation for making the parchment used to write Sifrei Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzos. I saw in the contemporary sefer Darash Mordechai that the author asked modern day Torah Scribes whether this was still the case, and they confirmed the fact that indeed the essence of the chemicals used to prepare animal hides to make parchment for writing Kisvei haKodesh is still derived from dog excrement.

So, the question is now strengthened three-fold. The dogs merited having non-kosher meat thrown to them, they merited saying Shirah, and they merit that their excrement is used for preparing holy parchment – all for what reason? It is because they did not bark at the departing Jews. Again, when we contrast that with the “heroism” of the frogs during the second plague, it seems like a very minimal sacrifice on the part of dogs that they refrained from “whetting their tongues.”

The explanation is that nothing is more precious to the Ribono shel Olam than a person or animal or creature breaking its nature. That is what Divine Service is all about. A person overcoming his natural instincts and his innate personality traits is more beloved and dearer to the Almighty than anything else.

Dogs bark! The Gemara says in Brochos that when dogs sense the Malach HaMaves (the Angel of Death) they certainly bark. It is an amazing accomplishment in the Eyes of Hashem for the dogs in Egypt to conquer their inclinations and not give in to their natural tendencies. The frogs, on the other hand, may not have even realized that they were jumping into ovens, and even if they did deserve any reward, perhaps not dying in the ovens and living to tell the tale was their reward.

Of course, whenever we hear a teaching of Chazal like this, these are all metaphors. Chazal are trying to teach us something. The message is that we all have natural inclinations. Some of us are inclined to get angrier easier than others, some people have a tendency to be cheap and stingy, while other people have a tendency to spend money loosely. People have various tendencies. Even siblings, and even twins,—who we might think have everything in common in terms of genes and background—have significant differences in their personalities. There are varying techunos haNefesh (qualities of the soul).

Man’s challenge in serving the Ribono shel Olam is to be able to control and channel his techunos haNefesh as needed to adhere to the Will of the Almighty. That was what was so great about the dogs in Egypt.

When I recently spoke in Chicago, I alluded to such an idea. Rav Ben Zion Twerski, son of Rav Michel Twerski, told me that the Baal HaTanya in the Torah Ohr mentions a similar concept as an interpretation of a particular Gemara. He subsequently e-mailed to me the source where the Torah Ohr mentioned this idea, as well as a location where the Tanya himself mentions the same idea.

This idea explains a Gemara in Maseches Avodah Zarah (18a) that has perturbed many Baalei Mussar as well as Chassidic thinkers. The Gemara writes that when Rav Yosi ben Kisma took ill, Rav Chanina ben Taradyon went to visit him. Rav Yosi ben Kisma asked Rav Chanina ben Taradyon “What on earth are you doing? Have you lost your mind?” Rav Chanina ben Taradyon was teaching Torah publicly against the edict of the Roman Government. This was a capital offense. Rav Chanina’s response was “From Heaven they will have Mercy.” Rav Yosi ben Kisma answered back: “I am telling you facts and giving you a reasonable argument and you say, ‘From Heaven they will have Mercy’? I will be astonished if the Romans don’t burn you together with your Sefer Torah in fire.”

This is exactly what happened. The Gemara continues with the famous story of how the Romans burnt Rav Chanina ben Taradyon, wrapping him in balls of wool inside a Sefer Torah to increase his pain and prolong his anguish.

However, prior to describing the tragic end of Rav Chanina ben Taradyon, the Gemara continues the story of the dialog between him and the ailing Rav Yosi ben Kisma. Rav Chanina ben Taradyon asked Rav Yosi ben Kisma: “Tell me, what will be my fate

regarding the World to Come?” Rav Yosi ben Kisma then asked him, “Have you ever done anything worthwhile in your life (Klum ma’aseh bah l’yadcha)?” Rav Chanina responded that in fact there was an incident he could be proud of: “I once had money I collected on Purim for distribution to the poor. However, I put that money in my wrong pocket and it got mixed up with my own personal money. I therefore gave away all the money—the money that was designated for the poor and my personal funds—to those in need.” Rav Yosi ben Kisma was very impressed with this noble action and said “If that is the case then certainly you are destined to enter the World to Come. Not only that, but may it be G-d’s Will that my portion in Gan Eden be equivalent to your portion there.”

Everyone comments on this most perplexing Gemara. Rav Chanina ben Taradyon is becoming a martyr for teaching Torah in public. He wonders whether he is deserving entrance into the World to Come? To compound the question, the incident he mentions, which Rav Yosi ben Kisma says is his ticket to Gan Eden, appears to pale in comparison to that martyrdom! What does this Gemara mean?

Rav Shneur Zalman of Lyadi, the Baal haTanya, answers with an amazing interpretation in his sefer Torah Ohr: There are certain people who love the intellectual pleasure of learning Torah. The mere intellectual challenge that Torah analysis presents is appealing to such people. The Baal haTanya cites as proof the gentile philosophers of earlier times – they had every single pleasure of the world open to them with no restrictions placed upon them by Fear of Heaven or Divine mandates – and yet they gave up all the pleasures of life to immerse themselves in the intellectual challenges of whatever secular discipline interested them. To such “absent minded professors” – subjects such as Chemistry or Physics can be their whole life! This is because for them, the biggest pleasure in life isn’t eating or drinking or other physical indulgences. Their biggest pleasure is gaining knowledge and wisdom. They are willing to give up on everything else to achieve wisdom.

Rav Chanina ben Taradyon said “Yes, I am teaching Torah publicly. But maybe I am not really doing it ‘for the Sake of Heaven’. Maybe I am doing it because I enjoy it, because this is my life. There is no greater pleasure to me than publicly teaching Torah.” If that would be the case, for such effort and even martyrdom, perhaps he would not receive Olam

HaBah. He does it because he is addicted to Torah. Some people are addicted to alcohol or drugs or other addictive pleasures. Rav Chanina ben Taradyon realized that he was addicted to Torah. He feared that for such a personally pleasurable activity, he may not deserve Olam HaBah.

It was for that reason that Rav Yosi ben Kisma had to probe for another source of merit that Rav Chanina might have. His question was “Did you ever do something that went against your nature?” To that Rav Chanina responded affirmatively. “Yes, there was something I once did that went against my natural inclination.” The Baal HaTanya comments that people who have an affinity for intellectual pursuits tend to be cheap by nature, they don’t like to part with their money. (I have no idea why that should be the case.)

Rav Yosi ben Kisma opined that when Rav Chanina was able to cite the incident of the time he went against his inclination and voluntarily gave away his personal funds which were accidentally mixed in with Tzedaka funds, it was a sure sign that his Service to the Almighty was strictly for the Sake of Heaven and deserving of entry into the World to Come.

The Baal HaTanya explains in the same fashion the famous Talmudic dictum that one cannot compare someone who reviews his learning 100 times to someone who reviews it 101 times. The latter is called an “Oved HaShem” (a servant of Hashem). The Baal HaTanya explains that everyone learns something one hundred times. That was standard operating procedure. That is how they learned. However, someone who goes beyond the normal, beyond what is expected – that is an Oved Hashem.

This is the idea by the dogs. A dog not barking is going against its nature. A person doing the right thing against his or her nature is the highest level of Divine Service. As a result, they deserved to sing Shirah, they were rewarded with the non-kosher meat, and their by-product is used in the production of Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzos.

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

Efrat, Israel –I have always been most fascinated—and confounded—by the ninth plague, the plague of darkness. How can darkness be “tangible,” touchable? Yes, darkness can be oppressive, foreboding and forbidding. But darkness is not substantive; much the opposite, it is usually defined as the absence of light, a

phenomenon more akin to nothingness than to something that can be touched or felt.

But then one phrase in the text, especially in view of how the Hebrews got to Egypt in the first place (because the jealous brothers of Joseph never “saw” the hapless favorite son of Jacob as their brother), cried out to me: “No man could see his brother”—because of darkness (Ex. 10:23).

Herein is depicted a spiritual, social darkness, a veritable blindness on the part of the Egyptians, who refused to see their Hebrew neighbors as their siblings under God; therefore, since they were the more powerful, they enslaved the able-bodied Hebrews and murdered their defenseless male babies. It was this spiritual blindness that certainly could be “felt” in the daily acts of inhumanity perpetrated against the Hebrews; it was this blindness that was miraculously expressed in this ninth, palpable plague of darkness.

This may very well serve as the key to understanding all of the plagues. The Egyptians turned their life-giving river into a bloodbath of innocent Hebrew babies; God turned the Nile into blood against the Egyptians.

Then, instead of much-needed water for crops, frogs poured out of the Nile, with their death-heralding “croaks” signaling disasters to come. The Egyptians forced cruel and unsanitary living conditions upon the Hebrews; God sent lice to the Egyptians. The Egyptians came after the Hebrews like wild beasts; God sent a plague of wild beasts to afflict the Egyptians. The Egyptians denuded their slaves of livestock; epidemic destroyed the Egyptian livestock. The taskmasters’ whippings caused the Hebrew slaves to suffer boils on their bodies; God sent the Egyptians a plague of boils and blisters.

The whiplashes stung the bodies of the suffering Hebrews, and a heavy rain of stinging, slaying hail fell down on the Egyptians. The Hebrew slaves saw the last of their crops confiscated by their masters, and God sent swarms of locusts to remove the last residue of Egyptian produce; locusts which covered their land and filled their houses. And finally, just as the Egyptians plunged the world into spiritual darkness by enslaving and murdering God’s “firstborn” Israel, God engulfed the Egyptian world in darkness and then slew the firstborn of the Egyptians—providing new hope for humanity when Pharaoh submitted to God’s will and allowed the Hebrews to leave Egypt as free men and women.

The peaceful Islam of the Sufi and moderate Sunni variety (11th to 13th centuries), the Islam which gave the world translations of the Greek mathematicians and philosophers, has given way to extremist Wahhabi Islam of world domination, of Jihad and conquest by the sword. Meanwhile, the free world is sleeping at the wheel. Iran is being allowed to continue to develop nuclear weaponry; European countries are siding with Mahmoud Abbas in his request for UN recognition even after he makes a pact with terrorist Hamas; Islamic State is on the march, beheading innocent people and taking over more and more territory in Iraq, and America is putting up too little opposition too late.

Shari’a domination is every bit as dangerous as Hitler’s Nazism, and is even more fanatically determined to make the world non-Islam free. The world once again is being engulfed in darkness. We are returning to the dark, black Middle Ages, and our response must be strong and immediate. We must prevent the victory of extremist Islam.

The Jewish people must understand that in these quickly changing times, we must be cognizant of the fact that God provides the cure before the knockout strike. One of the great miracles of this fateful and extraordinary period in Jewish history is the rapprochement between Christianity and Judaism after 2,000 years of Christian anti-Jewish persecution. A great majority of Christian leadership today renounces anti-Semitism, accepts our unique Covenant with God, and deeply respects the Jewish roots of their faith.

In light of the fact that our world war against extremist Islam is a religious war and although we are fewer than 13 million Jews worldwide while there are 1.2 billion Muslims, thankfully there are also two billion Christians. Hence, we Jews and Christians who believe in a God of love, morality and peace must join hands and hearts together and fulfill our mission as God’s witnesses and a light unto the nations. Together we must reach out to our Muslim brothers and sisters, first to those who understand and deplore the fact that ethical monotheistic Islam is being hijacked by fanatic mono-Satanistic Islam.

We must strengthen their voices to recapture the true faith of Islam. Then all of us, together, must reach out to our errant Muslim siblings and remind them that we are all children of Abraham, the father of those who believe in a God of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. With strength and spirit, faith and

fortitude, the free world will not only survive, but will prevail.

Shabbat Shalom!

Can we Identify the True Eizov?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Hyssop

Is eizov hyssop?

Question #2: Multi-use Eizov

May an eizov be used more than once?

Background

Parshas Bo includes the first reference in the Torah to eizov, in the following posuk:

And you shall take a bundle of eizov and dip it in the blood (of the korban Pesach) that is in the basin and touch it to the lintel and the two doorposts (Shemos 12:22).

The Bnei Yisroel were to take a bundle that contained at least three stalks of eizov (Sifrei, Parshas Chukas; Rambam, Peirush Hamishnayos Parah 11:9), although be'di'aved, if they found only two stalks, this would be sufficient to fulfill the mitzvah (see Parah 11:9). This requirement of using eizov stalk for the korban Pesach existed only that first Pesach, when the Bnei Yisroel were still in Egypt. Future korbanos Pesach did not require any eizov, nor was the blood touched to the lintel and doorposts, as stated in the Mishnah (Pesachim 96a).

Other mitzvos

Eizov is also essential for the performance of several other mitzvos, including:

1. Making a metzora tahor.
2. Purifying a house that is tamei tzaraas.
3. Processing the ashes of parah adumah.
4. Becoming tahor from tum'as meis.

To fulfill any of these mitzvos, it is required to use the specific species that the Torah calls eizov. Let us analyze and understand each of these instances.

Metzora

There are two types of metzora who are tamei, one called a metzora musgar and the other called a metzora muchlat. There are several differences between them, but, for our purposes, we will focus on only two: how long they remain tamei, and how they become tahor (Mishnah Megillah 8b). A metzora musgar is tamei for a maximum of fourteen days, after which, depending on his symptoms, he either immerses himself in a mikveh and becomes tahor, or he becomes a metzora muchlat. On the other hand, a

metzora muchlat will remain tamei for the rest of his life unless his tzaraas symptoms heal.

When a metzora muchlat's symptoms heal, becoming tahor requires a complicated procedure described in the Torah in the beginning of parshas Metzora (Vayikra Chapter 14). One of the steps in this procedure requires the use of an eizov stalk, which is tied to a detached cedar branch with a thread of crimson red wool. The piece of eizov must be at least the length of a tefach (Niddah 26a; Rambam, Tum'as Tzaraas 11:1), which is approximately 3-4 inches, and the piece of cedar wood must be the length of one ammah (Nega'im 14:6), approximately 18-24 inches. This branch is then used as part of a very unusual dipping and sprinkling procedure, in which a specific kind of blood is applied seven times, either to the back of the metzora's hand or to his forehead (Nega'im, 14:1). The tanna'im dispute which of these two places is correct, and the halachic conclusion is that it is the back of his hand (Nega'im, 14:1). This sprinkling is the first step in a long purification process necessary to make a metzora tahor again. Without an eizov branch, he cannot become tahor (Tosefta, Menachos 6:11).

Tumah on houses

There are several different stages of tum'as Nega'im that can affect a house, see Vayikra 14:33-53 and Mishnah Nega'im, Chapters 12-13. For some of these stages, the method of making the house tahor again involves the same process, utilizing eizov, cedar wood and crimson-red wool that I have just described. In this instance, the blood is applied to the lintel of the house (Nega'im, 14:1), since it is uncommon for a house to have either a forehead or a hand.

Processing parah adumah

One of the steps in processing the parah adumah is throwing into the burning pyre the same three items tied together that were used to make the metzora and the tamei house tahor – that is, an eizov stalk tied to a cedar branch with a piece of crimson-red wool (Bamidbar 19:6; see also Parah 3:10).

Becoming tahor from tum'as meis

Someone or something that became tamei from contact with a corpse requires the following procedure to become tahor: ashes of the properly processed parah adumah are sprinkled into spring water and then a tahor person takes an eizov stalk, dips it into the parah adumah/spring water mixture and sprinkles this water onto the utensil or person that needs to become tahor. This procedure needs to be performed twice; the

first sprinkling is at least two days after the person or utensil became tamei, and the second at least four days later (Bamidbar 19:18-19). These are referred to as the third and seventh day of the purification process. To be kosher, the sprinkling must be performed with a stalk of eizov.

With a vov or without?

This author has noted that the word “eizov” is spelled in all places in Tanach with four letters, including the vov, with the exception of parshas metzora, where it is always three letters, missing the vov. I have searched, but thus far not found, any commentator who explains a reason for this curiosity. I have also thought about this question, without any satisfactory answer. If any of our readers locates an answer to this question, I will be grateful to hear it.

Multi-use eizov

At this point, we can discuss the second of our opening questions: May an eizov be used more than once?

Of course, this question requires clarification: used more than once for what? Obviously, the eizov used in processing the parah adumah cannot be used more than once, since it was burned in the pyre of the slaughtered red cow. (Although it is popular to translate parah adumah as “red heifer,” I have written in other articles why “red cow” is a more accurate translation.)

The Mishnah states that an eizov used to sprinkle someone and thereby make him tahor from tum’as meis may still be used to make a metzora tahor (Parah 11:8), so we know that, in this situation at least, an eizov may be used for more than one type of purification. In addition, the Tosefta (Nega’im 8:2) states that an eizov may be used to make more than one metzora tahor. So, it would seem that an eizov may be used as many times as possible.

Is eizov muktzah?

As we will see shortly, the eizov was harvested sometimes for food, sometimes for (animal) feed and sometimes as firewood. The purpose for which it was harvested determines whether it is muktzah on Shabbos. If it was harvested for food or feed, it is not muktzah, but if it was harvested for firewood it is (Shabbos 128a).

What species is eizov?

All of this previous discussion does not explain what an eizov is. The word is always translated in English as hyssop, which, according to my desktop dictionary, has the following meanings:

1. “A woody plant, *Hyssopus officinalis*, native to Asia, having spikes of small blue flowers and aromatic leaves used in perfumery and as a condiment.”

2. “Any of several similar or related plants.

3. “An unidentified plant mentioned in the Bible as the source of twigs used for sprinkling in certain Hebraic purificatory rites.”

The word purificatory means “something used in an act of purifying,” which means that dictionary definition #3 is a perfect translation for the word eizov, except that I would use the word “stalks,” rather than “twigs,” as we will soon see. I suspect that the contributor to the dictionary has not spent as much time analyzing Talmudic sources on this topic as I have.

The dictionary itself notes that we do not know if *Hyssopus officinalis* is the original eizov that the Torah meant. The English word “hyssop” was derived from the Hebrew word eizov, via Greek, Latin and possibly French.

Readily available in Egypt and Eretz Yisroel

The exact identification of eizov was well known from the time of the Exodus from Egypt through the time of the Mishnah, a period of almost 1600 years. This we know because the Mishnah in several places refers to “eizov” without any need to explain what is intended by the term. At the time and place of the Mishnah, its identity was still widely known, but sometime during the time and/or place of the Gemara, uncertainty regarding its identity developed. This might mean that eizov grew commonly from Egypt through the area of Eretz Yisroel, but was less commonly available in Mesopotamia, a section of which we call Bavel, 550 miles further east, and with a very different climate.

Hints of eizov

The Tanach and the writings of Chazal contain the following hints that might help us identify which species is the true eizov:

Very short

Several midrashim mention that eizov was a very low-growing plant. The midrash states that Shelomoh Hamelech explained why purifying the metzora requires the use of the tallest among tall trees (a cedar) and the shortest of the short plants (the eizov). Since this individual may have been as haughty as the cedar is tall, he was humbled by being smitten with tzaraas. When he learns to humble himself as the eizov is

short, he will be cured by the eizov (Bamidbar Rabbah, Chukas 19; see also Shemos Rabbah 12:7). From a Mishnah we see that, occasionally, an eizov was so small that it was difficult to dip into the water containing the ashes of the parah adumah, but it was still large enough to use for sprinkling. To quote the Mishnah: “A short eizov can be extended with a string or a stick and immersed this way. Then the eizov itself must be grasped when used for sprinkling” (Parah 12:1).

How small?

Short is a relative term. Are we able to quantify the size of an average eizov plant?

Indeed, we can, because the Mishnah permits using an eizov for sprinkling, even if it was as small as the volume of an egg, as we see in the following Mishnah: “Someone who used a tamei eizov to sprinkle, if the eizov was the size of an egg, it made the water of the parah adumah tamei, and the sprinkling does not make the person tahor. If it was smaller than the size of an egg, it does not make the water tamei” (Parah 12:6). Thus, this information will help us identify potential eizov candidates.

Inexpensive

We also know that the eizov was considered inexpensive (see Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim #986).

Grows on walls

From the pasuk in Melachim I 5, 13, we see that eizov sometimes grows out of walls, as it says that Shelomoh spoke about the eizov that grows out of the wall. Many plants can grow from the cracks between the stones of a wall; however most will not sustain themselves this way.

It is edible

Several Mishnayos indicate that the eizov, or some part of it, was commonly eaten. We also see that eizov was not harvested exclusively for food, but was often gathered or cultivated for feed or for firewood (Shevi'is 8:1; Parah 11:8; Tosefta, Shabbos 8:31). These usages of the eizov are reiterated in a Gemara (Shabbos 128a). We also know that it was eaten either raw or cooked (see rishonim to Shevi'is 8:1), implying that it was not eaten exclusively as a salad green.

A Mishnah implies that only part of the eizov plant is edible – there are parts too hard to be considered food, but are useful for holding the edible part of the eizov (Uktzin 2:2).

We also know that it had a medicinal use (see Shabbos 109b; rishonim to Shevi'is 8:1), since the

Gemara states that shumshik was used to treat kukiyani. (See below for the identification of shumshik as a suggestion for eizov.) The Gemara mentions that kukiyani was caused by eating barley flour that had remained in storage for forty days (Shabbos 109b). Rashi explains that kukiyani was some type of intestinal worm.

Berriful

From other Mishnayos we know that some type of berry grows on the eizov (Parah 11:7). There are varieties of marjoram, oregano and hyssop that have some type of cluster that grows on the stem, in addition to the leaves, and this is probably what is intended.

Different types of eizov

We see from the mishnayos (Nega'im 14:6; Parah 11:7) that there were various types of eizov, but most were identified by an adjective, such as “Roman eizov,” “blue eizov” and “desert eizov.” These other varieties were not kosher for use for any of the above-mentioned mitzvos, all of which required a species or variety that was widely known simply as “eizov,” without any adjective. To quote the Mishnah, “that which was called the Greek eizov (or eizovyon, there are two different texts to this Mishnah), the blue eizov, the Roman eizov, the desert eizov, and any other variety with a qualifying description is not kosher as eizov” (Nega'im 14:6; Parah 11:7). Dr. Yehuda Feliks, who devoted much research to identify various species mentioned in Tanach and Mishnah, suggested that “blue eizov” is *Hyssopus officinalis*, a variety of hyssop whose flowers are usually blue.

Does it have branches?

Regarding the requirement to use the eizov for making someone tahor from tum'as meis, the Mishnah (Parah 11:9) cites a dispute between the Tanna Kamma and Rabbi Yehudah, wherein the Tanna Kamma holds that one uses a bundle containing three harvested eizov plants each complete with its root. Rabbi Yehudah adds that each should have a main stalk and two side shoots. On the other hand, the Tanna Kamma rules that a single eizov plant containing a main stalk and two side shoots can be separated into three stalks and then bound together, and it is kosher, lechatchilah, as “three, bound eizov stalks.”

Tying three eizov stalks together is lechatchilah, but not essential, bedi'aved. It is also acceptable to use an eizov plant that contains two or three eizov stalks or branches, without separating the stalks. Furthermore, the stalks may be held together, rather than tied. It is

even acceptable to use only two, rather than three, eizov branches. In all of these instances, a tamei meis who was sprinkled with spring water containing parah adumah ashes by someone using these lesser quality eizov stalks has satisfied the requirement of one sprinkling that is part of the process of becoming tahor.

Usually three branches

Since the Tanna Kamma and Rabbi Yehudah are not disputing what type of plant is an eizov, we know the eizov plant must commonly have branches. This factor is mentioned in the Gemara that I will quote, momentarily, as the basis for a dispute identifying the eizov.

Available in Egypt and Israel but not in Mesopotamia
As mentioned above, at the time of the Mishnah, identity of the eizov appears to have been common knowledge. However, by the time of the Gemara, its correct identification was uncertain, as demonstrated in the following passage (Shabbos 109b): “Rav Yosef said: ‘Eizov is what we call avarsah bar hamag, whereas the eizovyon of the Mishnah is what we call avarsa bar hineg.’ (Rashi mentions that the first type is a plant that commonly grows near reeds, and the second type is a variety that commonly grows near thorn bushes.) Ula explained eizov to be what was known in his day as ‘white marva’ (which some translate to be a variety of sage). Rav Pappi explained that it was shumshik (some identify this as marjoram). Rav Yirmiya of Difti ruled that this last approach was most likely correct, since the (above-quoted) Mishnah stated that an eizov should ideally have three stalks, each of which has three flowers, and shumshik is a species that grows this way commonly.”

Which one?

Among rishonim, I found the following candidates suggested to identify the three differing opinions cited in this passage of Gemara: oregano, sage, marjoram, thyme and, indeed, the species today called hyssop, *Hyssopus officinalis* (see Rashi ad loc; Rambam, Commentary to Shevi’is 8:1 and to Nega’im 14:1; Aruch s.v. Shimshek; Ibn Ezra, Shemos 12:22).

(To correct a common error, marjoram and oregano are not two names for the same species. Marjoram’s botanical name is *Origanum majorana*, whereas common oregano is *Origanum vulgare*. The error comes from the fact that, in some places, oregano is called “wild marjoram.” Both oregano and marjoram are commonly used today as spices and herbs, and as natural herbal medicines for a variety of ailments.)

Another candidate is what is called today zatar, a commonly used spice that seems to fit the various descriptions mentioned above. Its scientific name is *Origanum syriacum*.

All of these candidates are small plants in the mint family that grow in the Middle East.

As with other mitzvos that require identification, there is a good chance that we will have to wait for Eliyahu Hanavi to provide definitive identification of this plant that has such halachic and hashkafic significance.

Conclusion

The midrash teaches that there are items in Hashem’s creation that look unimportant, and yet, Hashem commanded that they be used to fulfill many mitzvos (Shemos Rabbah, parshas Bo, 17:2,3). To quote the continuation of the midrash, “The eizov appears like nothing to man, yet its power is very significant to Hashem... this teaches us that small and large are viewed by Hashem with the same amount of significance. He makes miracles out of small items, and He redeemed the Jews with their use of the smallest of the tree family. ...

“When the eizov is bundled, (Hashem says) I make you a bundle, just for Me, even if you are as seemingly unimportant as the eizov, as the posuk says, you will be My special treasure from among all the nations”.

Stop Tolerating Abuse – Rabbi YY Jacobson Redemption Begins When I Stop Making Peace with the Lies

Moses’ Early Years

It is one of the most intriguing components of the Exodus story. As we pointed out in a previous essay, the first leader of the Jewish people, who would set them free and mold them into a nation, grew up not among his own people, but in the palace of the man who wished to destroy them.

Why did Providence have it that Moses was raised not in a Jewish home, but among non-Jews, in the Egyptian palace?

Liberation from Tolerance

The English translations of the Torah rarely capture the multi-dimensional underpinnings behind many words. One example in this week’s portion (Vaera): “Therefore,” G-d speaks to Moses, “Say to the Children of Israel: I am G-d, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their slavery; I shall redeem you.”[1]

The Hebrew word for "burdens," *sivlos*, can also be translated as "tolerance" (as in "lesbol," to bear, or "savlanut," which means patience).[2] Tolerance is a form of burden carrying, of accepting a challenge. If this is correct, then G-d is communicating a potent message: "Say to the Children of Israel: I am G-d, and I shall take you out from tolerating Egypt." I will liberate you from your patience, from tolerating the Egyptian horrors.[3]

The Genesis of Redemption

This is a critical moment because it is the genesis of redemption—physical, emotional, or spiritual.

Many of us, after being subjected to dysfunctional conditions, learn to acclimate ourselves to the bleak reality. This can be worse than the condition itself since it keeps me stuck in my prison.

The beginning of the Exodus could only occur when the Hebrew slaves refused to tolerate the horrors they were enduring. If I am not fed up with being weak and bullied, with being a victim of addiction or fear, my journey of redemption cannot commence.

It is not easy. Learned helplessness runs deep. Denying or repressing the depth of the dysfunction is a way of numbing myself to the suffering. I must be able to feel the pain of my alienation from self to be able to begin the voyage toward liberation.[4]

Abuse In Our Communities

The events this week in Israel have once again accentuated this truth.

Sadly, many people, including some in leadership positions, are ill-informed of the detrimental effects of child molestation and sexual abuse of all ages. The average person who has not suffered through this calamity doesn't realize how so many of the abused suffer for years or decades from feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, shame, guilt, and pain. Many of the victims—due to their profound pain and skewed sense of self—find temporary relief in all forms of destructive behavior, including molesting a new generation of children. Many of them fall prey to terrible addictions in order to escape their agony. Untold numbers of these innocent souls are haunted by unbearable nightmares that won't allow them to lead a normal life internally. Most of them struggle to maintain functional marriages since their sexual boundaries have been brutally violated.

Though recovery is surely possible—for the soul is more powerful than all else, and the Divine infinite power within each of us can overcome all darkness—the pain they must endure is heart-wrenching.

Many people are equally ill-informed of how rampant the problem is, and of the great number of our youth that has been victimized over the years. Many researchers claim that one in five children experience some form of sexual abuse or trauma, affecting them on different levels.

We can't tolerate this any longer. Just as we would do anything to stop a gunman from walking our streets and taking lives, heaven forbid (what Jewish law calls a "rodef"), so must we do anything and everything to stop the people who are murdering the psyches and emotional innocence of our children.

We must also begin educating every single one of our young adults about two critical factors: 1) If they have been molested, help is available. They must know that if they will break the silence and reveal their story, they will be embraced rather than shunned, and will be guided with loving care towards a life of wholesomeness and happiness. We must give all of them the names and contact information of approved professionals, so they can reach out to them if necessary. 2) Preventive medicine: If they might ever be prone to engage in these terrible acts themselves, they must know: A) the horrific impact of such actions; and B) that there are things they can do to help them avoid becoming potential monsters who will surely destroy lives. They must all know that help is readily available for people with an inclination toward touching children inappropriately.

Parents and educators must discuss these dangers with their children and students—both the danger of becoming a victim, as well as the danger of becoming an abuser. Every—and I mean every—Yeshiva student must be educated about these two items.

We must also educate the community—both children and adults—on how important it is to talk to someone if they are privy to any sort of abuse being perpetrated in the community. To withhold this kind of information is essentially akin to being an accomplice and an enabler of the unthinkable crime of destroying lives in this vicious cycle. Most victims are too afraid or ashamed to speak up—and surely it is not their fault. They are terrified of being shunned, not believed, and of the possibility of being rejected forever. That is where our community stands today. We must change that and teach all of our youngsters that they will be heard, listened to, believed, and embraced with a loving heart and open arms. They will not be judged or ridiculed. We will treat their pain with the deepest respect and empathy.

The Outsider

Free people, G-d is telling Moses, are people who know how to stop tolerating lies, dysfunction, cover-ups, and abuse. A free nation is one that has the courage to face its skeletons and cast a light on them.

This is why the redeemer of Israel needed to grow up in the Egyptian palace, not among his own people. To quote Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th-century Spanish philosopher, poet, and biblical commentator): [5]

Perhaps G-d caused Moses to grow up in the home of royalty so that his soul would be accustomed to a higher sense of learning and behavior, and he would not feel lowly and accustomed to a house of slavery. You see that he killed an Egyptian who did a criminal act [beating an innocent Hebrew to death], and he saved the Midianite girls from the criminal shepherds who were irrigating their own flock from the water the girls have drawn.

Had Moses grown up among the Hebrew slaves, he too might have suffered from a slave-mentality lacking the courage to fight injustice and devoid of the ability to mold an enslaved tribe into a great people with a vision of transforming the world into a place worthy of the divine presence. He would not find within himself the strength to dream of liberty and confront the greatest tyrant of the time. Only because he grew up in a royal ambiance, did Moses have a clear sense of the horrific injustice and feel the power to fight it.

It was Dr. Martin Luther King's ability not to embrace the status quo which turned him into a great leader, inspiring a new era of liberty in the United States. As our own country faces today such divisiveness and extremism on the Left and the Right, we need to ask ourselves if we have not reverted to our "reptilian brains," and cannot see anything larger than what we are being indoctrinated with by people driven by hate and bias? Can we stop tolerating being told all the time what to think, and labeling people in extreme ways just because they do not fit into the narrow paradigms that we created to define morality and justice?

Moshiach

Just as this was true in Egypt, it is also true today. We have been in exile for close to two millennia. But the greatest danger is when we come to tolerate it, when it is seen as normal.

The beginning of our redemption is in our awareness that our exile is unnatural and cruel. Can we learn to begin thinking with the broadness of a redemptive

model? Can we cry out sincerely about our individual and collective pain of alienation?

Standards Determine Destiny

A little story.[6]

In the 1950s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, walking on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, encountered two administrators of a local yeshiva (Jewish day school) gazing at a yellow school bus parked on the road.

When the Rebbe asked them what they were looking at, they said that the bus was on sale and they were thinking of purchasing it for the yeshiva. "We desperately need our own bus," they told the Rebbe.

"But this bus looks like an old shmoteh," the Rebbe said. "It seems like it's on the verge of retirement. Why not purchase a brand-new bus for the children?"

"If we could only afford that type of money!" they exclaimed. "The price of this old bus is something we could maybe fit into our budget."

"Let me tell you something," the Rebbe responded.

"You know why you can't afford the money for a new bus? Because in your mind, the old and run-down bus will suffice for your yeshiva. If it would be clear to you that the children need a new and beautiful bus, you would have the money to purchase it."

What the Rebbe was saying is that in many cases, your standards are often what ultimately define the quality and destiny of your life.[7]

[1] Exodus 6:6.

[2] Sefas Emea Vaera 1871, 1876, in the name of his grandfather.

[3] This interpretation also explains the apparent redundancy in the verse: "I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt" followed by, "I shall rescue you from their slavery." The two statements seem to be repetitive. According to the above translation, the first statement discusses an exodus from tolerating Egypt, while the second alludes to the liberation from slavery and forced labor in Egypt.

[4] Thus, the Torah, in last week's portion (Shemos), commences the story of G-d choosing Moses to lead the Jewish people out of slavery with the following words: "The children of Israel groaned because of their subjugation and they cried out. Their outcry because of their slavery went up to G-d. G-d heard their cries and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." The curse of the Egyptian exile consisted not only of the oppression of the Hebrews; it also inculcated within many an enslaved mindset. The abuse was so profound that many of them learned to see their misery as innate.

This may be one of the reasons why when Moses presented the promise of redemption to the Jewish people, "They did not heed Moses, because of shortness of breath and hard work" (Exodus 6:9). The hard work was not only a physical impediment; it also created a slave mentality.

[5] Ibn Ezra Exodus 2:3. Though Moses was a Levi, and the tribe of Levi was not subject to hard labor, they were nonetheless still enslaved, they were part of a nation of slaves to one degree or another. The decree to murder the Jewish male infants applied to the tribe of Levi too. Prisoners who are not subject to slave labor, are still in prison.

[6] My thanks to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Hadakov (New Haven, Conn.) for sharing this lovely story with me.

[7] This essay is based on Sefas Emes Parshas Veira, authored by the second Rebbe of the Chassidic dynasty of Gur, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (1847-1905). This explanation in the word "sivlos," as well as the concept conveyed in this essay, is quoted by him in the name of his grandfather, the first Rebbe of Gur, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Rottenberg Alter, known as the Chedushei Harim (1799-1866).

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Bo - Out of Africa

Imagine that you are a tourist on your way to see this nation's most revered document, the one that forged our beliefs and principles. You enter the hallowed halls of the Library of Congress and ask a guard, "which way to the Declaration of Independence?" He points to a sign with bold letters. The sign has a large arrow and reads; "This way to the "Declaratsiya o Nezavisimossti" " In small print it translates the two Russian words – "Declaration of Independence." You would be shocked. Why in the world would the United States government use a foreign language to identify the very document that symbolizes the essence of America?

Of course the story is not true, and probably can never happen.

That is why I am troubled by the Torah's choice of words to introduce us to the most Jewish of all symbols – tefillin. The Torah commands the children of Israel to wear tefillin with an interesting expression. "They shall be for totafos between your eyes." (Exodus 13:16) The Talmud in Sanhedrin is concerned with the origins of the word totafos, clearly

it has no Jewish origin. The Talmud declares that totafos is a compound word that combines two foreign words. The word tot in Afriki (I assume Africa) means two, and the word pas in the Coptic language means two. The tefillin on the head has four compartments. Thus, tat-pas or totafos, means four.

How baffling! Why would the Torah use a compound of two very foreign words to describe a Jewish – perhaps the most Jewish — symbol?

What is even more interesting is that just a few verses prior the Torah refers to the tefillin boxes as a zikoron (remembrance) between the eyes (Exodus 13:9). If the Torah calls tefillin a remembrance than why does it refer to them as totafos? Moreover, if they are totafos then why call them a remembrance?

Stephen Savitsky, CEO of Staff Builders, one of America's leading home health care providers, spends quite a bit of time travelling on airplanes. It is at 35,000 feet where he has met Jews of great diversity, backgrounds, and beliefs. Once on a flight out of Baton Rouge toward Wichita, Kansas, he was bumped to first class. He was seated next to a large man who had a thick gold ring on his pinkie and an even thicker gold chain hanging loosely from his neck. The man was chewing an unlit cigar while immersing himself in a sports magazine. As soon as the seat belt sign was turned off he ordered two drinks. All the while the flamboyant jet-setter was immersed in his own self, and hardly glanced at the neatly groomed executive who was sitting next to him. He surely did not notice that Steve's head was covered during the entire flight.

The flight attendants began serving the meal. The smell of glazed ham that was wafting from his neighbor's tray made it difficult for Steve to eat his kosher food. It was only after the meals were cleared and the trays removed did Mr. Savitsky take out a small siddur (prayer book) to say Grace After Meals.

All of a sudden a pair of eyes transfixed on the siddur. "Hey, my friend!" exclaimed the man. Steve heard a Brooklyn accent cowering underneath the Southern drawl, "is that a seedoor?" Steve nodded, "sure. Do you want to look at it?"

"Look?" shouted the stranger. "I want to use it! Do you know how many years it has been since I saw a seedoor? Give it to me please!" The man grabbed it, kissed it, then he stood up in his seat and began to shake and shout with fervor! "Borucho es Adon " The entire first class section just turned around and stared in shock. For the next ten minutes the man stood and shook wildly as he recited the maariv prayer – word

for word – without care and concern for anyone who was watching. For those ten minutes he left Louisiana way below, as he ascended to the heavens with the world of his childhood.

With a mixture of great pride and a bit of embarrassment, Steve watched. When the man finished praying, Steve presented the small siddur that evoked Jewish memories over the Delta as a memento to the former yeshiva boy.

Perhaps the Torah intentionally called tefillin a remembrance. And perhaps, with even more intention, did it give it a foreign name. The Torah tells us that no matter where a Jew may be, whether the jungles of the Congo or the Coptic Islands, the Jewish symbols will be there to remind him to come home. The Torah's observance is not relegated to any specific geographical location. It can be observed, albeit not in toto, every place in the world. And no matter where a Jew finds himself there are symbols to remind him of his Judaism. For there is a special spark in every Jewish soul that is waiting to be kindled. Even out of Africa.

Dedicated By Dr. and Mrs. Keith Staiman and family in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Samuel Schectman Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
A Night of Transformation

The celebration of Pesach, and particularly the Seder night as described in Parshas Bo, is marked by stark contrasts. In the days of the Beis Hamikdash, the night of Pesach centered around the eating of the korban Pesach. There are two seemingly contradictory themes that emerge from how the korban Pesach is eaten. Its meat must be roasted rather than cooked since roasted meat was a sign of wealth and royalty. Similarly, the meat must not be left over as such a practice would resemble one who can't afford fresh meat the following day. Bones of the korban Pesach may not be broken since this is something one who lacks enough meat would usually do. The Sefer Hachinuch (in mitzvos 7,8, and 16) elaborates upon how observing these intricacies of halacha creates the mindset of our state of royalty as the nation of Hashem.

Even as we celebrate our exalted status on Pesach night, we perform mitzvos that invoke a very different image of ourselves. Accompanying the korban Pesach we partake of matza and marror. Matza is referred to as lechem oni - a poor man's bread. We highlight an existence of poverty and suffering even as we

celebrate our newfound freedom. This aspect of matza is so essential that we introduce the matza at the seder by declaring "Ha lachma anya"- this is a poor man's bread. Completing the mitzvos of eating on Pesach night is the obligation to partake of marror, which is the ultimate reminder of the bitterness of our lives as slaves prior to being redeemed on this very night.

Freedom and slavery, wealth and poverty, not only permeate the mitzvos of Pesach, Matza, and Marror, but the mitzva of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim revolves around these very themes as well. We are taught by Chazal that the Torah commandment of telling the story of yetzias Mitzrayim at the seder must include beginning with how lowly we were, both physically and spiritually, as slaves, and culminating in the glory bestowed upon us. The actual mitzvos as well as our entire discussion on this night encompass this theme of transformation.

Such a change in our existence, from those who survived on mere matza and tasted the bitterness of slavery to becoming a royal nation, should mentally take a great deal of time; perhaps generations would have to pass before a glorious nation could emerge. Yet, Hashem performed this transformation in literally the blink of an eye.

The symbolism of a downtrodden suffering people all of a sudden celebrating as the beloved royal nation of Hashem has great meaning for us both personally and nationally. Situations that appear bleak and hopeless can turn around in a moment. Personal suffering and pain can be transformed instantaneously to joy. Over the course of generations Jews have often sat down to the Seder in the most difficult circumstances. What gave our people the strength to celebrate the first Pesach after the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed? From where did Jews get the inspiration to perform a Seder knowing that the dangers of a blood libel could be upon them at any moment? How were Jews able to find the faith to commemorate the night of redemption from Mitzrayim even as they were suffering during the horrors of the Holocaust?

It was the Seder night that kept alive the dream of nobility of the Jewish people. Just as matza and marror gave way to korban Pesach over three thousand years ago, so too Klal Yisrael will emerge from galus and once again return to the Beis Hamikdash to partake of the korban Pesach and celebrate its glorious destiny.

As we read Parshas Bo, although still several months away from Pesach, let us focus on the dream of geula that we eagerly wait for at any moment.

Rav Kook Torah

Bo: The Exodus and Tefillin

The Torah commands us to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt by wearing tefillin (phylacteries) on the arm and head.

“These words will be for a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes, so that God’s Torah will be in your mouth; for God brought you out of Egypt with a strong arm.” (Exod. 13:9)

What is the connection between tefillin and the Exodus? How does wearing tefillin ensure that the Torah will be “in our mouths”?

An Outstretched Arm

Superficially, the redemption from Egypt was a one-time historical event, forging a potent memory in the collective consciousness of the Jewish people and all of humanity. But if we listen carefully to our inner soul, we will recognize that the Exodus is truly a continuous, ongoing act. The Divine miracles and signs that took place in Egypt launched the continual revelation of the hand of God, openly and publicly, on the stage of world history. The Exodus was an outburst of Divine light, potent and vibrant, in all realms of the universe, and its impact continues to resonate throughout the ages.

Before wrapping tefillin on the arm, we reflect that this mitzvah commemorates God’s zero'a netuya, His “outstretched arm” with which the Israelites were extracted from Egypt. What does this metaphor mean? The word “arm” (zero'a) comes from the root zera, meaning “seed.” The Divine redemption of Israel in Egypt was a holy seed, planted at that point in time. That wondrous event initiated the dissemination of its message, unhindered and uninterrupted, over the generations. As we bind the tefillin to our arms, we are reminded of God’s “outstretched arm,” the inner Godliness that continually develops and perfects the world, until it elevates its treasures of life to the pinnacle of Divine fulfillment.

A Strong Arm

The Torah uses a second metaphor to describe the Exodus: the yad chazakah, God’s “strong arm.” This phrase indicates a second, deeper connection between the mitzvah of tefillin and the Exodus. The liberation from Egyptian bondage served to combat the debasement of life, which threatened to drown

humanity in the depths of its crassness and vulgarity. Since the materialistic side of life is so compelling, it was necessary for God to reveal a “strong arm” to overcome our base nature, and allow the light of our inner holiness to shine from within.

The holy act of fastening the tefillin to the arm and head helps us transform the coarse and profane aspects of life into strength and vitality, revealing an inner life beautiful in its holiness.

To triumph over humanity’s coarseness, then at its peak in the contaminated culture of Egypt, required God’s “strong arm.” We similarly need to make a strong effort so that the Torah will remain in our minds and hearts. Tefillin are called a ‘sign’ and a ‘reminder,’ for they evoke the wondrous signs and powerful miracles of our release from Egyptian slavery. We must engrave the legacy of those miracles on all aspects of life: deed, emotion, and thought. Thus we bind these memories to our hand, heart, and mind, and transform our coarse nature to a holy one. Then the Torah will naturally be “in your mouth,” in the thoughts and reflections of the heart.

Through this powerful mitzvah, engaging both the arm (our actions) and the eye (our outlook and thoughts), we continue the Divine process that God initiated in Egypt with a “strong arm.”

TORAH SHORTS: Bo 5782

Weekly Biblical Thoughts by Ben-Tzion Spitz

Commentary based on the Chidushei HaRim

Powerfully Powerless (Bo)

Let not thy will roar, when thy power can but whisper.
-Thomas Fuller

Pharaoh is the most powerful man in the most powerful empire of the world in his day. He decided who would live and who would die. He decided who would be wealthy and who would be poor. He decided who would be free and who would be enslaved. It is no wonder that not only was he worshipped as a god, but he even thought of himself as a god.

Enters Moses, the self-proclaimed leader of the lowly slave race of Jews, claiming that there is some unseen God who demands obedience. Pharaoh quickly and cruelly laughs him out of the palace while cracking down even harder on the enslaved Jewish nation.

Moses together with his brother Aaron become the agents of the famed Ten Plagues. Before each series of plagues Moses asks Pharaoh to let the Jewish nation go serve their God. Pharaoh consistently either

declines to let them go, or reneges on his promise to let them go after a plague has passed.

Pharaoh is unwilling to bend to the attack of the plagues to the point of ludicrousness and national oblivion. His stubbornness would seem almost comical if it weren't so devastating. The Chidushei HaRim on Exodus 10:2 states (as do a number of other commentators) that after a certain point of Pharaoh hardening his own heart against the Jewish people and not letting them go, that eventually God steps in and hardens Pharaoh's heart as well to give Pharaoh the strength to continue to resist the onslaught of the plagues. A normal human being, even one as narcissistic and self-adoring as Pharaoh, unaided, would eventually succumb and give in to the divinely ordained plagues and free the Jewish people. God wanted Pharaoh to have the strength to continue to resist until all the plagues had been unleashed.

The Chidushei HaRim adds that God had another reason for giving Pharaoh additional power to withstand the devastation of the plagues. God wanted to show the Jews and the world that there is no power, there is no force, there is no situation that God can't save the Jewish people from. Even the most powerful man of the most powerful empire, with divinely reinforced stubbornness is as nothing for God to affect salvation when and how He chooses.

May we realize that power is so often just a façade, a temporary mirage.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the Webb telescope and all those involved in its planning, construction and launch, including my friend Michael Kaplan, recently interviewed here: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/space-is-changing-webb-is-just-the-start-says-ex-israeli-who-was-in-from-its-dawn/>

Torah Weekly - Parashat Bo
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and

Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned.

Hashem ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too.

Moshe tells Pharaoh that Hashem is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. Hashem again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month.

The Jewish People are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their doorposts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the doorpost will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when Hashem strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating chametz on Pesach.

Moshe relays Hashem's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. Hashem sends the final plague.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Egyptian Pandemic Reaches Its Climax

“Pharaoh said to him (Moshe), ‘Go from me!’” (10:28)

As we near the end of the second year of the coronavirus pandemic, life without a mask seems like a fond memory. And no one has any idea as to how long it will go on. Having had the privilege of being born at the half-way mark of the twentieth century in a stable western democracy, I never experienced a catastrophe like war or famine. That is, of course, until COVID-19 was unleashed upon the world.

I recently finished reading "The Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing, and the Future of the Human Race" by Walter Isaacson. I guess I have always been a bit naïve about scientists. Like many people, I like to think of them as somewhat otherworldly and not interested in the flesh-pots. Nothing could be further from the truth. The world of bio-tech is big business, and intellectual property is as fiercely fought over and as guarded as the crown

jewels. The egos involved are as large as in any Hollywood movie.

But the nightmare of Covid changed all that. There was no attempt, as Doudna put it, “to protect the university’s ability to profit from hypothetical inventions that might arise from scientists doing what we’re supposed to do — share our work with each other.”

She further writes: “Scientists around the world contributed to an open database of coronavirus sequences that, by the end of August 2020, had thirty-six thousand entries.

“The sense of urgency about COVID also brushed back the gatekeeper role played by expensive, peer-reviewed, paywall-protected scholarly journals such as Science and Nature. Instead of waiting months for the editors and reviewers to decide whether to publish a paper, researchers at the height of the coronavirus crisis were posting more than a hundred papers a day on preprint servers, such as medRxiv and bioRxiv, which were free and open and required a minimal review process.

“This allowed information to be shared in real time, freely, and even be dissected on social media. Despite the potential danger of spreading research that had not been fully vetted, the rapid and open dissemination worked well: it sped up the process of building on each new finding and allowed the public to follow the advance of science as it happened.

“On some important papers involving coronavirus, publication on the reprint servers led to crowdsourced vetting and wisdom from experts around the world.”

Pharaoh needed ten pandemics to humble his ego and let the Jews leave Egypt. It is encouraging that biotech scientists needed only one.

But maybe it is naïve to think that this spirit of humility and sharing will outlast the pandemic itself.

Restoring Trust

by Jonathan Rosenblum - Mishpacha Magazine

Once trust is lost, it is notoriously hard to restore, and never completely

Trust is the glue that secures every personal relationship and society in general. The widespread assessment that America is on a downward trajectory is largely a function of the division of the country into two large, antagonistic groups, neither of which credits the other with basic human decency. Once trust is lost, it is notoriously hard to restore, and never completely.

Torah society is perhaps uniquely predicated on a high degree of trust. We live with the assumption that members of our communities share our commitment to Torah values and that they strive to live in accord with those values, albeit not perfectly.

In light of recent events, however, we find ourselves of necessity giving our children the message: "You cannot trust anybody — at least not completely." And though it is not our intention, our children may hear that message as "Everybody cannot be trusted" — which is something very different. The societal glue has weakened as a consequence.

Anyone who enjoys a modicum of communal respect bears a large responsibility not to act in such a way as to undermine societal trust — the greater the respect, the greater the burden.

That responsibility is greatest with respect to the most vulnerable and gullible members of our community — the young. When they are abused by those whom they have been taught to view as representatives of the Torah — e.g., rabbis — their connection to Torah itself is shattered. And when the abuse is at the hands of those to whom they are bound by innate bonds of love — i.e., close family members — their ability to form any deep bonds thereafter is similarly destroyed.

In either case, the only hope that young victims can ever overcome the betrayal of trust is if they share their secret, and subsequently their pain is fully validated by those closest to them and the society at large. That means, inter alia, that wrongdoers are prosecuted. (I have written in the past about how crucial "validation" of the victims' pain is to their chances of leading a normal, productive life.)

Predators inevitably tell their victims, "No one will believe you. If you ever speak about what happened, nothing will come of it." The existence of an effective system of batei din goes a long way toward taking away that power from the perpetrator.

Any words or actions that discourage victims from coming forward, or that could appear to cast the blame on them, are invalidating, and result in their feeling twice murdered. Here again, the existence of batei din to deal with the issues is validating: It reinforces the importance that the community attaches to the issue.

THE MORNING SHIUR that I attend is currently studying Shaarei Teshuvah on chanufah (flattery). In the second category of flatterers, Rabbeinu Yonah lists those who praise an evildoer, whether or not in his presence, even though they do not justify his crime or give a false account of him (III:189). And that is so

even if one praises him for qualities that he does in fact possess. When we first studied this paragraph, I was puzzled: Aren't we always supposed to look for the good in others? Aren't we constantly advised to focus on the positive in our own child-raising?

And yet Rabbeinu Yonah describes one who praises an evildoer, even accurately, as falling within the verse, "They who forsake the law praise the wicked" (Mishlei 28:4). For if one had not forsaken the Torah, he would not praise the transgressor of its words and violator of its mitzvos. I now understand Rabbeinu Yonah to be saying that by praising the wicked, one diminishes the revulsion that his deeds should cause. And it is crucial that Torah society preserve and reinforces that sense of revulsion.

In the preceding paragraph (III:188), Rabbeinu Yonah cites the Gemara (Sotah 41a) that attributes a decree of destruction to the flattery of the Jews toward Agrippas, the Herodian king. One day Agrippas was reading in the Torah. When he reached the verse, "You may not place a foreigner over you [as king], who is not your brother" (Devarim 17:15), tears streamed from his eyes. Those who were with him consoled him, saying, "You are our brother," even though he was halachically unfit to be king.

From the case of Agrippas, we learn that even generally positive motives can bring communal destruction when they lead to a distortion of the Torah. Sympathy for the family of a perpetrator is natural and even praiseworthy. But it causes a distortion in the world when concern for the family of a perpetrator takes precedence over the suffering of his or her victims, who, unlike the former, are often unknown and faceless to us.

Still remaining to be answered, however, is why the words of a few should bring about a decree of destruction on the entire community. Rav Dessler provides a clue to the answer. When the Jewish People entered the Land, under the leadership of Yehoshua, 36 Jews were killed, and "the people's hearts melted and became like water" at the first battle of Ai (Yehoshua 7:5-6). Hashem explains to Yehoshua (7:11-12), "Israel has sinned; they have also violated My covenant that I commanded them; they have also taken from the consecrated property; they have also stolen; they have also denied; they have also placed [it] in their vessels. The Children of Israel will not be able to stand before their enemies... because they have become worthy of destruction."

Yet only one Jew, Achan, had taken from the cherem. Why, then, was the entire people punished? Rav Dessler answers that the community has great influence on every member in their midst. Had taking from the cherem been something disgusting in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, it is quite possible that not even one would have had the effrontery to do so. But because the community did not convey to Achan the feeling that if his crime were discovered, he would be subjected to ignominy and totally ostracized, the members of the society were punished as well. In short, the society had not sufficiently conveyed its revulsion at Achan's me'ilah.

HOW CAN WE REINFORCE OUR COMMUNAL STANDARDS in the clearest possible fashion, and thereby avoid further communal disaster and chillul Hashem? Rav Yitzchak Berkovits, in a talk to mental health professionals, suggested several means. One simple and clear-cut response would be a communal takanah against any male counseling females. There are plenty of highly qualified women counselors, and too many examples of male-female counseling relationships that have gone awry. (He explicitly did not mean to exclude couples therapy.)

Second, it is time to reinforce parental safety messages about what it is absolutely forbidden to do to any child, and of the importance of the child or young person confiding in his or her parents if anyone acts to make them feel uncomfortable. The brightest flashing light is if an adult tells someone much younger to not tell anyone or threatens them if they do.

And finally, there is the necessity, as mentioned above, of establishing communal batei din, whose authority to remove stumbling blocks from the community is universally recognized, and which have access to experts in the field. Such batei din offer the best chance of removing the danger, while protecting both victims and families of perpetrators from the glare of publicity. Such batei din would also have the expertise to know when there are sufficient reglaim l'davar to involve secular authorities, if need be. A member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah told me last week that he is fully involved in creating such batei din.

Batei din will encourage victims and their families to report what they have suffered, and help avoid the misbegotten attempts of some to sweep matters under the rug to prevent communal disgrace and chillul

Hashem. Any attempt to do the latter only ensures more victims and even greater chillul Hashem.

Talmud Tips

Megillah 16 - 22

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

K Is for Kavana

“One who has read the Megillah of Esther while writing it or explaining it or proofreading it — if he had kavana in his heart (“intent”), he fulfilled the mitzvah to read it on Purim; and if not, he did not fulfill the mitzvah.”

This mishna teaches an essential factor necessary for fulfilling a mitzvah: kavana, i.e. “intent.” There are a variety ways in which the word kavana/intent is used in connection with the fulfillment of a mitzvah. One is the intent to understand what one is doing or saying, such as the kavana one must possess in understanding the words (at least the first verse) when saying “Shema Yisrael.” “Hear O Israel, Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One.” Hashem who is nowadays recognized in the “limited role” as G-d of the Jewish People, in the future will be recognized and known by all to be G-d of all people and of all existence. (For further explanation, see Aruch Hashulchan 60:1-4.)

Another meaning of kavana is to understand the reason behind the mitzvah. For example, this would mean having in mind — while dwelling in the succah on the festival of Succot — the reason why the Torah says to do so. The Torah states, “You shall dwell in succahs for seven days, in order that future generations will know that I placed the Jewish People in succah dwellings when I brought them out of Egypt.” (Vayikra 23:42-43)

Yet another meaning of kavana is in a Kabbalistic sense, such as the connection of a mitzvah with the names of Hashem, the letters of those names and the various combinations of those letters. Much has been written in classic texts on this highly metaphysical topic, which involves a deeper understanding of the manner in which Hashem interacts with His physical creation.

However, none of these meanings of kavana is the main point of the halacha in our mishna that addresses reading the Megillah and fulfilling the mitzvah. The kavana in our mishna is kavana in its most pure and basic sense: Doing the act of a mitzvah for the sake of fulfilling the mitzvah. Not reading the Megillah in order to write another copy of the Megillah next to it; not to read the words in the Megillah for the sake of

teaching a Torah lesson; and not to read it for the purpose of merely proofreading it to make sure it is kosher.

(An aside: in my youth, I bought my first Megillah — with quite beautiful writing — from a close friend. He told me it had been checked by another scribe when it was written and that he had also quietly read from it in shul for the past five years when following the reading of the chazzan of the congregation. However, the first Purim, when I was reading it at home for my wife who had recently given birth and was still homebound, I noticed a missing letter in the word chodesh and stopped in shock. My neighbor helped us complete the Megillah reading by lending us his Megillah. When I told my friend after Purim, he was more than surprised, but we decided that we are only human. He said that he would not only pay for a scribe to make the correction, but that he would also pay to have it checked by a computer scan for accuracy, just in case. And just like with the Purim story, all ended well with my Megillah!)

Now, back to our mishna. There is a fascinating question throughout Shas as to whether “mitzvahs need kavana.” Does a person fulfill a mitzvah by merely doing the correct action or saying the correct words? Or, in order to fulfill a mitzvah is there also a requirement that the person specifically have in mind that he is doing it in order to fulfill the mitzvah? This subject is discussed at length by the Poskim and may have different answers depending on whether it pertains to a Torah mitzvah or a rabbinical one (such as Purim); whether it is a mitzvah that is performed by an action as opposed to by speaking; is it self-evident from the time/place/manner of doing the mitzvah that it is being done for the sake of fulfilling the mitzvah? And possibly more factors, as well.

The commentaries ask why our mishna — which requires kavana for fulfillment of the mitzvah of reading the Megillah — is not mentioned in Shas as proof that mitzvahs need kavana, or, alternatively, is not cited as refutation to the view that a person does not require kavana. Many answers are presented by the Torah commentaries, and here is but one. In the cases of our mishna — reading to copy it, reading to expound on it, and proofreading it for errors — the person is reading the Megillah expressly not for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvah to read it. For example, his reading is for proofreading it, and not at all for fulfilling the mitzvah to read it on Purim. Therefore, in this case he does not fulfill the mitzvah

unless he consciously has in mind that his reading is also for the sake of fulfilling the mitzvah and he is careful to read it with correct pronunciation of the words (an effort not normally the concern of one who is merely proofreading). So, even if it would be true that a person fulfills a mitzvah with a lack of kavana, nonetheless, if there is a different intent involved that could diminish the mitzvah significance of the person's action, the mitzvah is not fulfilled

This is akin to a person who is actively thinking to not want to fulfill the mitzvah that he is currently doing, and is certainly not fulfilling his obligation against his will.

For a more in-depth halachic understanding of the subject of "mitzvahsneedingkavana" I highly recommend learning the Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 60:4, with the Mishneh Berurah and Bi'ur Halacha there, along with the Aruch Hashulchan in simanin 60 and 61. And, as always, it is extremely important to ask a local halachic authority in any practical, real situation, for which one needs to know the halachic ruling.

I would be remiss in not adding another point regarding the significance of always having kavana to fulfill any mitzvah, whether or not one has achieved post-facto fulfillment of a mitzvah without conscious intent to fulfill the mitzvah. The Torah instructs each member of Klal Yisrael to love and serve Hashem with all of one's heart, soul and might. Therefore, it is certainly ideal that a person should be conscious, aware and have clear intent as to why he is doing any mitzvah: because Hashem said to do so. (See the Mishnah Berurah 60 at the end of letter yod.)

Parshas Bo

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Hachaver Avraham Ben Meir, Arnold Meyer. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Seeing is Believing

And Bnei Yisroel went and did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so they did (12:28).

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly repetitious conclusion of the possuk. In other words, the beginning of the verse clearly states that Bnei Yisroel did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon; so why did the Torah find it necessary to conclude with the words "so they did"? Rashi explains that the words "so they did" is referring to Moshe and Aharon: they too, did the mitzvah of Korban Pesach.

Maharal in the Gur Aryeh (Shemos 12:28) wonders; why is it assumed that Moshe and Aharon would not have had to bring a Korban Pesach thus making it necessary for the Torah to tell us otherwise?

Additionally, if the Torah meant to tell us that "so they did" is referring to Moshe and Aharon, then why doesn't the Torah state it expressly and leave no room for confusion?

Very often, when telling our children to do something that we feel will improve their lives greatly (e.g. they should commit to studying Torah an hour a night), they silently wonder (and sometimes not so silently) why we ourselves are not modeling that very same behavior.

Of course they don't realize all the obligations that we are under (work, business meetings, school board meetings, home repairs, etc.), so how can they possibly understand why we aren't able to make that very same commitment to Torah study?

But, in fact, our kids are actually right. Certainly, there are myriads of excuses we can make as to why we ourselves don't do what we are asking our kids to do, but that's exactly what they are – excuses. When one has many responsibilities there are conflicts that cannot be avoided. But our kids aren't fooled; they know when we are serious about an ideal and when we are merely paying lip service to one. Our kids also know that we have unavoidable conflicts, but they will absolutely judge what we consider to be important in our lives by how we choose to spend our free time.

Leadership follows some of the same rules. Obviously, a leader has many responsibilities and obligations, after all, that is what leadership is all about – taking responsibility to get things done. Yet some leaders see themselves as above following certain laws that everyone else must adhere to. They forget that they too have a responsibility to follow the rules.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson about what kind of leaders Moshe and Aharon were. On the night that Bnei Yisroel left Egypt, undoubtedly, there were a multitude of things to do and Moshe and Aharon could have easily been forgiven for not fulfilling the mitzvah of Korban Pesach. But that's not the type of leaders they were; they led by example and did exactly what everyone else was supposed to do. That's what the Torah is telling us by not mentioning their names: They fulfilled the Korban Pesach like everyone else – as ordinary members of Bnei Yisroel about to leave Egypt.

Contend or Pretend?

And you shall guard the matzos... (12:17)

Rashi (ad loc) explains that guarding the matzos entails being very meticulous in their preparation in order to prevent them from becoming chometz (leavened). Rashi goes on to quote the Mechilta (Bo, parsha 9), “R’ Yoshia says – Do not read the word ‘matzos’ rather read it ‘mitzvos’ (although vowelized differently, the word matzos is spelled exactly the same as mitzvos) – just as people do not allow the matzos to become chometz (by delaying the process to completion), so too they shouldn’t allow mitzvos to become “leavened.” Rather, if an opportunity to do a mitzvah presents itself, do it immediately.”

In other words, just as we have to be meticulous in our process preparing dough to become matzo (eliminating all unnecessary delay), so too we must have the same attitude of immediacy toward fulfilling mitzvos.

Yet the analogy seems flawed; if one delays doing a mitzvah, he can do it a little later or, at the very worst, he lost an opportunity. But if one fails to prepare the dough for matzos properly, he has created a far worse situation: he now has chometz on his hands, which on Pesach is a serious transgression. How are these two ideas analogous?

Generally, people delay or push off doing things they wish to avoid doing. Procrastination is usually not a problem of time management or of planning. People simply delay doing things they don’t want to do. If we ask our children to clean up their room, even if they finally acquiesce, getting them to actually do it is often a battle. Imagine if after finally getting them to pick up their room we now ask them to set the table, and then clear and wash the dishes. Pretty soon they

will to resent doing things we make them do and begin to object.

Unfortunately, doing mitzvos can fall into the same rut. If one doesn’t perceive mitzvos as opportunities, but rather as onerous obligations, one will begin to resent doing them. Pretty soon one will delay and push off fulfilling them. Eventually, those delays will become noncompliance, which leads to nonobservance. When we force our children to get up, wash their hands, daven, make brachos, and the like, we are actually well on our way of getting them to resent doing mitzvos. That is to say, we are on the derech of getting them “off the derech.”

We must slowly educate our children that mitzvos are really opportunities. Chazal tell us exactly how to do this; give them incentives every step of the way. Show them that learning Torah and doing mitzvos can be rewarding. When it comes to doing things like studying Torah and mitzvos the Gemara (Pesachim 50b) teaches, “Metoch shelo lishma ba lishma – if one begins by doing things for a selfish reason he will eventually come to do it for the proper reason.”

After a while a person begins to realize how meaningful it is to begin the day off with a conversation with Hashem, or how intellectually stimulating and enjoyable studying Torah can be. There are very few mitzvos that aren’t accessible to the emotions or intellect.

This is what Chazal mean by we should not delay fulfilling mitzvos. We should perceive every mitzvah as an opportunity for ourselves; not merely as something we have to do.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
ע"ה אנה מלכה בת ישראל